

JOHN ROOS '80: LAWYERING TO SILICON VALLEY'S ELITE

It was 1985, the Silicon Valley technology industry was still in its adolescence, and John Roos '80 (BA '77) was itching to get out of Los Angeles. He was an associate in litigation at O'Melveny & Myers, a venerable firm with hundreds of lawyers, but Roos wanted something different. So he took a job at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati in Palo Alto, California, then a mere 20 years old and boasting only 50 or so lawyers. Not only did Roos trade south for north, old for young, and large for small; he moved into a new line of practice: corporate securities.

"I thought Silicon Valley was taking off, and I wanted to come back to the Bay Area," said the 50-year-old Roos, sitting behind his desk in his sparsely decorated corner office. "I decided to make the switch so I could work with and advise young entrepreneurs."

During Roos's 20-year tenure at Wilson Sonsini, the firm has added about 500 lawyers and seven branches in cities around the country. "Our practice has grown from representing start-ups to representing multibillion-dollar corporations such as Google, HP, and Pixar," he said. "We've basically grown up with Silicon Valley."

"For many years, Wilson Sonsini has been *the* law firm in Silicon Valley," said Abigail Johnson (BA '77), who runs a Silicon Valley public relations firm and knows Roos from the days when they were both Stanford undergraduates. "It has been pretty instrumental in defining law in tech start-ups."

Roos took a leap of faith in moving to Wilson Sonsini, but it's now clear how right the decision was: early this year, he was named chief executive officer of the firm. Larry Sonsini, 64, who had held that post for more than 20 years, stepped aside. "It's important for

me to stay with the practice and build the firm," Sonsini said. "I need someone who can focus as a real executive. John has the skill set: he is a wonderful communicator and listener, and he is willing to put the time in and step away from his practice."

Roos, the son of college administrators, grew up in San Francisco with dreams of becoming a trial lawyer. He attended Stanford as an undergraduate and liked it well enough to stick around for law school. There were other reasons to stay on the Farm: he had started the Stanford Speech Institute, a three-week summer debate camp for high school students; he also met his wife, Susie Roos (BA '78), at this time.

After graduating and plunging into the demanding world of law firm practice, Roos still found time to volunteer: in 1984, he took a year off to act as special assistant to the national cochairman for Walter Mondale's presidential campaign, and in 2000, he campaigned for Bill Bradley's presidential bid. More recently, he was Northern California finance chair for John Kerry's presidential campaign. Noting that all of his candidates lost their bids and sounding much like a politician, Roos noted, "My record is consistent." Roos has been more successful running on his own. In 1991, and again in 1995, he ran and won a seat on the San Mateo-Foster City School District board.

Ronald Beck '80 (BA '77, MBA '79), a classmate, longtime client, and former roommate, says that Roos's political activism demonstrates his ability to develop strong relationships with

people. "John is extremely well connected," said Beck, a managing director at the private equity firm, Oaktree Capital Management. "He is the consummate business lawyer whom you can rely on for business advice, not just technical advice."

When the tech bubble burst in 2000, Wilson Sonsini deflated along with many of its clients. Today it has 200 fewer attorneys than it did during the boom and records \$377 million in revenue, down from \$450 million in 2000. But Roos said that Wilson Sonsini survived the downturn better than many other firms: "Our firm has a very strong name. We feel very well positioned for the future."



PHOTO: STEVE GLADFELTER

Roos says he plans to recruit more minority attorneys and expand Wilson Sonsini's pro bono practice. He's also exploring opening offices in China, India, and Israel—a development that reflects the changing technology industry, which has moved beyond Silicon Valley. Noting that his ascension to CEO represents Wilson Sonsini's first generational shift, Roos said, "Now we're looking to build the firm on a global basis, capitalizing on our brand in technology. That is the challenge of this generation." —Mandy Erickson

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