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Everybody Knows Their Name

Allen Flatt Ballidis & Leslie aims to offer personalized service.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Plaintiffs' attorney Suzanne B. Leslie acknowledge her Newport Beach personal injury firm is small, but says that's just the way she wants it. "In personal injury, you see the TV advertisers or the radio advertisers that we often call 'mill firms,'" Leslie said. "And I just don't want to be that. I want to be like the bar Cheers, where when somebody comes in and they become a new client of ours, everybody knows your name and everybody knows who you are and you get very personalized service. I enjoy staying in that boutique law firm feel."

Halfway through her second year at Western State University Law School, Leslie joined what was then primarily a business litigation firm as a law clerk. After passing the bar in 1987, Leslie was hired at that same small firm as an associate and tasked with helping launch a personal injury practice. Nearly 40 years later, she owns Allen Flatt Ballidis & Leslie, and the firm only handles personal injury cases, work Leslie still finds fulfilling.

"When somebody has an accident, they don't know what to do," Leslie explained. "Injuries might be minor. They could be major. They could be life-threatening or life-ending. And you're dealing with a lot of people and a lot of emotions. And I just try to take the stress off them in terms of dealing with the insurance companies and questions like, 'How do I get



From left: Arshia Mardasi and Suzanne B. Leslie

Thomas Kurtz / Special to the Daily Journal

a car? I need a rental car,' or 'I'm not working. What do I do?' You can really help to just take a lot of that stress off somebody, so they can focus on recovering from their injuries, and there's just a lot of satisfaction in that."

Leslie handles business development at the firm, overseeing marketing, meeting the new clients, working with her team to gather

medical bills and records, preparing settlement demands and heading up pre-litigation negotiations. If the firm is unable to get matters resolved in that manner, Leslie hands the cases over to the firm's other attorney, Arshia Mardasi, who heads up the litigation department.

"I file the lawsuits," Mardasi said. "I represent the client through the entire process — from written dis-

covery to depositions to trial, or if need be, mediations, arbitrations, whatever. All of that's my baby. That's what I do."

Mardasi, a 2003 graduate of Whittier Law School, joined Allen Flatt Ballidis & Leslie in 2018, but she spent nearly 15 years before that handling medical malpractice insurance defense. Mardasi said she moved to the plaintiffs' side in per-

sonal injury, in part because she was ready for a change and felt like she could make a difference in the lives of injured parties.

"I've always felt compassion for the little guy, the wrongly accused, the ones that don't necessarily have the money or the opportunity to be heard," she explained. "I think at the end of the day, I just feel like I get along with everyday lay people better than big insurance companies."

After 15 years of frequently representing doctors and insurance businesses in medical malpractice disputes, Mardasi said she had a good handle on the litigation components necessary for representing injured parties in personal injury matters. But she said Leslie has taught her a great deal about thoughtfully communicating with those clients.

"We get clients whose expectations are sometimes just through the roof," Mardasi said. "They're rear-ended. It's a moderate accident, but they're alive, they didn't break any bones. But somehow, they think this is the million-dollar case they're going to retire on. ... Suzanne's taught me a lot about managing clients' expectations, which is a big deal on our side. She's taught me how to communicate with them in a reasonable way and to involve them in a way so that by the time you sit down at a mediation, or you're talking about settlement, they're on the same page as you."

Brea defense attorney Matthew J. Trostler has opposed Mardasi on a couple of personal injury disputes

in recent years that settled short of trial.

"She is prepared, professional. It was always very civil," Trostler said. "And I think she fights for her clients. In the two cases I've had with her, she's done a great job."

Irvine employment attorney Jibit Cinar, who frequently refers personal injury clients to Allen Flatt Ballidis & Leslie, said Leslie has also been a terrific source of support and guidance.

"Suzy's just been such a big help in terms of the struggles that come with a legal practice — whether that's managing employees or issues with clients," Cinar said. "There have been so many times when she's helped me to understand I'm not alone, I'm not a failure and that other business owners go through these things, too."

Leslie said it's important to her to offer that support and mentorship to other women attorneys building their practices or striking out with their own firms.

"I think the most important thing is they need to be told they can do it," Leslie explained. "And there's a lot of support out here from other women for you if you want to go about that endeavor. ... Women want to see women succeed, in general, and I think women are very giving of their time and their energy and their efforts to make sure they're there for other women business owners — whether it's the law or not."

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