Renowned disability rights litigator Paradis dies

By Banks Albach

Larry Paradis, the attorney and co-founder of Disability Rights Advocates who carved a pathway for the disabled in California through hundreds of class action lawsuits, died last week. He was 57.

Remembered by colleagues as a hungry litigator and a fearless adversary of any opponent in a courtroom, Paradis was unwavering in his advocacy for people with disabilities of any kind, said Sid Wolinsky, who co-founded DRA with Paradis in 1993.

"He was the gold standard as a litigator," Wolinsky said. "The firm will carry on. But he's irreplaceable. We might have to find three people to take his place. Three really good people."

Paradis had fought an ongoing battle with a deteriorative genetic bone disease since he graduated from Harvard Law School, leading to his use of a wheelchair. His cause of death has not been disclosed.

"It drove his passion, but he never let it define him," Wolinsky said. "He wanted to represent people with all disabilities."

Together they challenged the public and private sectors, mostly under the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act. The pair reached a $5.8 million settlement, for example, against the United States Postal Service, representing a class of roughly 1,000 workers who claimed they were denied promotion.

They also secured a victory in federal court that forced Macy's to widen its shopping aisles for wheelchairs and scooters, a decision that affected retailers nationwide.

More recently, Paradis garnered a favorable settlement against Uber Technologies Inc. that mandates its drivers allow blind passengers with service animals.

One of the pinnacles for Paradis, said Wolinsky, was a 2009 settlement against the California Department of Transportation that forced the state agency to widen curb ramps and fix sidewalks across the state, which is now the standard.

Paradis met Wolinsky at the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, where he was lead litigator.
"He came in and said, 'I want to represent pro bono,'" Wolinsky said.

"We loved to litigate and instantly hit it off. In 24 years, Larry lost one case. He was bringing cutting-edge litigation, first of its kind."

Paradis is survived by his wife, Judy Fine, and their two sons. The firm is planning a vigil for Paradis on Aug. 31.

banks_albach@dailyjournal.com

Government
Bill would help bar immigration status consideration in lawsuits
State legislation barring consideration of a plaintiff's immigration status in personal injury and wrongful death lawsuits that is on Gov. Jerry Brown's desk could have significant implications for civil defendants and companies that employ such workers.

Intellectual Property
Texas judge vacates $625 million patent verdict against Apple
A Texas federal judge vacated a $625.6 million patent verdict against Apple Inc. last week after finding that trial proceedings were unfairly prejudicial against the Cupertino-based defendant.

Litigation
$15 million for former UCLA football starter who lost leg in traffic accident
Attorneys for a former UCLA football starter who had his leg amputated due to a car accident have settled for $15 million with the driver who struck him. The agreement was a rare move done under a Mary Carter Agreement.

Obituaries
Jack E. Goertzen, retired Court of Appeal justice, dead at 85
Known for his humor and skill, Goertzen also served as a deputy attorney general and superior court judge.

Government
Record $1.4B settlement nears approval
Attorneys fees, request for factual findings hold up landmark disability settlement.

Obituaries
Renowned disability rights litigator Paradis dies
At 57 and dealing with his own disability, his firm described him as tenacious in the courtroom.

Bar Associations
State Bar spends $125K remodeling executive floor
The agency had new offices created, as well as a new waiting area put in

California Supreme Court
Anti-SLAPP statute straightened out by state high court
When a single, otherwise-valid, SLAPP cause of action includes allegations of protected activities, these activities may be excised and the case may move forward, under a new California Supreme Court opinion. By Gary A. Watt