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PRESENTS

*Litigation
Department
OF THE Year*

AN **ALM SIGNATURE AWARD** SERIES

Colson Hicks Eidson

GENERAL LITIGATION Finalist

BP spill, tainted drywall bolster Colson's clout

SMALL FIRMS Finalist

by Susan Postlewaite
Special to the Review

Litigation boutique Colson Hicks Eidson identified its formula for success years ago: stay lean and take on mega cases.

The firm has just 17 lawyers in its Coral Gables headquarters and two small offices outside Florida.

"We sue big companies that do bad things," explained partner Ervin Gonzalez, summarizing the firm's approach.

He specializes in class actions, mass torts and complex commercial litigation and is on two plaintiffs steering committees dealing with the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and defective Chinese drywall.

The BP litigation was spawned by the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig. Eleven workers died and the ensuing rupture gushed for three months, spreading black oil along beaches. That led to massive damages and claims.

The firm counted two major victories in 2012 tied to the drywall litigation. The final approval of a deal with Knauf Plasterboard meant \$600 million to \$1 billion would be distributed to affected homeowners nationally for repairs. The settlement holds Knauf liable for negligence. Last June, an \$80 million settlement was reached with another manufacturer. Gonzalez was part

of the global discovery process, taking depositions in China, Europe and the U.S.

With both the drywall and BP spill litigation consolidated before federal judges in New Orleans, the firm opened a small office for Gonzalez in the city.

Firm president Lewis S. "Mike" Eidson, a product litigation and injury attorney, quickly ticks off a few milestones in his firm's history.

"Our litigation department started in 1967 when the firm opened, and the division was growing from the beginning. I came in 1974 and became a partner in 1982, and we're more or less the same type of firm today, a broad-based peer litigation law firm."

He recalled that Dean Colson, son of firm founder Bill Colson, joined the firm from the now-defunct Steel Hector & Davis.

"Then the most important change was when we hired Joe Matthews around 1992," Eidson said. The firm opened a Washington office for Matthews to serve clients facing international commercial and investment treaty arbitration cases.

"Bobby Martinez came in 1996, and he started representing white-collar criminal defendants. Then we brought in Ervin Gonzalez, and he was doing class actions, mass torts, commercial cases.

"We do everything. Commercial cases, medical negligence, every kind of



J. ALBERT DIAZ

Taking on mega cases: Lewis S. Eidson and Ervin A. Gonzalez

personal injury case imaginable, from cruise ships to airplane crashes," Eidson said. "Mass torts, hundreds of cases from defective tires to drywall to the people who were damaged by the pipeline explosion."

Eidson also is on a plaintiffs steering committee in

muti-district litigation in California against Toyota Motor Corp. over sudden unintended acceleration. A settlement of more than \$1.2 billion was announced in December between the automaker and thousands of former Toyota owners.

Eidson and Gonzalez said the firm is built on trust among the partners, but everyone does due diligence before the firm fronts \$1 million in costs to land a case.

Gonzalez said, "If there is a case we all know is a good case, we will discuss it informally. We don't have a lot of bureaucracy in the firm."

“We do everything. Commercial cases, medical negligence, every kind of personal injury case imaginable, from cruise ships to airplane crashes.”

**LEWIS S. "MIKE" EIDSON
PRESIDENT**

COLSON HICKS EIDSON