Werner Wolfen, In Memoriam

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Irell & Manella LLP mourns the passing of its partner emeritus Werner Felix Wolfen who passed away peacefully on November 29 at his home in Los Angeles.

Werner was born in Berlin on May 15, 1930. At age eight, he came to America with his family as refugees from Nazi Germany. Werner’s memories of what he witnessed in Germany as a child forged his lifelong commitment to international human rights. Werner earned his J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, after obtaining his undergraduate degree in business administration from UC Berkeley.

Werner joined Irell in 1953 as a tax lawyer and became the firm’s third partner. He spent his entire career at Irell with a practice focused on tax and entertainment matters and a client roster that included Kirk Douglas, Ella Fitzgerald, Norman Granz, Burt Lancaster, A&M Records, The Carpenters, Motown Records, Lorne Michaels, Barbara Walters, Mo Ostin, and many others.

“Werner was a pillar of the Irell community and a brilliant lawyer who had a keen sense for what was in his clients’ best interests, sometimes before the clients knew it themselves. And he was never shy about telling them so. His self-assurance was part of his brilliance,” said Irell partner emeritus John Fossum. “Additionally, Werner was an amazing teacher who mentored several generations of outstanding tax and entertainment lawyers.”

After retiring from Irell in 1999, Werner became a venture investor in technology and life sciences companies. He served on the board of directors of several companies including Broadcom.

“Werner played a crucial role in Broadcom’s formative years. He pulled together our first external round of angel investors and he joined our board of directors,” said Henry Samueli, co-founder of Broadcom Corporation. “Most of Broadcom’s management team at the time was quite young (in our thirties) and wet behind the ears, so Werner served as a father figure to the team, providing us with his sage advice and always entertaining us with his wonderful stories and experiences. He was truly a wonderful human being. His advice was always spot on and helped carry us through our ups and downs as we grew the company. The entire management team and board of the early days of Broadcom cared deeply for Werner and we will miss him dearly. He clearly helped shape our success, and I know he was quite proud of the company and the amazing success we achieved.”

Dedicated philanthropists, Werner and his wife Mimi established the Wolfen Family Foundation, which supported a range of initiatives including the Wolfen Family Cancer Clinical/Translational Research Program, created in honor of their son Larry who lost his own brief battle with lung cancer at the age of 28. The Wolfen Family Foundation has also provided support to the Armand Hammer Museum, L.A. Goal, and many other worthy organizations. Werner was also instrumental in creating the Larry Wolfen Entrepreneurial Spirit Award at the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

At Berkeley Law, Werner and Mimi created an endowment that was used to establish the Wolfen Research Professorship and Wolfen Distinguished Scholar awards. Werner’s support of the law school’s International Human Rights Law Clinic reflects his dedication to social justice. In 2007, he received UC Berkeley’s Citation Award, which is the Boalt Hall Alumni Association’s highest honor and awarded annually to one of its most distinguished citizens in
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recognition of leadership in humanitarianism and legal scholarship.

Werner was also actively involved with the public interest law firm Bet Tzedek, which honored him with the Rose L. Schiff Commitment to Justice Award in 2013.

“Werner was an unwavering supporter of the important work of Bet Tzedek Legal Services,” said Sandy Samuels, former president and CEO of Bet Tzedek Legal Services. “Werner treated his charitable giving in the same way as he approached his financial investments. He would ask to meet with various members of the Bet Tzedek team a couple of times each year to receive updates on the progress of various Bet Tzedek activities, especially the Holocaust Survivor Services and Caregiver programs, which were particularly close to his heart. During these meetings, Werner would not only ask penetrating and thoughtful questions about Bet Tzedek’s work, but he would also regale those Bet Tzedek members lucky enough to attend with colorful accounts of his past adventures. The substance of these meetings was shared among the Bet Tzedek staff to the point where there were always numerous volunteers to attend these meetings. Werner’s devotion to the cause of justice made him a worthy recipient of the Rose L. Schiff Commitment to Justice Award at Bet Tzedek’s 2013 gala dinner. We, at Bet Tzedek, will all miss Werner’s warm and welcoming smile, and his resolute commitment to justice that will continue to inspire all those who knew and loved him.”