

# San Diego law firm DDWK wants more growth in Pennsylvania

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Image: Pittsburgh Business Times



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A DDWK partner who's a Pittsburgh native talks about how and why the California law firm recently entered downtown.

The newest law firm to enter Pittsburgh hopes to grow its downtown office.

David Cardone, a founding partner at San Diego-based Dunn DeSantis Walt & Kendrick LLP, first moved to California in 2004 but has multiple ties to the region. The combination of DDWK wanting to establish a hub to serve clients in the Mid-Atlantic region and having boots on the ground with a 2021 remote hire led the firm to [establish](#) a physical presence. Solid connections to tap and lessons learned during the pandemic were also factors.

Cardone is a North Hills native and, after earning his JD at Duquesne University's now-Thomas R. Kline School of Law, he joined a California law firm. He returned home to serve as a clerk for Associate Justice Cynthia Baldwin on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2006 and went back to the West Coast two years later. DDWK launched in 2016.

"Although I've been in California for the better part of two decades, I have always maintained close relationships in Pennsylvania," Cardone said. "One of those is with my law school classmate, Jason Hague ... When he asked me, in 2021, about my thoughts on joining various firms in Pittsburgh, it evolved into a discussion about simply opening an office in Pittsburgh that would allow him to work with DDWK, from Pittsburgh, and assist our firm's existing clients and contacts across the southwest, and also in Pennsylvania. The pandemic confirmed for those in the legal industry that attorneys can, for the most part, work remotely. All of these things coalesced into an easy decision to open a Pittsburgh office."

DDWK's practices include business, corporate and real estate, employment, transportation and litigation.

Since joining DDWK in late 2021, Hague primarily focused on matters the firm handles for clients in California. At present, Hague is the only lawyer based here full-time. His legal assistant is in San Diego, along with DDWK's administrative team.

"The office has only recently opened and I've spent some time there," Cardone said. "I've been fielding phone calls and inquiries from Pittsburgh. I do hope that the office grows in a way that justifies me spending more time working alongside Jason in our office on the Boulevard of the Allies."

But Cardone would "like to see growth" there in the next 12-24 months.

"We are equipped to support attorneys who have a book of business and want to depart larger firms," he said. "We operate other satellite offices with one or two attorneys in them, just like this."

The Pittsburgh office is DDWK's eighth. Half are in California with locations in La Jolla, Irvine and Walnut Creek, in addition to the headquarters. Other sites are in Boise, Idaho; Phoenix, Arizona; and Dallas. The website lists 27 lawyers.

DDWK is also exploring the possibility of opening a Philadelphia office, Cardone said.

Cardone's local connections have played a part in hiring, in a typical Pittsburgh way.

Take Evan McNally. When Cardone was a student law clerk for the late Ralph Cappy, then an associate justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Cardone worked with Pittsburgh lawyer Joy McNally, Evan McNally's mother.

"After graduating from Pepperdine's law school [in 2022], Evan then clerked for Judge William Stickman, who, not coincidentally, was one of my fellow clerks during my time working as a judicial clerk for Justice Baldwin," Cardone said.

Stickman was clerking for Cappy who at the time was chief justice of the state's top court.

"We worked together quite a bit in those years," Cardone said. "Judge Stickman's recommendation of Evan to my firm made it an easy choice for us to hire another native Pittsburgher, and now Evan works in our San Diego office."

Cardone also said he's done his best to maintain a close relationship with Duquesne University and its president, Ken Gormley. Gormley previously served as dean of the law school and was Cardone's mentor.

"He has played a role in the careers of many Duquesne Law graduates," Cardone said. "Being in a position to open a Pittsburgh office of a California-based firm is a credit to President Gormley and Duquesne."

So what drew Cardone to San Diego in the first place?

"Initially, California simply seemed like an interesting place to be when gaining experience as a young attorney," he said. "Aside from that, I was interested in becoming more involved in motorsports — auto racing — and, as much as I love Pittsburgh, the fact is California is a better environment for motorsports."