

# New York Law Journal

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# A Structure Of Their Own

Decision makers at three firms make busy lives and work balance out.

BY LISA PULITZER

For six years, attorney Siobhan Moran worked at a large corporate firm with 800 lawyers. While the work was good, she ultimately decided to leave because there was no balance between her career and personal life. Hoping for a change, she moved to a smaller firm with 200 lawyers. But still the firm did not offer the balance she was looking for and so she left again to work briefly as in-house counsel at several Fortune 500 companies before opening her own firm in 1996 with two partners.

"We were looking for the balance, to be the decision makers, to have more control over our lives," said Ms. Moran, referring to lawyers at her current law firm, Moran • Karamouzis, where she is majority shareholder and managing partner. The firm is an eight-attorney

commercial litigation firm with offices in New York City and Long Island. "Those were the issues at the forefront for me. I can't recall any one of the three of us saying we wanted to be a women-owned firm. We just realized one day, 'we are women owned.'"

Ms. Moran is not alone in her quest to find a better work/life balance while still advancing her career into the leadership ranks of the law. Still, the number of women in partnership roles in major law firms has grown less than 4 percent during the last 10 years from about 14 percent in 1996 to 17.9 percent in 2006, according to Judith Collins, research director of the National Association of Law Placement (NALP), a Washington, D.C.-based trade group that provides legal career counseling and professional development for law students and lawyers. Ms. Collins based



Partners at d'Arcambal Levine & Ousley, from left: Aimee Levine, Michelle d'Arcambal and Jodi Ousley

her findings on an analysis of the organization's 2006-2007 "Directory of Legal Employers," the annual compendium of

legal employer data of large law firms with more than 50 employees.

Jim Liepold, the executive director of



NALP, said data is not available to explain the low number of women partners even as the number of women graduating from the nation's law schools is now equal to that of men.

"It's the million-dollar question, and it's one of the most serious and troubling challenges facing law firms," said Mr. Liepold, who noted that the issue has been receiving a lot of press of late, with experts weighing in on the causes, the recent implementation of women's initiatives such as mentoring and training sessions for women attorneys, and work/life resources such as parental leave, mother's room and back-up childcare, at a number of the nation's top law firms.

Mr. Liepold cited raising families and the rainmaking structures that men have dominated for years as possible reasons why women have fared so poorly in attaining partnership roles. He also raised the possibility that women just aren't interested in choosing that career path.

"It is really speculation," Mr. Liepold said. "We just don't have data that supports the 'why.' What's clear, and what more and more work is focusing on, is that the career pathways of men and women who are choosing private practice is not the same."

### Beyond Billable Hours

Manhattan attorney Mindy Stern said she joined a large city firm right out of law school, never expecting to make it her permanent home. "What I wanted to do was to develop my own practice and to be an entrepreneur," said Ms. Stern, who is now the managing partner of Schoeman, Updike & Kaufman, a 20-attorney general practice law firm whose equity ownership recently shifted to the five women partners of the firm. "I knew I could accomplish that better at a small firm."

Ms. Moran cited other issues. "Big law firms really serve one master and that is the billable hour, and to that extent women want something different," said Ms. Moran, who began her law career at Shearman & Sterling. "It is often women who are dealing with child care and elder care, perhaps more than men. They are usually the ones who have the other responsibilities. Even if women are available to serve that one master, the way they go about it—using telecommuting and flex hours—is not traditional and I think that causes a big problem. I don't think that large law firms have embraced that concept."

"It's exhausting, but you can raise a family and become a successful lawyer in a firm," said Beth Kaufman, an equity partner in Schoeman Updike, who joined the

firm straight out of law school in 1978 as the first associate to five male partners.

"Flexibility has always been a hallmark of the firm. A few years after I came here, I started having kids," she recalled. "I never wanted to work part-time. I knew I wanted to spend a lot of time with my children and family, but I also wanted to practice as a

lawyer full-time.

"I certainly felt at times it was too much, and sometimes it is too much," said Ms. Kaufman. "Sometimes you have to devote yourself 100 percent to your job, but then you bounce back."

As much as taking care of families has fallen to women, there are still other rea-

sons why women pursue courses other than the large law firm. "It's not about being a parent and wanting more flexibility for your kids, it's about work environment, and the ability to pursue other interests and have more control over your schedule," said Aimee Levine, a partner with d'Arcambal Levine & Ousley, a five-



## LawFirmBuilder

We are pleased to announce the formation of LawFirmBuilder, a virtual marketing department led by Andrea K. Stimmel. Ms. Stimmel has created award-winning websites and designed fully integrated marketing and communications programs for AMLAW 200 firms as well as leading accounting firms. She is the president of the Legal Marketing Association's Metro New York Chapter.

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Siobhan Moran, managing partner of Moran • Karamouzis

lawyer commercial litigation firm. "Even if you are a white male [at a large firm] you don't have the control you have at your own firm."

Ms. Levine's partner, Michelle d'Arcambal, cited the ability to create additional flexibility for herself, both in terms of hours worked and in payment

plans and options for her clients, as the primary reason for leaving a large law firm setting to become a partner in a small, women-owned law firm in New York.

"I don't think I wanted to end up in a women-owned law firm," noted Ms. d'Arcambal, who, during her 20-year legal career, has held positions at both large and medium-sized corporations, including the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. She also served as a commercial litigation partner in the New York City office of Ross & Hardies—now known as McGuire Woods—a 200-lawyer firm that at the time was based in Chicago. "I've been really happy in-house and at big law firms, where I worked on big cases with lots of people, and it's been fun.

"But I'm happier now," said Ms. d'Arcambal of her current position. "The flexibility in this firm is fabulous. I can be myself more now."

The female partners of d'Arcambal, Levine & Ousley described their work atmosphere as "collaborative, supportive

and fun."

"What has happened with the three of us is that the whole firm is wrapped around collaboration with each other, and with our clients," said Ms. d'Arcambal.

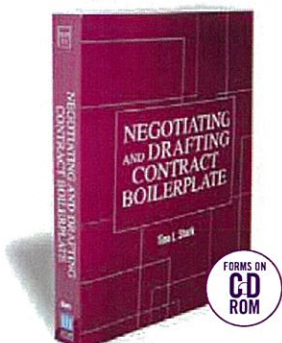
One way the firm encourages collaboration is by requiring that its partners be familiar with the firm's whole portfolio of work. Since all the partners have a working knowledge of the matters being handled by the firm, it is far easier for them to consult with an associate and shift workloads from one person to another. It also means that their clients always have the ability to seek the opinion of another partner in the firm, and to get prompt assistance should the attorney assigned to their case be out of the office.

"Things happen in our lives, personal things, and someone is always able to pick up the case," Ms. d'Arcambal said. "At behemoth law firms, you can't be as flexible as we are, even about getting the rate. We don't have that kind of overhead, so we can implement different ideas of how to achieve results with fewer hours or fewer people."

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Ms. Levine, a graduate of the Columbia University School of Law and former corporate and commercial litigator for Willkie Farr & Gallagher, said: "I've always liked my independence, and I didn't like being in a constricted environment."

Partner Jodie Ousley, a former examining attorney for the Public Assistance and Grants Unit of the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), said collaboration is something she values. "In my current position, it happens on a day-to-day basis. We have the flexibility to try new ways of practicing. Our clients like it, and we like it."

In the spirit of staying flexible, the firm is looking for a pool of highly trained attorneys to work on a part-time or contract basis. "We are looking for lawyers who are looking for work here and there, who want to keep their pulse on things, but are not yet ready for a full-time schedule," said Ms. Ousley.

### A Formal Push

The law firms discussed in this article are members of the National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF), a national trade organization based in Milwaukee, Wisc., that helps corporations diversify their outside counsel. Following a lengthy selection process, the group recognizes firms committed to diversity, and functions by establishing relationships between its member law firms and outside corporations, who sign up as corporate partners.

NAMWOLF's marketing coordinator, Tom Sergeant, reports a "startling" jump in membership applications in 2006, with 23 law firms admitted last year, up more than 50 percent from the 10 firms admitted in 2002. Currently, NAMWOLF has 47 member firms, of which 27 are women-owned. Its 100 corporate partners include PepsiAmericas, Accenture and Dupont, the recipient of the organization's 2006 Diversity Award.

The New York City Law Department recently joined NAMWOLF's Corporate and Public Entities Partnering Program. The program requires interested corporations and other entities to agree to set a goal of eventually expending a minimum of 5 percent of their outside counsel budget on minority and women-owned law firms that have been certified by a credible and recognized entity. In addition to the New York City Law Department, NAMWOLF counts the cities of Cincinnati and Indianapolis, and the housing authorities of Fort Wayne, Ind., and Columbus, Ohio, among the program's 13 members.

The expenditure is consistent with the city law department's objective, said

# "The flexibility in this firm is fabulous. I can be myself more now."

—Michelle d'Arcambal

Martha Alsaro, deputy chief legal counsel for the New York City Law Department. Ms. Alsaro said her agency's goal in joining NAMWOLF is to recruit more women-owned firms to list with the law department. She also noted that a number of the women lawyers she has encountered through her work have confided that finding a position that offers "a flexible lifestyle" is their main objective when conducting a job search. "It is a relevant issue," said Ms. Alsaro.

"Since we became women-owned, we've become very valuable because of the diversity we provide corporations, whether it is because they have diversity initiatives, or because it is important to them," said Ms. Kaufman, a member of

the board of the National Association of Women Lawyers, and coordinator of a series of networking breakfasts and lunches for women litigators for the New York City Bar Association.

She lauded the foresight of the founding members of the firm, who, she said, provided all of its women attorneys with the tools they needed to succeed in the field of law. "I think it was really part of the plan to advance the people who were worthy of being advanced no matter the gender," said Ms. Kaufman, who noted that the firm's shift in equity ownership in 2004 of nearly 70 percent to its women partners did not cause friction for the men of Schoeman Updike. "I think they recognize that because of corporate di-

versity initiatives, it is a great opportunity for us and for them."

"Most of our clients didn't know we are women owned," said Ms. Moran, who is also vice chair of the Women in the Courts Committee for the Nassau County Bar Association. "I think there are a lot of small firms that are cutting edge that can do what a lot of corporate firms can do, but potential clients might be hesitant to hire a small firm. That's where organizations like NAMWOLF help."

Ms. Moran said corporations are drawn to her firm, first and foremost, for the service it can provide its clients. "I think as far as employees, associates and other partners, they are drawn to our firm more for the work/life balance we can offer," she said. "We have people, both men and women, who have other commitments. Two serve as elected officials for the Village of Rockville Centre. Their time is needed during the day, and they are free to meet those responsibilities. Most professionals know their responsibilities, and if given a structure in which they could meet both their professional and family responsibility, most people would embrace that."

"In order to get that balance, you have to make a commitment to how you are going to grow, whether you are going to handle every client that walks in the door, and a commitment to people who share your philosophy."

"We do complex corporate and commercial litigation. We have that cutting-edge work. But at the same time, there is a commitment to a work-life balance."

"If work-life balance shifts, it is not going to be long term," Ms. Moran continued. "It's sort of a seesaw. Not to say that things have not been crazy at times. I have been in cases where I have worked 20 hours a day, and I have young children."

"Those days are going to require my undivided attention—for a period of time. Then, I would have to say, how are we going to get things back to balance," said Ms. Moran.

"It's about communication and about keeping the balance."



Mindy Stern, left, managing partner of Schoeman, Updike & Kaufman, and equity partner, Beth Kaufman

Lisa Pulitzer is a freelance writer, former correspondent to The New York Times and author of six true-crime books.