

Pittsburgh law firms among best for mothers
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By Joyce Gannon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Wendy West Feinstein was visibly pregnant when she became an equity member at law firm Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott several years ago. After giving birth to her son, the litigation specialist took two months off and returned for partial days the first month to ease the transition back to the office.

A number of other women at the Downtown-based firm work reduced and flexible schedules or telecommute to better balance the demands of motherhood and family life, said Ms. Feinstein, 37.

The firm's policies that support a culture of work-life balance, she said, are among the reasons Eckert Seamans earned a spot on the Best Law Firms for Women, a new survey to be released today.

The list of 50 firms nationwide is a joint venture of Working Mother magazine and Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a Philadelphia consulting firm that advises lawyers and law firms on work-life issues and how to promote and retain female attorneys.

Two other Pittsburgh-based firms also made the list: Reed Smith and Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Preston Gates Ellis. Two other firms on the list are headquartered elsewhere but have offices here: Duane Morris, based in Philadelphia, and McGuire Woods, based in Richmond, Va.

Working Mother has been publishing its 100 Best Companies list since 1986, and Deborah Epstein Henry, founder of Flex-Time Lawyers, said she proposed the magazine create a new list focused exclusively on law firms.

More than 200 law firms registered for the survey, which polled the firms on the number of women attorneys who are equity partners, benefits and compensation, parental leave and related policies, child-care, flexibility of scheduling, and retention and advancement of women.

Firms had to have 100 or more attorneys to participate in the survey.

Although the inaugural list is a step in beginning to measure what firms are doing to support working mothers at law firms, "There is a tremendous amount of work to be done," said Ms. Henry. "We're not done yet."

The relatively small percentage of women who advance to partner and leadership roles in law firms has been an issue nationwide.

In Pittsburgh, for instance, a 2006 survey by the Allegheny County Bar Association found the majority of women lawyers were no better off in pay and job satisfaction than they were 15 years earlier.

"It's great for Pittsburgh" to have a strong presence on the Best Law Firms for Women list, said Ms. Feinstein, who coordinated Eckert Seamans' responses for the survey. The firm has a women's initiative that includes mentoring and development programs for its female staff.

Ms. Feinstein, who worked at other law firms in Pittsburgh and Cleveland before she joined Eckert as an associate in 2001, said the firm's "flexibility and support of working parents in general" sets it apart.

"If I'm a young woman of child-bearing years working through the grind of private law firm life, can I still succeed if I decide to have a family? Eckert is definitely openly supportive. ... I was elevated to equity member when I was pregnant. They supported my professional efforts. That to me on a personal level meant a lot."

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Joyce Gannon can be reached at jgannon@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1580.