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## Family Affair

*High-profile litigation is family business for Orange County boutique Easton & Easton LLP.*

By Melanie Brisbon  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

**C**OSTA MESA — W. Douglas Easton was considering retirement from his lengthy legal career until he received life-changing news.

“I got diagnosed with Stage 3 throat cancer,” Doug Easton said. “I was out of the office for treatment for about six months and only part-time with a lot of fatigue for the next six months. I think if I had been in lots of law firms, I might not have had a job to come back to, or a law firm to come back to, but the boys held everything together and kept it going great.”

The boys are Easton’s sons: Brian W. Easton and Matthew D. Easton. Both were attorneys at Easton & Easton LLP, a Costa Mesa law firm specializing in personal injury matters, when their father was diagnosed with cancer in 2015. The younger Eastons, who had become partners the prior year, were forced to step up professionally while their father focused on recovery.

“That was kind of when I stepped into the managerial position,” Matt Easton said. “After my dad returned, the firm had grown even in just that six months, and I think that’s partially what made everybody really conformable with me continuing to take on that role. It also allowed my dad to slowly ease back into it.”

Today, Doug Easton is a cancer survivor. A specialist in medical malpractice, he continues practicing law after nearly 50 years with no immediate plans for retirement.

“That six-month hiatus allowed me to really appreciate what I have here, what I accomplished, and what we’re able to do together,”



Courtesy of Easton & Easton LLP

From left, Travis Easton, Matt Easton, Doug Easton and Brian Easton of Easton & Easton LLP.

Doug Easton said. “It made me realize how much I really enjoy what I do and there isn’t something that I want to do more than what we do here.”

**Mr. Easton and his sons are consummate gentlemen while simultaneously serving as vigorous advocates for their clients.’**

— Terrence J. Schafer, name partner at Doyle Schafer McMahon LLP

Doug Easton launched his law firm as a sole practitioner in 1991. Then called the Law Offices of W. Douglas Easton, the firm has transformed into a family business that handles high-profile legal cases. Rae Lyn Easton, his wife of nearly 40 years, started doing bookkeeping for the firm in 1991. In 2006, she came on full time as

office manager of the firm, where five of their seven children also work.

“You can’t plan that your kids are going to follow in your foot-

steps, and I don’t think that we ever expected that,” Rae Lyn Easton said. “It’s nice to see that they enjoy doing what their dad has enjoyed doing all these years.”

Premises liability, car accidents along with catastrophic injuries and wrongful death are some of the firm’s other practice areas. Brian Easton, the eldest son,

was also the first to join in 1995. Nicknamed “The Fixer” by his brothers, he is known for solving problems.

“If the case has problems, they usually try to get me involved, whether it’s trying the case or trying to establish liability on cases that are difficult,” Brian Easton said.

Matt Easton, who handles much of the firm’s management, was the next to join in 2009. In 2014, Travis R. Easton, Doug and Rae Lyn Easton’s youngest son, joined as an associate.

“I wanted to come and work for my brothers and build the firm up with them,” Travis Easton said. “Brian taught me his best tactics for fixing and seeing problems

before they arise.”

“Matt had implemented this really good case management plan that I now have kind of taken and run with, and it’s why I can handle 150 cases,” he added.

Doug Easton has now tried a case with each of his sons at the firm.

The parents of Dennis Schenk, a 55-year-old man killed after crashing into a street sweeper, relied on Easton & Easton for counsel in a wrongful death lawsuit. Schenk, unmarried and without children, was survived by his parents.

Attorneys prepared to tell Schenk’s story in trial and explain why his parents’ loss was greater than insurers initially thought. Their strategy helped the case settle in mediation before trial.

“We put together a really thorough brief, talking about the unique bond this family had and showing the significant loss our clients had suffered,” Matt Easton said. “Ultimately, the case settled for \$2.75 million, which was a huge number in comparison to what was being considered when we first took the case.”

The case resolved in 2013. *Schenk v. Joe’s Street Sweeping Inc.* 30-2011-00531372 (Orange Super. Ct., filed Dec. 20, 2011).

Easton & Easton also represents Vamsi Polisetty, a man seriously injured in 2015 after a woman fell from the Crowne Plaza Hotel and landed on him. The firm brought a lawsuit against the hotel, claiming it has some liability. *Polisetty v. IHG Management*

*LLC*, BC659183 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed April 26, 2017).

“Our client is a gentleman who was standing in front of the Crowne Plaza Hotel in the valet area waiting to get on a bus when unbeknownst to him, a homeless woman snuck up on the 11th floor and gets discovered by security,” Brian Easton said. “In an attempt to escape security, she climbs out the window on the 11th floor and slips and lands on our client and now he’s a paraplegic.”

The lawsuit is pending.

Earlier this year, the firm expanded its offices to accommodate its growth. In the last four years, Easton & Easton has grown by attorney headcount as well as its number of high-value cases.

“Every year, the value and the size of the cases we take on grows,” Matt Easton said. “We still have plenty of the smaller cases because we still have that philosophy of helping anyone that we can help, but we get referred a lot of significant catastrophic injury cases.”

Most of the firm’s cases come through referrals, and it has been that way from the onset.

Doug Easton’s career started at an insurance defense firm. He then went to a business litigation firm where he handled the personal injury cases other lawyers referred. When that firm dissolved, the UC Berkeley School of Law graduate started his own firm with the cases he was already handling.

“When the firm dissolved, my concern was whether I would keep

getting referrals from my other partners and colleagues, and fortunately, I did,” Doug Easton said. “I went to law school at a time when it was unethical for lawyers to advertise, so that was not how I considered building my practice.”

Another early concern Doug Easton faced was whether he would be able to provide for his family.

“For somebody who has a family and ongoing obligations, it’s very hard to withstand that startup curve when you’re not being paid for a long period of time,” he said. “The cases that I already had were in various stages of completion, so it allowed me to get over that hurdle that you have of starting up without starving to death.”

Doug Easton overcame those early issues, and his creation continues to provide for his family. Two of his daughters work as a legal assistant and paralegal at the firm. It also employs associates Gabriel M. Mendoza and Brenda Coleman, who are not related to the family.

“It’s worked out very wonderful for me, and I feel very blessed to work with my family,” Doug Easton said. “I never could have imagined it would grow into something like this.”

Continuing to help people through high-caliber legal work along with maintaining steady and strategic growth are among the firm’s goals, Matt Easton said.

“Seeing the joy that it brings to my dad definitely is really nice for all of us,” he said.

“I think we just want to make sure we continue to build upon the legacy and philosophy that he adopted. My dad always looked at it like, ‘Is this a legitimate case, and if so, I want to take the case, so I can help them out whether its big or small.’ That’s the philosophy that he started with, and that’s the philosophy we want to continue no matter how big we grow,” Matt added.

The firm’s work product is “exceptional,” said Terrence J. Schafer, name partner at Doyle Schafer Mc-Mahon LLP, who has opposed Doug Easton and his firm on many cases throughout the last 25 years.

“Mr. Easton and his sons are consummate gentlemen while simultaneously serving as vigorous advocates for their clients,” Schafer said.

“I am especially impressed how the firm has grown with the times and has embraced courtroom technology, undoubtedly under the influence of the younger Easton attorneys,” he added. “There is no question that a lawsuit filed by Mr. Easton will immediately get my undivided attention.”

Esther P. Holm, a partner at Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP in Costa Mesa, said Easton & Easton is an “excellent firm.”

“I always say it’s one of my favorite plaintiffs’ firms,” Holm said. “I had a case against Brian, and we got along so well that we actually commuted to LA together for depositions. I have nothing but respect for them.”