

Power Lunch: Danny Abir

BY ZANE HILL

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Danny Abir at Blai, a Thai soul food restaurant in Woodland Hills. (Photo by David Sprague)

Danny Abir is the managing partner of ACTS Law, a plaintiff's law firm based in Encino. He is among the attorneys who worked to land a record-shattering \$4 billion settlement this year from L.A. County for the victims of sexual abuse at county-run foster care and juvenile detention facilities. Abir sat down with the Business Journal at Blai, a Thai-soul food restaurant in Woodland Hills, to discuss his outlook on law.

I think when a lot of people think of trial lawyers, they think of the guy on the billboard – the whole brand is just this personality. ACTS does not do that.

We're not a billboard firm. We have one billboard, and it's on top of our building. And the only reason I took that billboard and advertise on it every month is because I just didn't want somebody else's face on top of our building.

When we've interviewed you before, you talked about how you were assembling a one-stop shop plaintiff's firm. How's that going?

We now have eight different verticals, and each vertical is headed by someone who is, if not the best of the best, one of the best at what they do. They are heading a department which that is the only thing that they do. I'm a very big believer that if you give someone who's smart what their heart wants, they'll be able to achieve greatness, because what your heart usually wants is what you're best at.

A lot of law firms are still recalibrating from the pandemic and its labor disruptions – remote work versus in-office work. What's ACTS Law's approach?

After Covid, in almost every area, there's been a shortage of manpower. I think a lot of people prefer to work from home or prefer to work remotely, which has impacted how many people are available to come up in the office. When I realized that it's really hard finding people in Southern California who are qualified to come work for the firm, I started expanding our horizons. One thing was a lot more flexibility – for those who are really responsible and get their work done – on the ability to work from home. The other part of it was being open to hiring folks who are not necessarily in

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as well. The oper. ~~manufactures kind of dishes as to be healthy and continue getting, what under these circumstances was difficult.~~



The Drunken Noodles at Blai. (Photo by David Sprague)

Why the Valley?

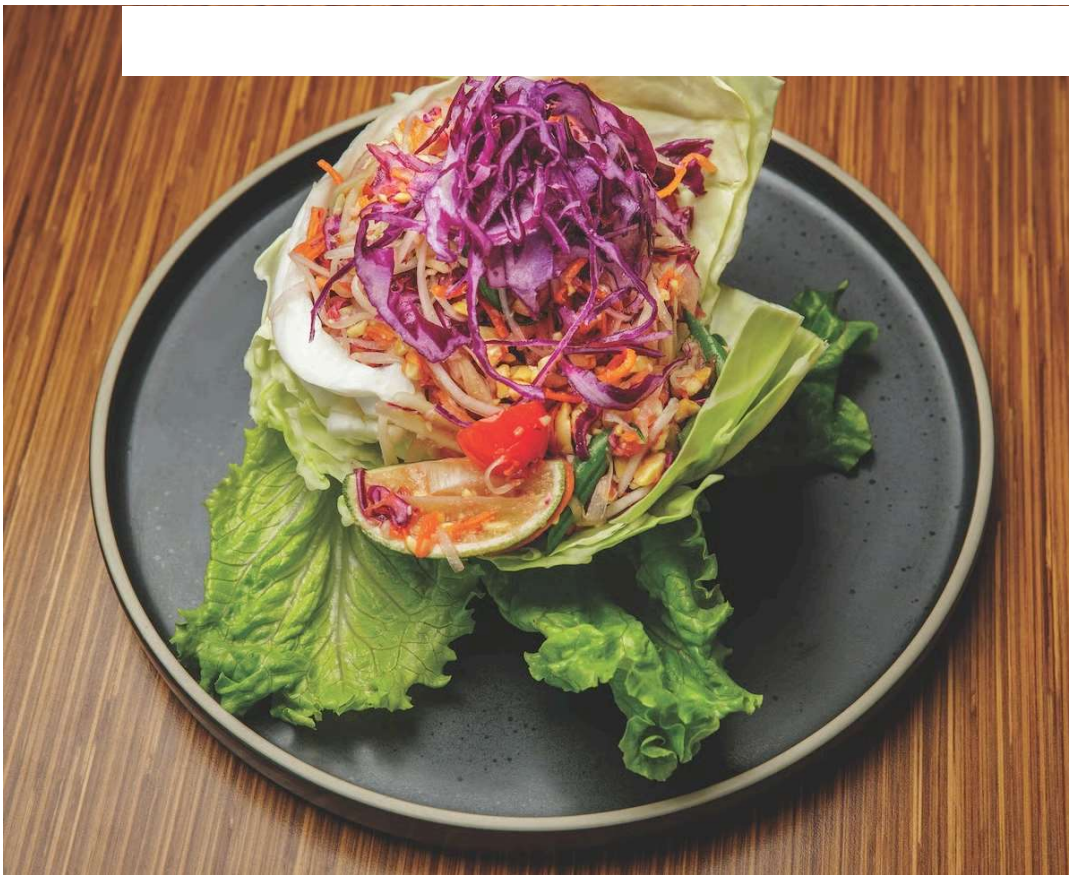
Our location – near the juncture of the 405 and the 101 – is really good for my partners, who live on the Westside. It takes them less time to drive from Brentwood to Encino than it was taking them to drive from Brentwood to Century City. You also get a lot more bang for your buck. The square footage that you can get in Encino, if you were to have that in Century City or the Westside, it costs significantly more. We own our own building; you can't offset something like that.

I feel like that's rare in L.A., to actually own the building that your company is in.

Right before Covid, our office was in Century City. We had outgrown two office spaces, to the point that I had given up my office for two attorneys to share, and I was working out of the conference room. I had asked my partner Boris (Treyzon) to give his office to multiple attorneys to work out of. By pure coincidence, we ended up moving into the Encino office around June 2019. Can you imagine, had we been in the setup where everybody's sharing offices during Covid when people were supposed to be distanced from each other?

You've brought in other partners by merging with their private practices. Is there any more of that coming?

Probably the only area I really want that we don't have is an employment department. I want to find someone who really loves doing employment law but doesn't want to deal with management. The crappiest part of any business is running it, right? The ones that get all the accolades or the big verdicts are the trial lawyers; rarely do the managing partners get the accolades for firm success. I volunteer to handle that part so that it allows the trial lawyer to do what they do best.



The Papaya Salad at Blai. (Photo by David Sprague)

Last time we talked, you speculated that eventually companies like Amazon or the accounting firms would get into law. KPMG just got licensed in Arizona.

I would guarantee Deloitte, PwC and EY are right on its tail. That's something that nobody's going to be able to stop once that door is open. It's not that the KPMGs of the world are going to impact our area of business, but they will definitely impact Big Law. AI is going to allow Big Four to be a lot more effective and to be able to do it at a much cheaper rate. Accounting firms traditionally have been a lot quicker to embrace technology than Big Law. What that does is they'll make it a lot more competitive when it comes to pricing. But I think it'll impact access to justice, very much in a bad way. If they come in, just like Uber did, and undercut everybody to get everybody out of the business, then they're going to do exactly what Uber did afterwards. The price is going to go through the roof. It just creates a monopoly, and if it becomes that way with law, then that monopoly will crush access to justice.

Hopefully you're wrong about that.

I hope so too, actually.