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Six offices in Chicago make list of 'Best Law Firms for Women'

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Six law firms with Chicago offices are among Working Mother magazine's 2009 list of the 50 "Best Law Firms for Women."

The firms cited by the magazine, which released survey results Tuesday in conjunction with the consulting firm Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, are Chapman and Cutler LLP; Jenner & Block LLP; Katten, Muchin, Rosenman LLP; Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP; Perkins, Coie LLP; and Sidley, Austin LLP. Those six firms, with the exception of Perkins, Coie, which is based in Seattle, are headquartered in Chicago.

Other firms based elsewhere that have Chicago offices also made the list.

The magazine accepted applications from firms that employ at least 50 lawyers in order to identify candidates. A total of 105 firms applied to make the list this year, which is now in its third year.

Deborah Epstein Henry, president of Flex-Time Lawyers, said Tuesday that there was strong participation in the survey despite the economic downturn.

"The firms that participate recognized that when the market improves, the war for talent will return," Henry added in a telephone interview. "When the market returns, firms will be more cautious about using money to recruit or retain talent and culture and environment will be that much more important to distinguish themselves."

For the Chicago firms cited, the rankings revealed the following:

At the end of 2009, Chapman & Cutler adopted a formal flex-time policy for associates that will track usage for the first time.

Jenner & Block for the first time held a two-day women's retreat in October 2008, where they discussed work/life issues and heard from the firm's female managing partner and Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne M. Burke.

Katten, Muchin women lawyers receive 13 weeks of paid leave following childbirth. In 2008, 17 of 26 lawyers returning from maternity leave availed themselves of a program in which they could come back to work on a reduced schedule over a three-month period.

At Neal, Gerber, a woman serves on the seven-member executive committee and the firm's first chief operating officer is a woman, who also is the firm's general counsel.

Perkins, Coie allows reduced-hour associates to stay on the partnership track, while some full-time associates can select their own billable hour target and compensation level.

Sidley, Austin provides mentors to new associates, typically from the practice group the new lawyer is joining. The firm's Committee on Retention and of Women hosts an orientation highlighting the committee's projects and offer tips for a good beginning.

The report is in the August-September issue of *Working Mother* and online at Workingmother.com and Fleximelawyers.com.