

Voice of Experience

Arbitrator and mediator Alan Ribakoff has seen all sides of disputes

By Henry Meier
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Alan P. Ribakoff enjoys “uncovering the mysteries” within each case he handles as an arbitrator and mediator, and uses a blend of structure and flexibility to resolve matters.

His experience — which spans everything from labor and employment to initial public offerings — has proved valuable to his cause. After spending considerable portions of his career representing both plaintiffs and defendants and working in-house, Ribakoff is confident that he’s seen most sides of an argument before.

“There’s no perspective that you can look at one of these cases from that I haven’t been involved in,” said the neutral, who practices out of his Toluca Lake firm, Masters & Ribakoff.

In arbitrations, Ribakoff said that he’s essentially in the room to make one party a winner and the other a loser, but despite the polarity of that equation, he tries to lay out his decisions in a way that both parties can see the logic.

“The goal is to produce well-reasoned, fair, neutral awards,” he said. “Not everyone always agrees, but hopefully everyone thinks it’s fair. I spend a lot of time crafting awards because of that.”

While the award is the final product, the process is not entirely scripted and there’s always room for suggestions about how things can be done efficiently.

“I issue a fairly lengthy case management order and get some procedural things done at the outset [of an arbitration],” Ribakoff said. “But I also encourage input from parties on how to make the arbitration better.”

These customizations can take many forms. For instance, Ribakoff

said he’s had both parties’ experts get together and talk about where their views differ and then had them come in and offer testimony at the same time.

While mediations can be structured differently and are more collaborative, Ribakoff does keep some things consistent.

“I try to keep things relaxed, but in a formal way — no first names, no sports clothes, et cetera,” he said. “By the same token, I don’t march around like a little potentate either.”

But other than the basics, his mentality in a mediation setting is very different. When there’s an impasse in this format, Ribakoff said, it’s much more important to establish trust because if parties don’t feel they are getting a fair shake, they will never come to an agreement.

“If they get the sense that you’re trustworthy and that you’re being honest with them, it’s possible to break an impasse,” Ribakoff said.

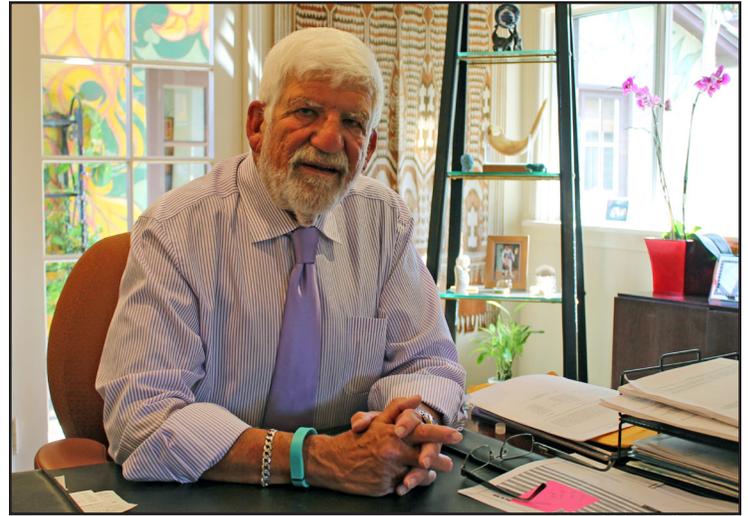
Attorneys who’ve used the neutral for both mediations and arbitrations characterized him as effective in brokering deals and fair when it came to arbitration awards.

“He’s very, very smart and knows the law incredibly well,” said Adam J. Reisner, a partner at plaintiffs’ firm Reisner & King LLP in Sherman Oaks. “He gives people a fair shot and is always respectful of all the parties.”

Jodi S. Cohen, who focuses on labor and employment defense work as a partner at Keesal Young & Logan in Long Beach, said even though Ribakoff ruled against her client in an arbitration, she found him professional and fair.

Ribakoff was born in Huntington, W.Va. but moved around as a child and adolescent before enrolling at the University of Missouri, where he graduated in 1961.

After college, he joined the U.S. Navy. As an officer, he served on destroyer escort and minesweeper ships. He was mostly stationed in the South Pacific ahead of the deploy-



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ment of U.S. troops in Vietnam.

After finishing his military service in 1963, Ribakoff decided to attend Loyola Law School, earning his degree in 1966.

He entered private practice the next year, and joined the Los Angeles firm of Monteleone & McCrory. He spent 15 years at the firm, making partner after just three. While the firm mostly focused on litigation on big cases related to the construction industry, Ribakoff was interested in “the other stuff” and as a result became one of the firm’s go-to attorneys dealing with mergers and acquisitions and other transactional work.

In 1981, he left the firm and joined Allred, Maroko, Goldberg & Ribakoff as a name partner and served as managing partner for a period of time.

Then, in 1992, a client he’d worked with since his days at Monteleone & McCrory was looking to expand its operations in the magazine publishing world and brought Ribakoff on as in-house counsel.

The company, Paisano Publications — which started off as a shop specializing in chrome motorcycle parts — eventually put out a dozen different magazines and Ribakoff oversaw all the legal work that came with the growth.

In 1996, the company was sold and, after handling the sale, Ribakoff formed a partnership with his wife Christine Masters. After working in-house, Ribakoff had

Alan P. Ribakoff

Masters & Ribakoff
Toluca Lake

Areas of specialty: employment, business/commercial, construction

become intimately familiar with labor and employment matters and continued handling that type of work in private practice.

In the early 2000s, Ribakoff began to turn towards mediation and arbitration work, and it slowly became his focus. Lately, he said he handles 90 percent arbitration matters with mediations occupying the balance of his time.

When he’s not brokering deals or handing down private awards, Ribakoff can likely be found at the home he and his wife have on an island off the coast of British Columbia north of Vancouver. An avid outdoorsman, Ribakoff fishes, hikes and kayaks regularly.

Here are some attorneys who have used Ribakoff’s services: *Adam Reisner, Reisner & King LLP, Sherman Oaks; Charles Stephen Love, Calabasas; Solomon Gresen, Law Offices of Rheuban & Gresen, Encino; Jodi Cohen, Keesal Young & Logan, Long Beach; Thomas Brown, Brown Gitt Law Group LLP, Pasadena; Anthony Lewis, Encino; William Stein, Epstein Becker & Green PC, Los Angeles*