

# Daily Journal

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## PATRICK M. RYAN

BARTKO PAVIA LLP

SAN FRANCISCO

LITIGATION

**P**atrick M. Ryan chairs the litigation group and serves as co-managing partner of Bartko Pavia LLP, a full-range legal services boutique whose clients he represents in high-stakes cases across the country.

Ryan's practice centers on intellectual property and antitrust litigation. He joined

Bartko in 2014 after partnerships at global law firms, drawn by the independence a boutique offers. "Here, I can take the cases I want to take without being subject to a bureaucracy that wants to say 'no,'" he said in an interview last year.

This past year brought a milestone in the firm's own development: a combination with New York boutique Pavia & Harcourt, formalizing and rebranding a longstanding referral relationship between the two shops. "It's been terrific and seamless," Ryan said in a prior interview.

His appetite for difficult matters shapes how he approaches his docket. "I love taking the hard case, the ones that other lawyers think are unwinnable, because that makes winning all the sweeter," he said.

That philosophy was on full display last year, when Ryan secured a \$222 million jury verdict as lead counsel in a trade secrets dispute against retail giant Wal-Mart Inc. His client, Zest Labs Inc., alleged that Wal-Mart misappropriated its machine learning-based food waste reduc-

tion system, which predicted the shelf life of produce. The verdict ranked among the largest in Arkansas history and was likely the highest trade secret award the state had ever seen.

The result was built on a foundation of adversity. A different firm had obtained a \$110 million judgment in 2021, only to have it set aside in 2023 over an attorney conduct issue. Ryan took over and retried the case — on Wal-Mart's home turf in Arkansas. The jury awarded \$72.7 million in compensatory damages and \$150 million in punitive damages. The case settled at the end of July 2025 for an undisclosed sum, with no appeal by the defense. *Zest Labs Inc. v. WalMart Inc.*, 4:18-cv-00500 (E.D. Ark., filed Aug. 1, 2018).

A confidentiality obligation prevents Ryan from discussing the matter, but his closing argument, preserved in an official court transcript, distilled his theory of the case for the jury: "It's a big company taking a little company's ideas because they're arrogant enough to think, 'We can just do what we want.'"