

The One

There are thousands of attorneys that Governor Jerry Brown could have chosen as one of his appointees to the Little Hoover Commission, a bipartisan commission that investigates state government operations and policy and makes recommendations to the Governor to promote economy, efficiency and improved service in Califor-

nia's state functions and operations.

When it came down to the wire, Brown chose Sean Varner. To many in legal and state circles, it was a no-brainer. After all, Varner is one of the leading and most diverse legal minds in the state and the head of one of the most iconic firms in California, Varner & Brandt. The firm's legal roots date back to 1875 when Var-



Sean Varner

Sean Varner is one of the leading legal minds in California and the head of the iconic Inland Empire law firm, Varner & Brandt, whose legal roots go as far back 1875.

ner's great, great grandfather relocated to the Inland Empire and established a law practice. Varner's father, Bruce, also landed in the Inland Empire, quickly becoming the most respected attorney in the area – a position he still holds to this day. Bruce brought innovation to the legal process with strategic business consulting and planning while also creating a dynamic internal company culture.

"I find inspiration in my father every day and remind myself of his selfless dedication to others as a model for how I approach business and my interactions with clients and colleagues," Varner says.

With regard to his appointment to the Little Hoover Commission, Varner is intrigued by the work of the Commission. "I am continually astonished and impressed by the intellectual capital and work of the Little Hoover Commission and the impact it has on every aspect of our State," he says. "For example, we just completed a study on forest management in California in light of the drastic impact the drought, fires and floods we have experienced will have on our State.

"Our staff and commissioners diligently researched the history of forest management to assess if we must change our traditional views of forest management to minimize future damage to our environment, promote healthy living conditions and improve the health of our forests."

The impact of the recommendations the Commission makes to the Governor's office and the Legislature may not be felt for decades.

"We're trying to improve the lives of Californians 100 years from now," Varner says. "We're trying to change the way we take care of our forests. It is unique and rewarding that we can build a legacy and help people beyond our lifetime."

The Commission is now studying how artificial intelligence will shape the future economy of the State on what California can do to become a world leader in discussion.



Varner is an ideal individual to be entrusted with this role. For the last 20+ years, he has advanced his firm to one of the most prominent and impactful in the Inland Empire, growing it from five attorneys to 22.

Two seasoned counselors, Richard Marco and Brad Neufeld, joined the firm as partners in 2017, bringing decades of added experience to the firm's labor and employment practice group and its business trial practice. Two veteran attorneys with Varner & Brandt, Nathan Heyde and Linda Gladson, also were elevated to partners in 2017, enhancing the breadth of the firm's business and legal services to clients throughout California, the nation and overseas. "We look for attorneys who fit our culture," Varner says. "We don't just add bodies. We take time to ensure our people embrace the culture we have established and even enhance it. We look for team members, attorneys and staff, who have an innate trait of caring about the people with whom we interact and the quality of their work. We are one team. We take pride in how we treat each other."

The culture of Varner & Brandt – from Day 1 through today – began with Sean's father, Bruce, whom is referred to by his son as "a gen-

tleman's gentleman.”

“He is incredibly smart and intuitive,” Sean says. “He is known by virtually everyone in the community. When people are looking for solutions for the region, he is among the first called.”

He is the type of person “who gives selflessly without any expectation of acknowledgement,” Sean adds. “He operates as an architect behind the scenes of so many important developments in our community and his impact is immeasurable. All of us that work with him realize that we are in the midst of a legend.”

Bruce currently serves as a UC Regent, a prestigious gubernatorial appointment that he has held for 12 years. Among a vast list of other accomplishments, he has served on the President's Advisory Council at Cal State San Bernardino and the Advisory Council for the San Bernardino District Attorney, helped start the Boys and Girls Club in San Bernardino and assisted in establishing the City of San Bernardino's redevelopment plans.

His work with Jack Brown and Stater Bros. Markets is considered to be one of his greatest achievements with its lasting and invaluable impact on the Inland Empire. Varner helped Brown take control of Stater Bros. through a proxy fight in 1986 -- a feat recognized by Wall Street professionals and lauded as the kind of legal brilliance that is written about in books. The firm continued to help Stater's in acquiring 43 Albertsons and Lucky stores, which catapulted the company into a market leadership position.

Success stories like these are the norm for Varner & Brandt. The progressive firm doesn't only focus on law, but also mergers and acquisitions, corporate and business strategy, real estate strategy and transactions.

The firm's attorneys handle all aspects of business including labor and employment, succession and estate planning, intellectual property, and business disputes. They serve a diverse clientele that includes Fortune 500 companies, the food and beverage industry, the manufacturing industry, the service industry, the technology

sector, entertainment and social media, real estate development and land use, restaurant, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, officers and directors of corporations, and a variety of family-owned businesses.

In addition to his business, Varner, like his father Bruce, is involved in a wide range of boards, community services and organizations. He is Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Community Foundation Serving Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and a founder of Riverside's ExCITE Business Incubator. He serves as a director in the Monday Morning Group, a body of leaders in Riverside advocating in Washington D.C. and Sacramento for the region as a whole. He sits on the UC Riverside Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics and is a director on the fledgling First Tee of the Inland Empire, a youth development organization introducing golf's inherent values to young people. He is also a SSB Deputy with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. As a member of the Young Presidents Organization, a group comprised of young leaders of companies throughout the world, he led the Route 66 Chapter twice as its Chairman. As for the future of the firm, Varner could not be more excited.

“We continue to add members to our team who have a passion to see business growth in our area and a desire to apply that passion to our work on behalf of others,” he says. “At our company, we also feel very fortunate for the blessings bestowed upon us. We take pride in the resources we have to give back and help our clients and our community.” — **By Rick Weinberg and Steve Virgin, California Business Journal**

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