

Professional Liability Atty Joins JAMS As Mediator In LA

By James Mills

Law360 (October 10, 2023, 9:41 AM EDT) -- Alternative dispute resolution service JAMS is expanding its mediation team, adding a longtime professional liability attorney as one of its mediators.

Edith Matthai has joined JAMS as an arbitrator and mediator, JAMS announced Oct. 2. Matthai joins just a month after closing down her longtime law firm, Robie & Matthai LLP. During her 45 years as an attorney, Matthai has represented clients in hundreds of mediations and settled over 1,000 cases.

"I'm really excited about JAMS," Matthai told Law360 Pulse in a Friday interview. "My gut says this is the right place for me. I'm hoping that it really gives me a chance to feel as if I'm helping people and that I'm helping people to get to a resolution that's going to make their lives better because they're not wound up in the litigation."



Edith Matthai

Matthai reported she will be based in the JAMS resolution center in downtown Los Angeles, but will also work in the Century City office as well as virtually, if needed. She will serve as a mediator, arbitrator, special master/referee or neutral evaluator of professional liability cases as well as business/commercial disputes, family law, probate/trust, real estate/real property, insurance, appellate cases and more.

JAMS, which was founded in 1979 as Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services and now has a roster of more than 400 neutrals and 29 locations, is excited to have Matthai join.

"Ms. Matthai's litigation experience runs the gamut and has helped her build a reputation for creativity, fairness and serving clients at all stages of a dispute," JAMS CEO Chris Poole said in a statement. "Throughout her career, she has been lead counsel on high-stakes matters and has demonstrated her aptitude for navigating complex cases and securing strong outcomes for her clients."

Although Matthai is sad to have closed Robie & Matthai, she felt it was time to reduce stress in her life now that she is in her seventh decade of life.

"I had that firm for 37 years. I've had great lawyers and it's been a great run, but I was the person who was primarily responsible for making sure that everything needed to keep that law firm going was done, including all the issues of administration and staffing, getting business and taking care of issues that come up in a law firm," Matthai said. "I loved it for years. I know I'm going to miss it. I know I'm going to miss being a litigator terribly, but I got to a point where I said, 'It's time to change.'"

She started the process of winding down the firm months ago, including making arrangements for the eight attorneys and four staff members the firm had. A majority of them, including her daughter Leigh Robie, have moved over to open the Los Angeles office of the San Francisco-based boutique, Long & Levit LLP.

"[Long & Levit is] the firm that's probably the closest to our culture and our determination to make sure it is good legal work and that we do the right thing," she said. "We've worked with them on matters over the years, so they know us, we know them. It's a perfect match."

Matthai, who grew up in Taft, California, outside Bakersfield, earned her law degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, which is now known as University of California, College of the Law, San Francisco.

She and her husband, Jim Robie, opened Robie & Matthai in January 1987. Initially, the firm focused largely on representing insurance companies in property insurance cases, since that was her husband's area of specialty. However, since his death in 2011, the firm evolved into her area of specialty — representing professional liability matters such as legal malpractice cases and judicial discipline cases as well as fee disputes, disputes between lawyers and disputes between firms.

Matthai also handled business/commercial litigation cases as well as "strange and unusual cases" as she described them, explaining she's taken some weird cases that others didn't want to touch.

"I used to joke, 'If it's really weird, send it to Edith.' I've had some of the strangest cases you can image over the years. My reaction is 'Bring it on,'" Matthai said. "I'm happy to take on weird cases or something that's difficult or something's that got problematic issues. That's what makes this business interesting and challenging and makes you think."

Now that she's a mediator/arbitrator, she expects the cases she is assigned will follow a similar pattern.

"Primarily, I'll be doing cases in the professional liability area, but I'm not restricting it to that," she said. "And I'm not restricting it to stuff that is easy."

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.