

Seven San Diego Firms Score on List of 50 Best

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"The pressure to bill high hours in addition to doing client development made it nearly impossible to have a normal family life," she said. "I made the decision to leave because family should come first, not my firm."

She added that she was not aware of any partner – male or female – who ever worked a reduced-hours schedule at her firm either before or after making partner. And, she said, women with young children who did make partner typically did not take their full maternity leave and returned to work full-time, billing well over the hours requirement.

Some other San Diego firms who did not make it onto the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list scored well on Lawyers Club's Equality Survey in terms of numbers of female partners and have gotten positive reviews from their attorneys.

San Diego's Wilson Petty Kosmo & Turner, which, with 20 attorneys, was not big enough for consideration on the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list, scored at the top of Lawyers Club's Equality Survey. At Wilson Petty, a woman-owned firm, six of 10 partners – or 60 percent – are female. Wilson Petty also has the highest percentage of non-white attorneys (37 percent) and non-white female attorneys (16 percent) of firms rated in the Equality Survey.

Partner Meryl Maneker, a Lawyers Club member, said Wilson Petty's success is due in part to its culture. While the firm has a billable hour expectation, it is at least 100 hours less than the average, and partners do not scrutinize associate hours, Maneker said.

"We don't have any of the issues of having to be seen at the office late at night or on Saturdays," Maneker said. "I think our newer associates

find it a supportive place, and, to the extent you can be in the legal profession, a balanced place."

Maneker, who is a mother of two and had her second child since joining Wilson Petty, said almost all of the firm's partners are working parents and, while none currently works a part-time schedule, the firm is open to the option.

She said she has the same view toward part-time practice as her father, a retired lawyer who was concerned about the "brain drain" at large firms in the 1980s and '90s and encouraged his partners to consider flexible schedules as a way of retaining valuable attorneys.

"It doesn't make the attorneys any less available," Maneker said. "It doesn't matter if the attorney is not there because she's out at a deposition or working on another case or if she's out because she leaves early on certain days."

Three other local firms that did not make the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list also have strong female presences in San Diego, according to Lawyers Club's Equality Survey. At Best Best & Krieger, a California firm with eight offices and more than 185 attorneys, seven of 15 San Diego partners – or 47 percent – are women. At Philadelphia-based Duane Morris, a firm with more than 600 lawyers nationwide, eight of 18 San Diego partners – or 44 percent – are women. At Klinedinst, a California firm with four offices and 52 attorneys, seven of 16 San Diego partners – or 44 percent – are women.

Anne B. Browne is an associate with Brown Law Group and is a member of a Lawyers Club Balance Group and the Champagne & Chocolate Affair Committee.

What Makes a Firm the "Best" for Women?

By Anne B. Browne

What makes a law firm a good place for women to work? Is it sheer numbers of women present in the attorney ranks? Is it a generous benefits package or on-site daycare? Is it women in leadership positions?

Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers, LLC, a national consulting firm that advises its clients on work/life balance and the retention and promotion of women attorneys, wanted to find a way to measure all of these things to determine the best law firms for women attorneys. So, she teamed up with Working Mother magazine to develop the recently published list of 50 Best Law Firms for Women.

Inspired by Working Mother's annual list of 100 Best Companies for Women, Henry thought it was only natural to produce a similar list focused solely on law firms. She said she wanted a benchmarking process that could publicize what firms are doing and not doing to accommodate the needs of bright, young (and not so young) working mothers.

"Competition is the ultimate instrument of change, and my goal in partnering with Working Mother to create this list is to make work/life balance and women's issues a basis of competition among law firms, as historically has been the case for salary or pro bono," Henry said.

The 50 Best Law Firms list used a methodology similar to the one used for Working Mother's 100 Best Companies annual survey, Henry said. Firms interested in being considered for the list, and who have at least 50 attorneys, completed an application and a survey of approximately 500 questions covering six areas – workforce profile; benefits and compensation; parental leave; childcare programs; flexibility; and retention and advancement of women.

Henry said the survey explored work/life issues and other women's issues exhaustively, addressing female representation at all levels of the firm, flex-time policies, reduced hours policies, re-entry from leave, workplace culture, presence and leadership of women in committees and

departments, and many other topics.

Survey responses regarding workforce profile, flexibility, and retention and advancement of women were all weighted more heavily than other responses, Henry said, because these issues tend to be the primary concerns of working mothers.

Still, some women attorneys have criticized the survey's methodology, which relied on self-reporting by law firms and, presumably, their senior partners.

"When I read that my firm made the list, I realized that there had to be something wrong with the methodology," wrote one attorney who posted a comment on Working Mother's Web site under the name "lawyermom." "You do a disservice to young women allowing them to believe that these firms are supportive of working mothers simply because they have good benefits on paper."

Others agreed that the methodology did not reflect the realities of life for women attorneys.

"The policies on paper and discussed with recruits and magazine editors are lofty and given great praise," said M. Gretchen Silver, a senior trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice, who posted comments on Working Mother's Web site, "but they are mostly lip service and are rarely made available unless the woman seeking access to them has already made it through the meat grinder or has a powerful mentor in the firm."

All criticism aside, Henry said she hopes the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list will help foster improvements at law firms.

"The ... key component to making change is information," Henry said, "and participating law firms are now positioned to acquire the national benchmarking data they need to improve the status of women in the profession and raise the bar on what makes a best law firm for women."

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Seven San Diego Firms Score on List of 50 Best Law Firms for Women

By Anne B. Browne

When Working Mother magazine and consulting firm Flex-Time Lawyers, LLC announced their first-ever list of 50 Best Law Firms for Women in August, seven firms with San Diego offices were among those that made the cut.

The firms – all large, national firms headquartered in cities such as New York, Chicago and San Francisco – were among hundreds that completed a detailed application and survey designed to measure firms based on their workforce profile, benefits and compensation, parental leave policies, childcare options, flexibility, and retention and advancement of women. Firms with 50 or more attorneys were eligible for consideration for the list.

“What gets measured gets changed,” said Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers, which advises law firms, corporations and lawyers on work/life balance and the retention and promotion of women attorneys. “In order to get the ball rolling for women we need to know where firms stand.”

The San Diego firms on the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list, some of which also scored well on the Lawyers Club 2007 Equality Survey released in July, are Baker & McKenzie, DLA Piper U.S., Foley & Lardner, Heller Ehrman, McDermott Will & Emery, Morrison & Foerster and Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman.

Baker & McKenzie’s San Diego office – whose 14 partners include seven women – scored better locally than nationally in terms of numbers of women partners. Nationally, the firm’s partnership includes 13 percent women equity partners and 28 percent women non-equity partners, compared to the 50 percent women partners in San Diego.

Charmaine Buehner, an associate in Baker & McKenzie’s litigation department and a Lawyers Club member, said the firm deserves its ranking on the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list.

Buehner, a full-time associate who has a two-year-old son and is expecting her second child at the end of October, said she has been pleased with her firm’s work/life balance policies – including generous maternity leave and flexible and reduced-hours schedules.

Buehner said at least three attorneys in her office – including two partners – work reduced-hours schedules.

“One of our highest level partners has achieved that balance,” Buehner said. “People take advantage of the policy and can still do so if partnership is their goal. ... That speaks volumes to me.”

She added that attorneys working a reduced-hours schedule are not stigmatized at Baker & McKenzie.

“What matters is whether the person exhibits the intent to be engaged in the firm,” she said, adding that part-time attorneys have to be willing to do more than just come in, shut their door and get their work done.

One other San Diego firm on the 50 Best Law Firms list also has more women-friendly statistics in San Diego than firm-wide. At Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, five of 16 San Diego partners – or 31 percent – are women, compared to 14 percent women equity partners and 28 percent women non-equity partners nationally.

Three of the firms on the 50 Best Law Firms list had smaller percentages of women partners in San Diego than nationally. At Morrison & Foerster, only one of 21 San Diego partners – or 5 percent – is female, compared to 19 percent women partners firm-wide. At Foley & Lardner, only two of 20 San Diego partners – or 10 percent – are women, while the firm has 16 percent women partners in all its offices combined. Four of Heller Ehrman’s 24 San Diego partners – or 17 percent – are women, compared to 20 percent women partners firm-wide.

DLA Piper U.S. and McDermott Will & Emery have San Diego offices that generally reflect the proportion of women partners in their firms overall. At DLA Piper, 13 of the 59 San Diego partners – or 22 percent – are women, compared to 13 percent women equity partners and 23 percent women non-equity partners nationwide. At McDermott, one of the four San Diego partners – or 25 percent – is female, compared to 13 percent women equity partners and 31 percent non-equity partners nationwide.

Sheer numbers of women attorneys don’t necessarily equate to a good working environment for women, though, and some local attorneys said some of the firms on the 50 Best Law Firms for Women list don’t deserve to be there – at least not based on the atmosphere in their San Diego offices.

One former associate from the San Diego office of a New York-based firm that made the list said the firm was anything but family-friendly, despite also scoring well on Lawyers Club’s Equality Survey. The associate, who asked that her name not be used, said the firm is a “face-time place” and puts great pressure on associates to achieve high billable hours at the expense of client development and networking.

“Women need to be trusted that we are getting the work done even if we are doing the work outside the office,” she said. “It’s an uphill battle to try to work part time because the firm’s infrastructure is not family-friendly.”

A former associate in the San Diego office of a large Los Angeles-based firm, which did not make the 50 Best Law Firms list but scored well on Lawyers Club’s Equality Survey, said she would not consider her firm family-friendly, either.

The associate, who asked that her name not be used, said the firm has a part-time policy in name only. Part-time associates always seemed to be taken off the partnership track, she said, and eventually would leave due to the inability to advance within the firm.

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San Diego’s Best Law Firms for Women?

Law Firm	National				San Diego	
	No. of Equity Partners	% of Female Equity Partners	No. of Non-Equity Partners	% of Female Non-Equity Partners	No. of Partners	% of Female Partners
Baker & McKenzie Chicago	194	13%	137	28%	14	50%
DLA Piper U.S. New York	368	13%	291	23%	59	22%
Foley & Lardner Milwaukee	502	16%	N/A	N/A	20	10%
Heller Ehrman San Francisco	240	20%	N/A	N/A	24	17%
McDermott Will & Emery Chicago	265	13%	261	31%	4	25%
Morrison & Foerster San Francisco	318	19%	N/A	N/A	21	5%
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman New York	173	14%	172	28%	16	31%