

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025

Shares His View

Mediator and arbitrator Peter Wilson will weigh in when the timing is right.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Retired judge Peter J. Wilson never wants litigants to think he knows their case better than they do.

“My mediation style is to make sure the parties understand that this is their mediation,” Wilson said. “I’m there to facilitate, not direct. ... I don’t ever want to give the impression that I’ve got this figured out, so, ‘You better listen to me.’ That’s not my style at all, nor do I want it to be.”

Wilson completed his law degree in South Africa, where he handled criminal prosecution and defense work as well as a wide variety of civil matters as a barrister from 1977 to 1985. In 1986, he relocated to California and passed the bar before joining the Latham Watkins LLP office in Orange County. There he represented defendants in business, real property and construction cases.

Appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Wilson became an Orange County Superior Court judge in 2010, tackling criminal, unlimited civil and complex civil assignments before his retirement in November 2023.

“My wife became a judge in 2003,” said Wilson, who is married to JAMS neutral and retired Orange County Superior Court Judge Glenda Sanders. “She absolutely loved it - loved every aspect of it to the point that I got tired of hearing it and decided I should give it a try myself ... And I never regretted it for a moment. I absolutely loved my career on the bench.”

Wilson joined Signature Resolution’s roster of private neutrals in January last year, and he’s since been working on business, professional



Justin L. Stewart / Special to the Daily Journal

malpractice, construction defect and employment cases as a mediator and arbitrator.

“An arbitration for me is a more informal - and so potentially more pleasant - court trial with all the trappings of a court trial, but in a setting that hopefully works for the parties by giving them both informality and flexibility,” Wilson said. “It does not have to be as rigidly run as a court trial ... But it results in a reasoned award, where you not only get to understand whether you won or lost [but] why that was the case in the arbitrator’s view.”

Before mediations, Wilson likes to receive briefs from all the parties and speak over the phone with counsel. That approach was greatly appreciated by San Diego defense attorney Heather L. Rosing, who used Wilson to resolve a complex malpractice case in December.

“He gave us his personal number. He texted with us. He even got on the phone with my clients,” Rosing said. “I thought it was pretty amazing. Not every mediator will put in that amount of time and attention - not only prior to the mediation but even into the case. But he did.”

Peter J. Wilson

Signature Resolution
Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty:

Business
Real Estate
Construction Defect
Employment
Professional Malpractice

On the day of mediation, Wilson begins with introductions and an explanation of the process before typically starting out in the plaintiffs' room.

"I want to have an initial discussion more substantively about the case - about the merits, anything else they need me to know and give the client a chance to give me their version in their own words as opposed to through the briefs or through the attorneys," Wilson explained. "Then I will go to each of the other rooms and essentially have the same discussion."

When the timing is right, Wilson said he will weigh in on the strengths and weaknesses of a case.

"As a mediator, I am not there to direct a settlement, but I'm certainly there to facilitate a settlement," he said. "And to facilitate a settlement, I don't think you can simply be a listener - no matter how actively you're listening or how empathetically you're listening ... There are times when you simply, in effect, have to say, 'I'm going to share my view with you.'"

Wilson mentioned, however, that he reminds parties they do not have to accept that view and his

comments are not legal advice.

"If you want legal advice, you need to get that from your attorney," Wilson explained. "I'm careful not to act like a lawyer ... But it arises almost invariably that my discussion with [the parties] includes sharing some version of my reaction and assessment of what I'm hearing on the legal issues or the facts."

Rosing said Wilson's evaluative approach was particularly effective in her case.

"It was a fairly complicated matter, and he really delved into the details of it, and what I appreciated most in that very long process was his common-sense solutions," she explained. "There were a lot of difficult dynamics in that case. And he was very cool, very calm and collected. Throughout the day when things got rough, he would stay calm, and he'd be like, 'Here's an idea. Here's another idea.' And at the end of the day, he reached a result everybody was OK with."

Costa Mesa litigator Sean P. O'Connor used Wilson to mediate a complex sports industry dispute last year and described him as phenomenal.

"I think it's a combination of

his intellect and his people skills," O'Connor said. "He's a very, very smart guy. In my matter with him, he quickly grasped the issues. And what I liked about him is that he took control of the mediation, but in a very friendly, non-aggressive way, where everybody felt comfortable having him head the effort in the mediation process."

Los Angeles litigator Bradley E. Jewett said he used Wilson to resolve an extraordinarily complicated real estate dispute two months ago among three siblings "who all hated each other, fighting over millions of dollars' worth of property."

"These people can't agree on what color the sky is," Jewett said. "But he did a good job of listening and then finding a way to pivot into a talking point that resonated with the clients ... He doesn't come in with an overwhelming or abusive manner that some mediators seem to think is appropriate. He's very measured in how hard he presses on something."

Jewett described Wilson as "a top-tier mediator."

"He's worth every dollar," Jewett insisted. "He dealt with incredibly difficult personalities all day long -

with my client certainly being the most difficult of them all. And he did an incredible job. He got us to the finish line, which I frankly would have bet a lot of money would never happen - especially in just a one-day mediation."

Rosing was also quick to tout the Signature neutral's versatility.

"Judge Wilson can handle any type of case, and I think he'd do so with patience, skill and grace," she said. "He is somebody who's going to take the time to learn the issues. He's going to take the time to listen. He's going to put in that extra evening or day or phone call to get it done. And you really can trust him to help try to achieve your goals. He's somebody who I think is worthy of trust."

Here are some attorneys who have used Wilson's services: Sean P. O'Connor, Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP; Heather L. Rosing, Rosing Pott & Strohhenn; Bradley E. Jewett, Gavrillov & Brooks; Adam M. Koss, Koss Firm APC; Omar A. Siddiqui, Siddiqui Law APC

news@dailyjournal.com