



INFLUENTIAL LEADERS IN SAN DIEGO

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LAW

Heather Riley

Even when she was a young girl growing up in rural Putnam Valley, N.Y., Riley appeared to be destined for a career as an attorney.

“I think my entire life, people somewhat facetiously suggested it to me. I was a very chatty child and my mother worked in the (night) court,” said Riley, one of only two land-use lawyers in Allen Matkins’ San Diego office and a former president of the San Diego County Bar Association. “I went to college thinking it was something that was possible.”

Within a six-year span, Riley graduated from SUNY Albany and earned her JD from Albany Law School. She started working in government immediately after her first year in college and worked for the New York State Senate throughout her time in Albany.

Riley first came to San Diego in the summer between her second and third year of law school, as an intern with the Border Crimes division of the U.S. attorney’s office, returning permanently after graduating from law school. She joined Allen Matkins as an associate in March 2006 and made partner in 2015.

“I help (clients) build, acquire, sell, and develop anything they want to do with real estate – commercial, residential, industrial, institutional – and we help them from the initial stages of due diligence all the way through litigation,” said Riley. “Every project is challenged on a CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) basis.”

In what Riley cites as the most high-profile case of her career, she was one of the key legal pieces of the One Paseo mixed-use project on behalf of developer Kilroy Realty Corp. She helped the Del Mar Heights development



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gain initial approval, fought opponents’ efforts to overturn the approval, negotiated settlements to the case, got agreements to modify the project and then successfully pushed the modified project through the discretionary process all over again.

“It was one of those life-altering, once-in-a-lifetime projects, I think, because it was of such a scale that it will significantly change San Diego,” said Riley. “And I think so much for the better.”

Riley has come a long way from her rural

roots in New York, which she described as “a five-dollar train ride from the city.” But she’s not looking back.

“I love it here. I love what I do. I love where I live. My kids were born here,” said Riley. “I love that I can drive around San Diego, and I can show them properties that I either helped acquire or I helped a project get approved, or I can say ‘next time we drive by this, there’s going to be an office building here and mom did that.’ So, it’s pretty exciting.”

— Tony Lovitt