

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

She does the footwork in the halls of power

By **ANDREW GALVIN**
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Christine Iger is founder and president of **Iger & Associates**, a government-relations firm in

Newport Beach. She started the firm about four years ago after a stint as a partner at law firm **Manatt, Phelps & Phillips**.

Before that, she was chief executive of the Building Industry Association of Orange County for 12 years and worked in Sacramento as a deputy attorney general, director of the state Department of Housing and deputy secretary of the state Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.



Christine Iger

Q. Why did you start your own firm?

A. The reality was that having worked in Sacramento as director of housing, having run BIA for 12 years, when I went to the law firm I was continuing to do government relations, representing clients before water districts, planning commissions and other government bodies. It just became clear to me that I was enjoying working on my own and having my own clients.

I knew I had an entrepreneurial spirit in me, and I just decided to try it. A lot of my clients came with me because I was the only one

working on their cases, so it was a fairly easy transition.

Q. Who are your clients?

A. We have a steady clientele of about 20 to 30 companies. They all have different needs at different points, but it's a steady flow of business.

We have clients in health care, engineering, finance, plastics. And, of course, several builders and developers. When I left the BIA, my first clients at the law firm were the builders and developers that I had worked with all those years. But we set out to have a diversified base of clients, partly because we don't want to be dependent in case there's ever a downturn in the land-use business.

Q. What do you do for these clients?

A. City councils are really where we live. There are 88 cities in Los Angeles County, 34 in Orange County and about 50 in the Inland Empire. That's a lot of elected officials to get to know. A lot of it is who you know, but a lot of the work is what you know and working out what the real issue is and what compromises can be reached.

Q. How often does a client get exactly what they originally envision?

A. I think that really does depend on the circumstances. One of the services we can provide is an overview of what's really going on in a city before a developer decides whether they want to get involved in that city. For example, they may be looking at buying

a piece of property and want to see if it can be rezoned. Typically, there's a 60- to 90-day window to ascertain whether they can get the political support they need.

We'll talk to the city manager, city council members, and get their vision and find out what a buyer of property doesn't have time to learn because they're out there looking for a deal every day. In the short term, we can provide a reality check on what types of buildings they might be able to do, whether it's mixed-use, retail, condos, etc.

Long term, we can help them negotiate. We can hammer out regulatory issues and work on complicated political stuff.

Most of our clients are going to get what they need. It might not be what they want, but they'll get what they need to profit and have a good relation with the government. And if it's not going to work, we can tell them to walk away before they spend a lot of time and money. We don't want to create any undue expectations. Part of what we do is we are the messengers of bad news, and that is something that is priceless information.

Q. How many employees do you have and what do you look for in them?

A. Six full-time and several part-time throughout the state. They have to like new challenges because every day is different. They have to be extroverted because they're going to have to go and meet city and political folks and sometimes take our clients to meetings.

They have to be able to jump in on a front-page news item sometimes. Often we get hired because there's an 11th-hour crisis.