

Patricia M. Barbarito And Bonnie Frost Featured In NJBIZ Article, "Updating The Letterhead"

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"Updating the letterhead" *By: Gabrielle Saulsbery*

"Of more than 300 name partners at NJ's top firms, only 5 are women"



Gary Botwinick sat at the table with fellow leaders considering a rebrand of their sexagenarian firm and noted something he hadn't before: their firm name [Einhorn, Harris, Ascher, Barbarito and Frost PC](#) (since rebranded [Einhorn, Barbarito, Frost and Botwinick](#)) referenced three men and two women. What's the split like elsewhere for name partners?

After running down the New Jersey Law Journal's top 101 firms from 2018, he realized that two of the people he sat at the table were among only five women referenced in firm names in New Jersey's 101 biggest firms. Those two women, Pat Barbarito and Bonnie Frost, were joined only by Sandra Brown Sherman of Sherman Wells Sylvester & Stamelman LLP; Kerryann Cook of McGivney Kluger & Cook PC; and Janet Poletto of Hardin Kundla McKeon & Poletto.

Of the more than 300 names included on that list, how could that be? Each of the women had their own theories.

Frost, for example noted that until the 1980s, it was hard to get childcare and therefore difficult for women to throw themselves full-time into law school or a career.

Law was her second career, and the school district her two young children were in had just started a before- and after-school program.

Additionally, she said, many firms are now leaning into shorter names.

"Within the last 10 years, law firms have gotten away from very long names and gone down to one or two. When you start lopping off four or five names, it's even more difficult for a woman or anybody to

be named for that matter,” Frost said. “There’s a lot of different changes in the way firms are marketed now than before.”

One firm on the list, Flaster/Greenberg PC, had shortened its name in 1999 from an eight name iteration that included then-partner Laura Wallenstein. Wallenstein had been on the masthead for 14 years, and after 1999 remained with the firm until her retirement 17 years later.

Cook sees it as a network effect.

“People tend to hire from their networks. If there aren’t women in seniority, there tends not to be women in the pipeline,” she said.

How did she women end up in their firm name?

Sherman was the obvious choice for her firm because she had been practicing law the longest of all the people she started it with, she said. Sherman Wells was born out of a 16-person departure from Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland & Perretti LLP in 2014, and at that point, she’d been practicing for nearly 30 years.

“In terms of putting a woman on the masthead, that situation was one of the few that could happen because with an existing firm it would be a much bigger deal. When you look at history, when you look at people named in firms, some go back to the 18th century. There were no women,” Sherman said. “And in situations where people’s names did get added to the masthead, it’s happened toward the end of their careers. You don’t see 35-year-olds get their names [on mastheads].”

Barbarito was named to the masthead in 1989 after making partner four years prior (1985). She joined the firm—the only one she’s ever been a part of—as a summer associate in 1980 and as an associate in 1981.

She's been a part of every name change discussion since, including when Frost and now Botwinick were added, and said that it's "always been our firm's philosophy that we recognize people who distinguish themselves."

"[Naming decisions] depend on your firm's philosophy. Our philosophy is to recognize our history, acknowledge our present and look forward to the future," Barbarito said.

To get her name added to the masthead in 1997, Frost said she just walked into Ted Einhorn's office and asked the firm's leaders to put her there.

"After 10 minutes, they said 'okay, fine.' But it was obvious I was generating a lot of business for the firm, and my ability to bring that work in was certainly appreciated. People can't expect to have their names up there if they're not bringing in business," she said.

In reflecting on becoming name partners, the women each had something similar to say about firm leadership recognizing them as an asset who brought business to the firm, rather than seeing the addition of their names as an either risky or progressive move based on their gender.

To read the entire NJBiz Article, [click here](#).