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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

A Family Affair

Gordon Gordon Lawyers APC of Los Angeles is a tight-knit family business that specializes in helping clients through tough times and break-ups at home.

By Chase Scheinbaum
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — “Family law” both describes the practice area and the composition of Gordon Gordon Lawyers APC, where Errol Jay Gordon is joined by his daughter Erin L. Gordon and son Christiaan J. Gordon. In 1972, Errol Gordon set up shop in the same building on Wilshire Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles that houses the firm today.

What started as a one-man practice has evolved into a highly cooperative, teamwork-heavy operation in which Errol Gordon’s children look to him for advice, and they give him inspiration and specialized expertise.

“We represent people in all walks of life, from middle income to celebrities, professional athletes, entertainers, judicial officers, lawyers and doctors,” said Errol Gordon, 72, a fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. Though reluctant to name names, he said he has represented two Hall of Fame baseball players, one Hall of Fame basketball player, many spouses of eminent professional athletes and “what you would consider to be major rap stars and pop stars.”

“Those cases are glamorous, but those people are going through a tough time and we know how to get them through it quickly and easily,” he said.

In his decades of practice, Errol Gordon has gained a reputation as a shrewd litigator and earned the respect of colleagues. Rickey Ivie of Ivie, McNeill & Wyatt has known Errol Gordon for 30 years, first as a disarming adversary he found it impossible to be hostile toward, and then as a friend.

“Errol is what I would call a lawyer’s lawyer,” Ivie said. “He’s forgotten more family law than most people will learn.”

In the courtroom, Ivie has found Errol Gordon to be a formidable opponent. “Family law is a little esoteric in some ways and I think he’s mastered it fully,” Ivie said. “He sees a crack and he tries to make it a chasm. If there are some weaknesses there, he’ll find



Isaac Arjonilla / Special to the Daily Journal

Errol Jay Gordon, left, with daughter Erin L. Gordon and son Christiaan J. Gordon of Gordon Gordon Lawyers APC

them. There’s nothing sloppy about him,” he said.

Robert Brandt, former chair of the Los Angeles County Bar Association’s family law section, agreed that Errol Gordon is a savvy litigator. “He knows when to go to trial and when it makes sense to settle. He’s very sincere and very ethical.”

Errol Gordon has tried more than 1,000 cases, including 40 in front of juries, with 10 murder cases among them. He has four published appellate opinions to his name, and obtained three reversals in his clients’ favor in family law matters, according to his website.

Before starting the firm, Errol Gordon, a Southwestern University Law School graduate, garnered civil rights experience at the Western Center on Law and Poverty. In his year there, he worked on what he said were important early suits against the Los Angeles Police Department for abusive practices.

“I practiced with one guy who became a federal district judge and a couple appellate justices and superior court judges,” he said of this phase. “It was a really interesting time.”

He later spent a year with the Long Beach Aid Foundation, practicing a broad range of law for low-income citizens.

In deciding what to do next, Gordon, who’s black, said his choices were few. “At that time, being a minority lawyer, you had very few choices available to you — you went with a government agency or with a small minority firm, or started your own practice.”

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— Rickey Ivie

In 1971, he joined a small minority firm, venturing into business with Carl E. Jones and practicing a broad array of criminal and civil law. A year later, he opted to go solo and launched his own practice focusing on general civil, criminal and family law.

In 1993, Erin Gordon, 49, joined the firm and, in her father’s words, “revitalized my whole interest and enthusiasm about practicing and our family law practice took off.”

Erin Gordon quickly accumulated litigation experience and developed a specialty in child advocacy work and mediation. Father and daughter tried cases together and found that their strengths multiplied.

“We absolutely work as a team,” she said. “The reason why I’m a lawyer is because I was inspired by my dad’s trial skills.”

“He has great trial instincts and hopefully some of those have rubbed off on me,” she said.

Eight years ago, Christiaan Gordon, 40, came aboard, too, and has focused on litigation.

“Even though my dad has been the point for most of our major cases, we all work on them together,” he said. “What clients like about it is they know that between my sister and father, the experience is significant. Even if I’m doing 90 percent of the work I’m still talking to them constantly.”

Errol Gordon said his son “brings to our team a young perspective on cases and technology, in terms of operating our office, and legal research.”

Patrick DeCarolis, an attorney with Trope & DeCarolis LLP, recalled an anecdote demonstrating how family traits run through the firm. Christiaan Gordon was appearing before Louis M. Meisinger when the former general counsel for The Walt Disney Co. was on the bench in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Meisinger, now a mediator, is an expert in contract law, DeCarolis said. Nevertheless, Christiaan Gordon, a newly minted attorney at the time, was one step ahead of the seasoned judge.

The proceedings revolved around whether parts of a prenuptial agreement could be invalidated. Meisinger said they could if they were unconscionable at the time of formation. Christiaan Gordon disagreed, telling the judge that the matter hinged on the time of enforcement, not formation.

Meisinger told Christiaan Gordon he would need a memo on the law, to which Christiaan Gordon replied, “I don’t need to do a memo, just look at the code section,” according to DeCarolis. Seeing that the code supported Christiaan Gordon, the judge deferred.

The incident, Christiaan Gordon said, “was a flash point about knowing that I can stick with my guns if I believe in something.”