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COVER STORY

Fenwick's longtime chairman to step aside

By David Ruiz
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Gordon K. Davidson, who has led Fenwick & West LLP as its chairman since 1995 and become one of the best known corporate lawyers in Silicon Valley history, will step down at the end of the year, the firm announced Thursday.

The firm elected Mountain View-based corporate practice group chair Richard L. Dickson to replace him.

Dickson will assume the role Jan. 1.

Davidson has advised technology giants such as Oracle Corp., Facebook Inc., Cisco Systems Inc., Amyris Inc. and Electronic Arts Inc.

Last month, he helped lead San Francisco-based Marin Software Inc. in its \$105 million initial public offering.

Davidson, who joined Fenwick in 1976, said the firm's three consecutive years of revenue growth make now a good time to step down because of the built-up momentum. He said he wants to return more fully to his corporate practice, which he said he expects to continue for many years.

"I made my first priority serving clients, which means less time to spend on administration," Davidson said. "My first love is working with the client."

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— Mark Chandler

The firm more than doubled in attorney count since Davidson became chairman, growing from 150 attorneys to 325, according to a

Fenwick news release. In that time, Fenwick's revenue grew from under \$100 million to more than \$260 million in 2012.

Davidson said he is proud that Dickson will be the next firm leader.

"I genuinely enjoy working with [Davidson]," Dickson said, "and in my capacity as chair of the corporate practice, I enjoyed carrying on the tradition to empower other partners."

He added, "I'm very enthusiastic to do that across the entire partnership."

Davidson said he's been building the infra-



Daily Journal Photo

Gordon K. Davidson, who has been Fenwick & West LLP's chairman since 1995, will step down at the end of the year. The firm elected corporate practice group chair Richard L. Dickson to succeed him.

structure necessary for his succession for the past 10 years by involving many other partners in management. He said Dickson is a great example of a partner who took on leadership roles in many parts of the firm.

"He has chaired our corporate group for the last few years, has been on the executive committee, and is representative of several generations of leaders who we've groomed over the past 10 years," Davidson said. Dickson was elected to chair the firm's startup and venture capital practice group in 2002 and has served on the executive committee since 2008.

Cisco Systems Inc. General Counsel Mark Chandler said the smooth transition from Davidson to Dickson shows the firm is both stable and mature. He said some Silicon Valley firms create the impression that there is only one power partner at work for an entire practice.

"There can be an impression that some Valley firms are dependent on one person," Chandler said. "Fenwick isn't in that category." He said he anticipates the change will only strengthen the relationship between the company and the firm.

Kenton J. King, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates partner-in-charge in

Palo Alto, said the upcoming eight-month transition allows Davidson to have a smooth leadership transition for the firm.

"He's the sort of person that would want to leave behind a stronger institution and have institutional interests at the forefront of what he's thinking about and the actions he's taking," King said.

Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC chairman Larry W. Sonsini called the upcoming transition "good succession planning and management."

"This is a normal succession move by someone who is planning for the future stability and longevity of their enterprise," Sonsini said.

Davidson helped lead the Fenwick team that guided Facebook Inc.'s record \$16 billion initial public offering, the largest domestic IPO of 2012 and one of the largest technology IPOs in U.S. history. He also took Oracle Corp. public in 1986 and has guided multiple Silicon Valley companies in IPOs and mergers and acquisitions.

Dickson said he hadn't been planning for the role for long.

"In our firm you don't aspire to leadership," Davidson said. "You get drafted."