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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

Attorneys celebrate 50 years at Rutan & Tucker

Milford Dahl and John Hurlbut say firm's familial atmosphere breeds longevity

By Deirdre Newman
Daily Journal Staff Writer

In these days of job-hopping in pursuit of more money, more fulfillment, or more work-life balance, to hear of anyone celebrating 50 years working for the same company is astonishing. To hear of two people working at the same firm for 50 years is more noteworthy.

That's the case at Orange County law firm Rutan & Tucker LLP, where long-time attorneys Milford W. Dahl Jr. and John B. Hurlbut Jr. recently celebrated 50 years working at the firm.

Dahl and Hurlbut, whose fathers were also lawyers, are both senior partners and litigators at Rutan. Dahl, 74, practices civil litigation, mostly business and real estate. His father was one of the firm's founding partners. Hurlbut, 75, whose father was a law professor at Stanford University, practiced business litigation — real estate and corporate law — for most of the last half-century. He now spends most of his time as co-general counsel at Rutan.

Both agreed that being at Rutan for 50 years has been more about choice than circumstance. The firm, they say, is like a family.

"We've been really fortunate to keep lawyers here because of the congeniality of the firm and the way we treat people here," Dahl said. "We've always been pretty democratic in the way we run things. People are important here."

Hurlbut echoed those sentiments; he has another reason to take pride in his years at Rutan. He was one of six law school graduates in 1964 who made up the firm's first



Courtesy of Rutan & Tucker LLP

Decorated litigators Milford W. Dahl Jr., left, and John B. Hurlbut Jr. have been with Rutan & Tucker for a combined 100 years — and don't plan to stop practicing anytime soon.

associate class. He is the last of the six to still be working there.

Neither have any plans to retire.

"I like what I'm doing," Hurlbut said. "I'm in denial about my age. I feel like I have a lot of energy. I want to continue to be part of the Rutan family, as long as I can contribute because it's a second family."

Both have racked up a slew of awards in their time with the firm. Hurlbut has the distinguished honor of having a firm award in his namesake, the John B. Hurlbut Award, for Rutan attorneys who set the highest standard of excellence, teamwork and integrity.

He said he was shocked when the firm announced the creation of the award in 2003.

"I'm a pretty below-the-radar person in my actions," he said. "I was about as humbled and satisfied as one could ever be when the people that know you the best... would make that kind of award."

Dahl was in 1991 invited to be a Fellow

in the American College of Trial Lawyers, a testament to his high standards of professional integrity and being part of the top 10 percent of all trial lawyers in the nation.

Both attorneys have contributed to the community and to Rutan, mentoring young attorneys. One has been especially influenced by Dahl and Hurlbut. Lisa N. Neal has evolved from a young, single associate to juggling the multiple responsibilities of being a wife, mother and partner, all under the supportive watch of Dahl and Hurlbut, who let her know that having a live-work balance is important.

"I couldn't be more thankful to have two people like Milford and John be in my corner and to let me know, 'We can make this work,'" she said. "The easy thing to do would be for them to promote people like them. As we have more women entering our profession, I think it's important that Milford and John are there to provide that kind of support."