



Alumni in the Land of Oz

Upon entering the Fresno offices of Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani (GRSM50 as it's known), one is greeted by a friendly receptionist who bolts from behind her desk to offer a warm welcome.

BY **DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA**, ALUMNI LIAISON

While Ellie is not fond of hugs, she is more than willing to offer a lick on the hand or some emotional support. As a colleague the attorneys call invaluable, Ellie is often joined at the office by other dogs, with the caveat they are familiar with office etiquette and can get along with co-workers!

In addition to a focus on the well-being and contentment of their employees, GRSM has built an almost Oz-like approach to job satisfaction. Especially when considering that the firm is among the top 15 largest in the nation. The firm was the first in the country to have an office in all 50 states, and employs over 1,700 attorneys.

In Fresno, seven of those attorneys, one paralegal, and a law clerk, are SJCL grads. They say working together at the firm is a pretty sweet deal. "It makes our work easier in many ways because we all have shared 'trauma bonds' from law school!" said Nathan Maltes (Law '24). Both Nathan and classmate Marisol Cruz Rodriguez (Law '24) are recent graduates, but they were both hired as associates soon after passing the bar.

Elizabeth Thomasian (Law '14) was recently named Managing Partner of the Fresno office, quite a triumph in a firm this large. The press release announcing her achievement describes Elizabeth as a natural-born leader who has the utmost respect of her colleagues and the local legal community. She says she is thrilled that so many fellow alumni have joined the firm. Like in any law firm, the hiring process is fairly intense. But it wasn't Elizabeth's recruitment of fellow alumni that sealed the deal. Each was hired on their own merit, and their ability to exceed the hiring requirements. (We don't mind saying it's a testament to the legal education at their shared alma mater!)

Mike Landers (Law '15) worked for a time with Elizabeth at the Law Office of Rayma Church (Law '91). Upon Rayma's retirement, Elizabeth moved to GRSM and eventually asked Mike to apply. Initially, Elizabeth worried about moving from a small boutique firm to a giant like GRSM. "The culture at Rayma's firm was family-like," Elizabeth said. "Rayma knew my husband's, and even my dog's name!" When Mike joined GRSM, he brought in his expertise in personal injury law.

Nathan says he met Elizabeth, Landon Sciacca (Law '22), and Jenna Halop (Law '21) at SJCL's Career Day in 2023. After interviewing at the On Campus Interviews the following week, he began a clerkship during his last semester. Then he passed the bar and became an associate.

Jenna and Landon attended SJCL around the same time and found themselves as colleagues at GRSM shortly after both passed the bar. Even though he is still a newer attorney, Landon has become somewhat of a superstar. He has helped the partners prep for trials, and he conducts expert discovery, among other high-level tasks, Elizabeth said.

Karan Nagra will graduate this May. He met Elizabeth at Career Day last Fall and began a clerkship in January.

Others of the group were unaware of fellow classmates at the firm, until after they were hired. "It certainly wasn't intended," Jenna said, "But it's really nice that [we all ended up here]. We have commonalities, regardless of our graduation year."

While many super-sized law firms seem rigid and single-minded, GRSM is the opposite. The firm's massive size provides more flexibility and opportunity than most. Attorneys are invited to pick and choose their own schedules. They are welcome to work from home whenever they like.

“Most businesses learned how to be remote during COVID,” Elizabeth said. “But GRSM was a remote platform before that.” Because of their vast, nationwide presence, eliminating overhead for some buildings and offices made sense, but their main reason was always the wellness and contentment of their employees. Having worked out the kinks long before anyone else, they discovered that flexible, remote work is the key to new age efficiency – for both attorneys and clients alike.

An interesting fun fact that highlights the firm’s culture: the Fresno group likes coming into the office! Elizabeth says they come in sometimes just to visit and have lunch. But they also like the flexibility to work from home when it’s more convenient. “We love the hybrid mentality of choice here,” Elizabeth said.

On the day of our visit, eight of the alumni were present and “dressed for court,” but that was just for show. Most dress for comfort on no-court days.

For out-of-area appearances, colleagues at other branches can step in to avoid extensive travel. The digitalization of case

files has prevented the need for attorneys to spend long hours on the road for a short hearing, for example.

Elizabeth says this is the new model for forward thinking firms. “Theoretically, an attorney can have three different hearings happening in different cities all on the same day, with the use of Zoom and fel-

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low associates.” This provides cost benefits as well as helpful workarounds, Elizabeth added. If there is a downside to it all, it’s that things can move along pretty fast, but the attorneys say the phenomenal level of support they receive makes it work.

“From the associate colleagues to the IT department,” Paralegal Melissa Norwood (Law ’23) says, “there is a ton of support available at this firm.” Melissa said she was surprised to learn that even the high-level administrators know her name! Not only

is she a very recent graduate, she lives in Fresno and works remotely in Sacramento.

Erika Esqueda (Law ’22) has been at the firm for six months. She says the mentoring here is unique. “They teach new attorneys how to think like partners because they want everyone to [have the opportunity] to become a partner.”

With nearly every type of law in practice, attorneys here have the luxury of choice. Associates are welcome to explore areas of law they have never tried by collaborating with other branches. While Fresno doesn’t do much sports media law, Los Angeles does. If desired, an attorney in Fresno can work with the L.A. branch to train and try it out, without leaving home.

In addition to opportunity, industry change is a mainstay at GRSM. “My job interview was with a woman at the San Francisco office who was a partner, yet only in her 30s,” Jenna said. “It was inspiring to see that it’s possible to rise up the ranks that quickly.” For female attorney’s, becoming a partner in their 30’s is a shift in the traditional norm. Nathan concurred. His

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(L-R): Nathan Maltes, Mike Landers, Melissa Norwood, Jenna Halop, Landon Sciacca, Erika Esqueda, Ellie, Marisol Cruz Rodriguez, and Managing Partner Elizabeth Thomasian. Not pictured: Karan Nagra (Law ’25)



Newly appointed Chief Deputy District Attorney of Tulare County, **Jessica Weatherly** (Law '10)

Life is But a Dream

Jessica Weatherly (Law '10) achieved a dream she had held since middle school when she was promoted to Chief Deputy District Attorney of the Tulare County District Attorney's Office, in November. A native of Exeter, Jessica graduated from CSU San Diego with a degree in Biology prior to attending SJCL. Her parents had advised her to have a backup plan with a flexible major in case her interests changed. But Jessica never wavered from her passion to help victims find justice.

First hired as a law clerk in 2008, Jessica began her career by assisting now District Attorney Tim Ward on the prosecution of

a death penalty homicide case. She became a deputy district attorney two years later.

Jessica's tenure at the D.A.'s office has included assignments in general felony, juvenile, crimes against children, trial team, south county Porterville, and misdemeanor divisions. She has prosecuted high profile gang and homicide cases, as well as attempted murders on peace officers. In 2016, Jessica received the Valley Hero Award, and in 2017, the Porterville Exchange Club Attorney of the Year Award. Jessica worked for five years as Assistant District Attorney prior to her current promotion.

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fiancé is currently a 3L at SJCL. He says he likes working for a firm that supports the kind of career path she too, is hoping to follow.

Marisol Cruz Rodriguez relayed another traditional norm that is changing. "As an attorney who is just starting her career, and happens to be pregnant, I have received much support and grace here." She added that (managing partner) Elizabeth has helped her to feel at ease about her new, dual careers, both as an attorney, and a soon-to-be new mom. Marisol says she has been connected with people in the firm who can assist with navigating all of it.

For all of their intentionality, GRSM has a good retention rate for lateral partners. Within the highly fluid legal field, their retention rate of 88% is rare. By cultivating an environment where attorneys can integrate easily and establish long-term careers, the firm has gained inclusion in U.S. News & World Report's Best Companies to Work For: Law Firm Edition, 2025.



San Joaquin College of Law's Career Day with **Elizabeth Thomasian** (Law '14), **Nate Maltes** (Law '24), and **Landon Sciacca** (Law '22).

The group had to admit that sometimes they too are surprised by the sheer awesomeness of their jobs. In a profession that is known for its strict adherence to traditional norms, the alumni at GRSM seem to have found their way over the rain-

bow. The oft quoted advice about making connections and networking with fellow graduates is sound, but it is also good to find an office that loves dogs!