

CALIFORNIA

LAW BUSINESS

THE AUTHORITY ON RUNNING A LAW PRACTICE, FOR FIRMS AND THE SOLE PRACTITIONER • SEPTEMBER 28, 1998



The Top 100

A Who's Who of the state's most influential attorneys

The Billion-Dollar Gentleman

Veteran plaintiff's attorney **Thomas V. Girardi**, 59, has come a long way since opening up his own shop 23 years ago.

In contrast to the two \$500 cases he started his practice with, Girardi has racked up more than \$1 billion in verdicts and settlements in the last two years alone.

Since graduating from Loyola Law School in 1964 and earning an LL.M. from New York University a year later, Girardi's practice has moved from high-end medical malpractice cases to California's most complex toxic tort cases.

In 1996, for example, Girardi and his firm, Girardi & Keese, helped negotiate a \$333 million settlement from San Francisco-based Pacific Gas & Electric on behalf of 600 residents of a small desert town outside of Barstow. Then, earlier this year, he won an unprecedented \$760-million jury verdict against five major oil and chemical companies including Exxon, Unocal and Shell.

"Tom definitely knows how to bring big cases in and how to work the system," says Mark C. Holscher, a white-collar crime specialist at O'Melveny & Myers. "He is viewed as extremely savvy and well connected, and he definitely stays on the good side of all the courts."

Girardi detractors, however, argue that Girardi is a little too cozy with the courts. They point to a week-long bench and bar cruise organized by Girardi that included among its attendees three private judges who presided over "test" arbitrations and mediations that led to the PG&E settlement. "He will win at all costs — I'll let it go at that," says one attorney who was on the wrong end of a multi-million dollar suit.

On balance, however, Girardi's fans far outnumber his naysayers. Among his supporters is Michael J. Bidart, a plaintiff's attorney with Shernoff, Bidart, Darras & Arkin. "The things I've read in the recent past are not in



keeping with the Tom Girardi that I know," Bidart says. "People who have dealt with him know that he lives up to his word and that his handshake is as good as an ironclad contract."

His colleagues are also quick to note that Girardi is a generous man who gives both his time and his money. Along with serving on trial lawyer boards — he's the national president-elect for the prestigious American Board of Trial Advocates — and as an adjunct professor at Loyola Law School, last year he also pledged \$2.4 million to his alma mater for a new moot court room.

Behind the big bucks, however, is a deeply devoted family man. Says his brother Jack, who is an attorney at Girardi & Keese: "For all the success that Tom has had as a trial lawyer, in court and out, I would say that Tom has been an even better brother, son, husband and father."

— Alex Chun