

# VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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## Veteran construction litigator brings decades of expertise to neutral role

After nearly 40 years handling major construction disputes, mediator and arbitrator John D. Hanover has joined ADR Services, Inc., bringing deep industry knowledge and a collaborative approach to resolving complex cases.

By Shane Nelson  
*Special to the Daily Journal*

There isn't much in the complex practice area of construction law that longtime litigator John D. Hanover hasn't seen.

"In nearly 40 years of private practice, I think I worked in every area," Hanover said. "From private residences to hospitals, jails, football stadiums, infrastructure projects, roads, bridges, waterways, water treatment plants, subways, commercial buildings, mixed use. I just have a vast experience."

A third-generation attorney, Hanover grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, where he first became fascinated with the law as a grade schooler.

"I can remember as early as probably 7 or 8 years old, I would sit at the kitchen table with my father and talk about cases and work on cases," Hanover said with a chuckle.

After completing his legal degree at Vanderbilt University in 1986, Hanover went to work at his father's firm, and one of his first cases was a construction dispute.

"There were 13 parties involved, so it was complex from the get-go, and everybody had experts," Hanover recalled. "My first deposition ever was actually on that construction defect matter. ... There were 13 other lawyers deposing an expert



Justin L. Stewart / Special to the Daily Journal

on some very complicated wood-fiber issues, and I just dove right in, and I loved it."

Hanover speaks fondly of his nearly four decades of construction litigation — which also featured a few years working in-house for a construction management firm. But at the start of 2025, Hanover felt it was time for a new focus, and he joined the roster of private neutrals at ADR Services, Inc., where he's since been working to resolve construction disputes full-time.

Although most of his assignments have thus far been mediations, Ha-

nover said that as an arbitrator he works hard not to prejudge cases and described himself as "a stickler for evidence."

"I also really believe that in my role as an arbitrator, I'm not trying to find a result that is splitting the baby," Hanover explained. "I really try to decide a case based on the law and based on the facts. And there are winners and losers, but that's not for me ... to be overly concerned about. I let the evidence drive the decision."

Hanover described mediations as complex puzzles of legal ques-

### John D. Hanover, Esq.

ADR Services, Inc.  
Los Angeles

**Areas of Specialty:**  
Construction

tions and emotional challenges, while noting that many of the construction disputes he tackles feature a multilayered dynamic he understands well.

“You might have insurance companies, subcontractors, contractors, owners, attorneys,” Hanover explained. “And I’m very adept at recognizing the disputes between all those parties and how they fit together. ... It’s impossible to settle a case like that unless you understand the complexities of all the relationships with the stakeholders.”

Irvine construction attorney Jonathan J. Dunn has used Hanover to mediate several cases and noted the neutral possesses terrific expertise in the practice area.

“Construction cases have a lot of unique issues. They’ll have technical issues, design issues, delay issues,” Dunn said. “And in many cases, there are insurance products that come into play in the construction arena that have novel coverage issues. ... And John has a lot of experience on all those issues. So at least when I’m talking to him, he understands where I’m coming from.”

San Francisco litigator Emmett E. Seltzer used Hanover recently to resolve what he described as an “incredibly complex” construction dispute, and he agreed that the

mediator’s depth of knowledge in the practice area sets him apart.

“He understands — no pun intended — the nuts and bolts of construction, but he also, really importantly, understands the ins and outs of insurance coverage and how to speak with attorneys and insurance carriers,” Seltzer said. “Those two aspects — both the actual construction and the insurance that’s involved — you have to have a good working knowledge of both to handle cases like this, and he really does.”

Money is, of course, critical when resolving most construction disputes, but Hanover noted that reputational concerns are significant hurdles he often encounters while mediating cases. Ironing out some form of continued relationship can be helpful when working to resolve these matters, he explained.

“Continuing to do business with them may alleviate some of those reputational concerns,” Hanover explained. “Because [a party] doesn’t want to be criticized for the last project, so they can say, ‘Oh, no. We’re still working with that owner.’”

Hanover added that he finds it particularly helpful when attorneys arrive at mediation with an open mind and view the session as a collaborative process.

“Mediation is really different,” he said. “It really is supposed to be an exercise where the lawyer is not really advocating, but the lawyer is instead a stakeholder in the exercise of trying to resolve a case.”

Arcadia construction attorney Dennis G. Cosso used Hanover recently to resolve a complex multi-million-dollar case, and like Dunn and Seltzer, he was very impressed.

“All I do is construction litigation ... and I’ve been practicing over 50 years,” Cosso said. “If your case is a construction litigation, he’s the man. He’s fair, he’s calm, he’s smart. He’s the guy to use. He’s the guy I would recommend literally to anybody in the industry.”

Seltzer agreed that Hanover’s demeanor in mediations is a distinguishing strong suit.

“I sat in a lot of Zoom meetings with him and all the other parties, and he has a very soft touch and an affable nature he uses to connect with people with all sorts of different personalities,” Seltzer said. “Lawyers run the gamut, and I sat in meetings with him along with everybody on this case, and he’s able to connect with everybody.”

Dunn added that he valued Hanover’s persistence.

“If the case doesn’t resolve in one day, he’ll give you homework,”

Dunn said. “And then he will make phone calls and get after everybody and get you to a spot where at least you’re going to get a really good offer, and you’re going to have something to evaluate. ... John’s going to stay after everybody, and he’s relentlessly going to pursue the resolution.”

After nearly four decades of litigation, Hanover said refocusing his career on private neutral work has been fantastic — in part because he’s still spending so much time with attorneys.

“I’m thrilled to do the work ... and to think differently about cases alongside so many fine lawyers,” he said. “It’s just been really satisfying to try and assist them by being creative and hopefully offering some solutions they hadn’t considered before.”

*Here are some attorneys who have used Hanover’s services:* Jonathan J. Dunn, SMTD Law LLP; Emmett E. Seltzer, Lorber, Greenfield & Olsen LLP; Dennis G. Cosso, Law Offices of Dennis G. Cosso; Lawrence A. Dany, Jones Day; Michael Viayra, Thompson Hine LLP.

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