

# ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Care for Clients Grows Firm, Makes Workers Happy

### Jeffer Mangels Chooses Staffers Who Like People

By KIM HAMAN

When **Socorro De Luna** joined the Irvine office of **Jeffer, Mangels, Butler & Mitchell LLP** in 2009 as its administrator, she said she knew it was the right place for her because of leaders' commitment to clients.

She believed in that commitment and said she still does, even more passionately now than on her first day with the firm. What has made her experience over the past four years even more fulfilling is that everyone at Jeffer Mangels, from its top executive to the paralegals to office assistants, treats each other with respect and courtesy.

#### Regional and International

Jeffer Mangels, or JMBM, was founded more than 30 years ago by **Bruce Jeffer, Robert E. Mangels, Jim Butler and Burton A. Mitchell**.

Jeffer recalls those early days: "Legal business has been moving toward becoming more international. We decided we wanted to stay regional."

They opened their first office in Los Angeles in 1981. An office in San Francisco followed. To Jeffer and his partners, it was vital that the firm remain a size that enabled everyone in the office to know each other. That philosophy remains to this day an important aspect of how JMBM does business.

"By staying regional rather than be part of a large international group," Jeffer said, "we retain a more personal interaction with the employees."

Managing Partner **Gordon Schaller** opened JMBM's Orange County office in 2007.

"When we opened the office, it was just the three of us—**Scott Harshman, Cara Garmon** and myself," Schaller said.

Harshman is a partner with the firm, and Garmon is Schaller's assistant.

Over time, the office grew one lawyer at a time.



*"It's important to find people who like and buy into our philosophy."*

—Bruce Jeffer, founder, Jeffer, Mangels, Butler & Mitchell

"We opened small," Schaller said, "with no pressure to grow at a certain pace."

The office now has 12 attorneys in specialties ranging from commercial litigation to entertainment law.

When Schaller recruits attorneys to fill the ranks at the OC office, he said he seeks people who enhance the firm's reputation and who would fit with the other employees.

"Interpersonal relationships are key here," he said. "Everyone treats each other with respect, and everyone's job matters."

The Business Journal selected JMBM as the top large company to work for in Orange County (see list, page 38). Large companies, for the purposes of the list, have 250 or more employees. The firm has 263 employees, and while regional in location, its clients hail from all over the world. JMBM attor-

neys cover cases ranging from employment law to environmental law to business litigation and more.

"Our lawyers are skilled, ethical and passionate about the practice of law," Jeffer said.

#### Entrepreneurial Outlook

JMBM encourages an entrepreneurial atmosphere among its attorneys and provides the support they need to be successful, according to Jeffer and Schaller. Attorneys typically solicit their own clients, and management lets them pursue different kinds of cases with confidence.

"Our management-to-staff ratio is about 50-50," Schaller said. "We each perform different jobs, and each one is vital to our success."

The attorneys are competitive, to be sure, but the firm said that's tempered by the shared goal of providing clients with the best possible service. That means lawyers will work together to make sure clients win their cases.

The firm awards bonuses to employees at all levels based on performance, one of its most successful incentives. Employees also have access to additional education and training. In some cases, the firm has retrained attorneys who want to practice other specialties.

The formula appears to work: Most employees have been with the firm for a dozen years or longer.

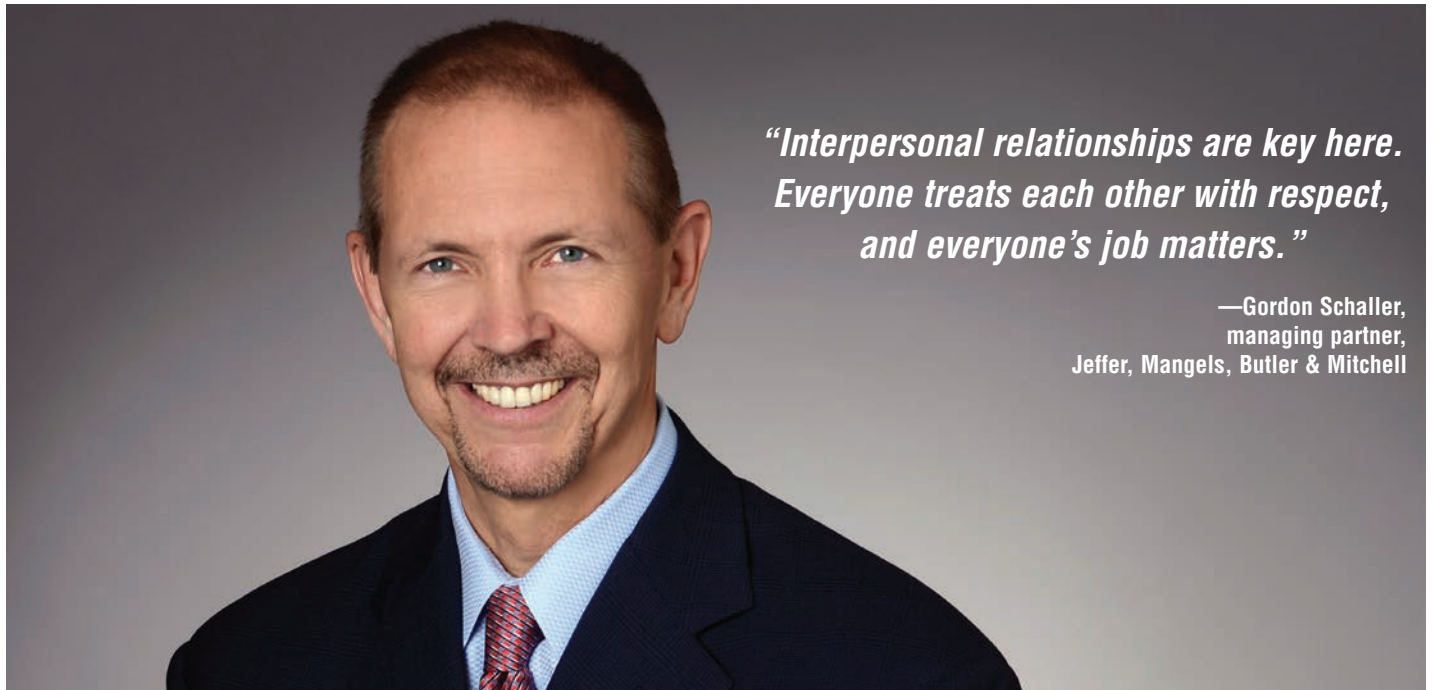
Employees also said they appreciate management's ability to plan ahead and see challenges in terms of the larger goal, namely, client satisfaction. They're given latitude to solve problems, Schaller said, and at the same time, they know they have management's support.

#### Benefits Match Philosophy

The firm's culture is reflected in its employee benefits package: 10 days of vacation a year, increasing to three weeks after five years of service; eight sick days a year; a floating holiday; a 401(k) plan; a healthcare plan with medical, dental and vision benefits; and profit sharing.

"Another thing our employees like is that there is not layers and layers of

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## JMBM

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administration as there often is within other law firms," Jeffer said.

He estimated that the firm will grow 10% in the coming year—yet it will be a

measured growth based on recruiting employees who enhance the company's culture. From experience, Jeffer said he knows that people who do best at JMBM are those who enjoy people.

"It's important to find people who like and buy into our philosophy," he said, "and most importantly, enjoy what they

do. It makes them better attorneys."

For employees like De Luna, the company's carefully considered growth is one of the main reasons staff treat each other with appreciation.

"Everyone is valued here," she said. "We all matter." ■