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Ivie McNeill Wyatt Purcell & Diggs set the template for what a minority-owned law firm could be

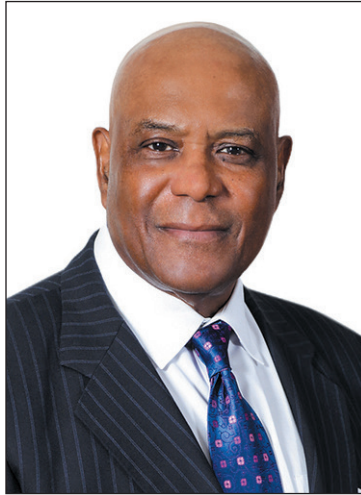
One law firm has been quietly making history since its inception in 1943. Ivie McNeill Wyatt Purcell & Diggs—today a 30-lawyer firm with offices across California and affiliate relationships abroad—stands as one of the longest-running Black-owned law firms in the nation.

Its founders, early partners, and current leaders have all been united by a common thread: a determination to break down barriers and create opportunities for Black attorneys—and increasingly attorneys from other underrepresented groups—in a profession that long excluded them.

To understand the firm's mission, said co-managing partner Rickey Ivie, you must look back to its origins.

"The firm initially was founded in 1965 as a corporation, but before then, it was started back in the '40s with Judge Earl C. Broady Sr.," Ivie explained. "Earl C. Broady Senior was formerly a lieutenant with the LAPD, along with another lieutenant, Tom Bradley—both of whom became lawyers. Tom eventually went into politics, as you know, and became mayor of Los Angeles. Broady distinguished himself as an outstanding lawyer and eventually was appointed to the bench in 1965."

In those days, practicing law as a Black attorney meant working under the shadow of legalized discrimination. "At the time these guys were practicing, Black lawyers were not even permitted to join the L.A. County Bar Association," Ivie said. "The California Club still did not allow African Americans or Jews to join. The same with other facilities in downtown Los Angeles. We were still living in the



Rickey Ivie

era of what was called 'separate but equal,' where discrimination was actually legal."

Even buying property in certain neighborhoods was prohibited for Black Angelenos under restrictive covenants. Against this backdrop, Broady and his peers carved out space for themselves—and for future generations.

When Ivie joined the firm as a young lawyer in 1976, it had already begun to take on a larger presence in Los Angeles's legal community. By then, Broady had been appointed to the bench by Gov. Pat Brown Sr., and the firm was in the hands of Charles R. Scarlett and Robert L. Roberson Jr.

"Later, in 1979, Gov. Jerry Brown appointed Roberson to the bench, and then appointed Scarlett in 1980," Ivie recalled. "The firm then passed to myself and my deceased partner, Robert H. McNeill Jr., and became Ivie McNeill."



Rodney Diggs

This transition marked a new chapter. "We began to try to penetrate and open doors that had previously been closed to Black practitioners," Ivie said. "We were one of the first African American firms to represent the Los Angeles Unified School District, and then the county. We started representing corporations. These were efforts made, I think, out of necessity more than anything else."

He added: "It was necessary that African American practitioners be given an opportunity to represent all aspects of clientele in our city. And we fought the fight to make that happen—not just to open doors for our firm, but to open doors for others."

Today, Ivie McNeill Wyatt Purcell & Diggs has offices in Los Angeles, Leimert Park, Inland Empire, San Francisco, and Las Vegas. Much of this expansion has been spearheaded by partner Rodney Diggs, who has a

vision for growing the firm both domestically and internationally.

"We went into expansion because when I'd looked at other firms to see if there's other Black-owned firms like ours across the U.S., I did not see many—less than a handful," Diggs said. "Of course, you may have solos or maybe one- or two-attorney firms, but to have a firm of our size, I didn't see many. So, the goal was to try to make our presence felt not just domestically, but also internationally."

The firm has forged affiliate relationships in France and Brazil and is positioning itself for further global work. "We joined organizations such as NAMWOLF that provided us with the opportunity to expand domestically and Interact Law, which provided us with the opportunity to expand internationally," Diggs said.

At the same time, the firm has cultivated relationships with Fortune 500 companies and large public agencies. "We're doing it very strategically and slowly, not to grow too big too fast," Diggs said. "But we want people to know that this type of firm exists."

While Ivie McNeill remains proud of its heritage as a Black-owned law firm, it is equally proud of its diversity. "We are a diverse firm," Ivie said. "You will find every race, creed, color, sex in our firm. And I think one of the things that we have found is that is an asset that many clients look for—especially in this age of diversity among jury panels. It becomes essential that every walk of life is represented at the counsel table."

Diggs agreed. “Companies are looking for diversity in all walks of life, and I think we come as diverse as they are,” he said. “That helps us when we go to pitch, whether it’s for smaller or larger clients. And our culture helps too. We take our clients very seriously, no matter how big or small the case is.”

Ivie McNeill has also become a training ground for the next generation of Black lawyers and judges.

“We have produced, I think it’s now seven judges,” Diggs said. “That’s quite a feat. We provide opportunities for young lawyers to come and learn, sharpen their swords, and hopefully become great litigators in the future.”

The firm’s roots as a litigation shop remain central to its identity. “We started as a litigation firm,” Diggs said. “It’s not just about being a Black-owned law firm—that’s

part of it—but it’s also the work we do, the work we do for our clients, and that we are litigators in court and in trial.”

Community engagement is also a cornerstone of the firm’s culture. “We believe in community service,” Ivie said. “We think that we serve a community, and as a result, it’s incumbent upon us to give back to that community.”

The firm supports organizations

such as the Brotherhood Crusade and the UCLA Black Alumni Association and encourages its attorneys to remain civically engaged. “We are affirmatively engaged in every aspect of our community so that we can provide service to our community and be an asset to our community,” Ivie said.

david_houston@dailyjournal.com