

Ivan Puchalt

Fighter for Public Safety

AALM: When did you first know you wanted to become an attorney? What drew you to this career?

Puchalt: My first job when I graduated from UC Berkeley was working for a litigation support company, Trial Technologies, setting up AV equipment in courtrooms all over Southern California and doing graphic design and video production for trial exhibits. This work included working closely with many great attorneys on PowerPoints for their closing arguments, back in the days when jurors could sit through a long PowerPoint without having their eyes glaze over. Learning how to tell a story and tie all the elements of a trial together was what drew me to trial work. Many of the clients I worked with as a courtroom technician before law school are the same GBW attorneys I work with today, so it is nice to have that long history. It sometimes feels a bit surreal when I find myself at counsel table arguing cases alongside the GBW partners when I used to meet them in court to plug in their VCR cables.

AALM: Do you have any mentors or professors that encouraged you along the way? What is the best lesson they taught you?

Puchalt: Attorneys Mark Quigley and Geoff Wells have been my main mentors. They have both taught me that you can absolutely bring your best fight to the other side while still being friendly and respectful. I used to worry litigation may not be for me because it resembled more of a boxing match than a chess match, but I have learned that preparation, having the right game plan and staying sharp get you a lot farther than beating your chest. One of Geoff's favorite sayings is "You get more flies with honey." The other main lesson has been that we must be willing to try cases, including the tough ones.

AALM: What experiences have taught you the most?

Puchalt: Focus groups and talking to jurors after trials have been great learning experiences. It is a constant reminder that what you think is important is not necessarily what everyone else will think is important about your case.

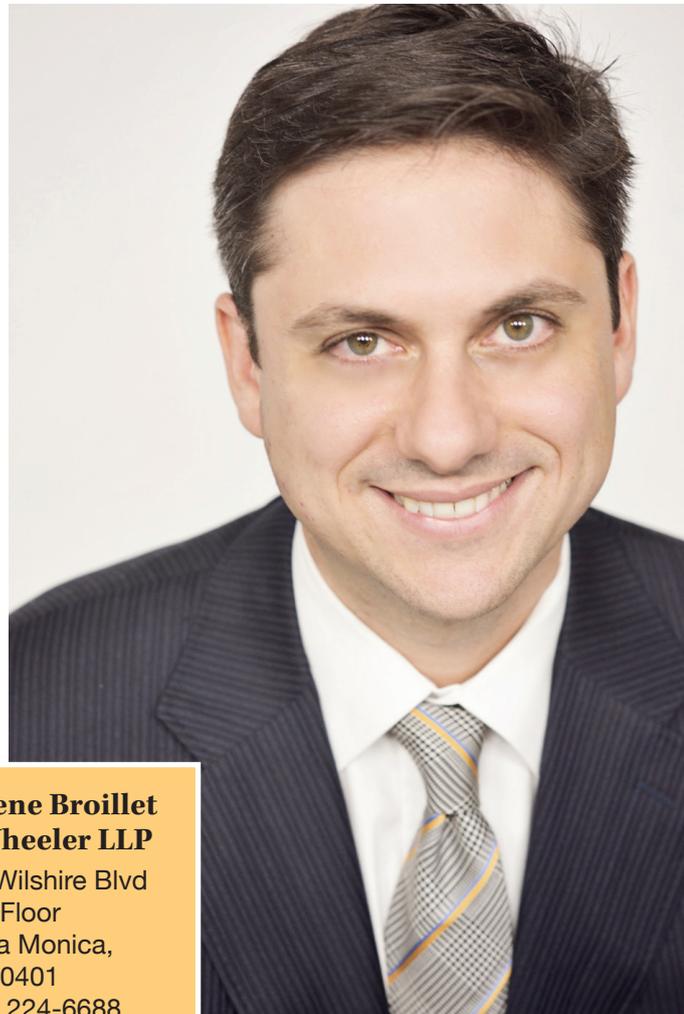
AALM: What do you find particularly rewarding about your practice?

Puchalt: The most rewarding part is definitely when a client is able to live a better life as a result of their lawsuit. There are also clients who benefit from the litigation process itself, unbelievable as that sounds. I have had clients who felt incredible guilt after a car accident in which they were the ones driving at the time a loved one died. Often in these cases the defendants, and even officers who were not present at the scene, blame the driver, and we have been able to prove that our client did everything possible to control the vehicle under the circumstances and it was not their fault. On one such occasion, after an officer told my client they were speeding at the time a defective tire tread separated and caused a rollover, we downloaded the ECM data (like an airplane's black box) and based on the recorded speed data I could objectively tell this client they were not speeding when the incident occurred. They cried in relief.

AALM: What accomplishment are you most proud of achieving?

Puchalt: The first thing that comes to mind are my kids, ages 7 and 10. But in the legal world, it would be working at a firm that makes products safer through the manufacturers' fear of being held accountable in court. People shouldn't die or get seriously injured when corporations choose to put profits over people. If you are going to make something, make it safely or don't make it at all. We have all seen way too much misery from needless injuries to buy into the tort reform arguments that our society has gone overboard when it comes to product safety or making our environment safer in general.

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