James J. Brosnahan, 75
Morrison & Foerster, San Francisco
Litigation

In 2009, the old-fashioned trial attorney who refuses to specialize celebrated his 50th year of lawyering by staying as busy as ever. In a case that pitted him against his old friend Joseph Cotchett, he defended billionaire Philip F. Anschutz Inc. and its chairman Charles Hurwitz in a False Claims Act case that alleged the defendants defrauded the federal government in a $1 billion payday when the arbitrator ruled in favor of Ashjaee, an inventor who got in a contract dispute after acquiring Russian technology company Arwest Communications Corp.

John L. Burris, 64
The Law Offices of John L. Burris, Oakland
Civil rights

Burris has negotiated significant large settlements over the past year in police brutality and misconduct cases. But he’s also making headlines in Alameda County Superior Court — wrongful death suit, representing the family of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old shot and killed by a BART police officer on New Year’s Day. This year, he also scored a $650,000 settlement for Jody Mack Woodfox, 27, an unarmed black man shot and killed by police in July 2008 after he was pulled over on suspicion of drunk driving. And, he settled a $2 million case on behalf of 20 South Asian women stalked by an Oakland police officer. Since his success in the infamous Oakland “Riders” case, involving officers accused of excessive force and other abuses, Burris continues to review policies and evaluate to conduct of the Oakland Police Department.

Mark Chandler, 53
Cisco Systems Inc., San Jose
Senior vice president, general counsel and secretary

In relations with outside counsel, this general counsel has been at the forefront of the fixed-fee movement. He’s also known for trying out technology tools that make legal services more efficient. But he doesn’t hold forth on legal issues alone. Chandler is among the executives helping the networking giant pioneer new services for its clients. Networking maintenance services now account for 20 percent of the company’s revenue. While managing a team of almost 200 attorneys, Chandler also finds time to fight for patent reform in Washington, D.C. His team is defending 30 patent cases now, compared to five cases 10 years ago.

Erwin Chemerinsky, 56
Dean, UC Irvine School of Law, Irvine
Constitutional law

Thanks both to his rocky start with and rocket-like launch of the new UC Irvine Law School, Chemerinsky is probably the best-known law school dean in the country. Already prominent as a constitutional scholar, Supreme Court advocate, civil rights lawyer, civic leader and newspaper columnist, Chemerinsky swept down on an overjoyed Orange County legal community last year promising to open California’s first new state law school in decades, squarely in the Top 20. By all accounts, he’s succeeded. His first dozen faculty rank in the top 10 of citations by other legal academics, the school’s student-faculty ratio is 3-to-1, and nearly all the 61 inaugural students turned down offers from top schools. And in his off hours last year, Chemerinsky compared to five cases 10 years ago.

— who gets by on four to six hours sleep a night and never uses notes for speeches or lectures — published a new book on federalism.

Donald W. Brown, 56
Covington & Burling, San Francisco
Civil litigation, insurance coverage

Considered one of the best insurance policyholder lawyers in California, Brown keeps busy with a long list of clients that includes cable television company Adelphia Communications Corp., billionaire Philip F. Anschutz’s investment vehicle Anschutz Co., ExxonMobil Corp., McDonald’s Corp., Morgan Stanley, McKesson Corp. and Yahoo Inc. In May, he won an arbitration for biopharmaceutical client InterMune Inc., through which the company recovered from its directors and officers’ liability insurer the legal costs of fighting its former CEO’s still-pending federal criminal charges. Brown also convinced California’s 2nd District Court of Appeal this year to hear a petition for a writ in a case that client Vulcan Materials Co. filed against one of its insurers stemming from liabilities it encountered in a Modesto groundwater pollution lawsuit.

David S. Casey Jr., 60
Casey Gerry Schenk Francavilla Blat & Penfield, San Diego
Personal injury, civil litigation

Casey is finishing up a case he has shepherded for more than two decades — representing fishermen in the Exxon Valdez trial, and initially reeling in a $5 billion verdict, since reduced to $1 billion. Still, he said, his clients finally are getting paid, after 20 years of waiting. For the past year, Casey also has been concentrating on his role chairing Sen. Dianne Feinstein’s federal judicial selection committee, which will be recommending appointments to the court and for U.S. attorneys in California. Casey said that he’s been reading hundreds of pages of information to evaluate candidates, and that he’s met some of the “best and brightest” people, eager to enter public service, when they could be making more money in the private sector.

I. Neel Chatterjee, 40
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, Menlo Park
Intellectual property

When he’s not getting mentioned as a possible federal judge or involving himself in organizations working for diversity, Chatterjee is best known for his work on behalf of social networking site, Facebook Inc. He recently won a major case for the Palo Alto-based company, persuading a federal judge to enforce a settlement that, unless successfully appealed, resolve the claims of the co-founders to another company that said founder Mark Zuckerberg stole their idea. Chatterjee also represented the company in getting a large default judgment against a man found to have deluged the site with spam messages. Chatterjee also represents a number of other Internet companies.

Morgan Chu, 58
Irell & Manella, Los Angeles
Intellectual property

Chu represented City of Hope Medical Center against biotechnology company Genentech Inc., winning the largest California judgment ever upheld on appeal. As a result, Genentech paid more than $500 million in damages and sanctions. He also continues to represent digital video recorder TiVo in its ongoing litigation against EchoStar Technologies LLC and the Dish Network. Chu helped win TiVo’s patent infringement lawsuit before a jury, which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit upheld. Also, after a bench trial, Chu helped get a court to hold EchoStar in contempt of court for violating a permanent injunction. In total, EchoStar and Dish Network have been ordered to pay more than $400 million in damages and sanctions.