

# CHICAGO LITIGATION DEPARTMENTS OF THE YEAR

A SPECIAL REPORT

In this issue, The National Law Journal spotlights litigation departments at law firms in Chicago. We asked top litigation practices to tell us about their operations—head counts and revenues, biggest wins and even their losses. The NLJ staff then pored over the information and selected the nine firms you'll read about in these pages. Dentons earned the top spot, but it was a close call, and we selected two finalists: Jenner & Block and Jones Day. We also recognize firms with distinguished practices in intellectual property, insurance, mass torts and class actions, and white-collar defense. We highlighted two firms for their labor and employment work.

## MORGAN, LEWIS & BOCKIUS

### LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT

Come trial or not, the labor and employment lawyers at the Chicago office of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius in 2013 showed they have the muscle to win the fights that businesses face with workers.

The lawyers last year pulled in significant victories on behalf of Hewlett-Packard Co., Public Service Co. of Colorado and Claire's Stores Inc., among other clients. The firm won the HP and Public Service Co. cases without going to trial, and the Claire's win followed a five-day bench trial.

These victories and others earned Morgan Lewis a spot on the 2014 Chicago Litigation Department of

the Year list for its work in labor and employment law.

"We're not just paper lawyers," said Morgan Lewis partner Sari Alamuddin, who leads his firm's 20-lawyer labor and employment practice in Chicago.

For Claire's, Morgan Lewis successfully defended the jewelry and accessories chain in a case former company executive Debbie Kvinlaug brought in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois over her severance.

Kvinlaug alleged that Claire's changed the terms of her employment, denying her benefits. She sought more than \$1 million from the company.

In his opinion, U.S. District Judge Gary Feinerman said that he found Claire's senior vice president of global human resources, Joe DeFalco, who testified during the trial, "to be more credible than" Kvinlaug.

"It shows we're not afraid to take these very high-profile cases to trial," Alamuddin said.

Rebecca Orand, general counsel for Claire's, praised Thomas Hurka, who was the lead Morgan Lewis partner on the case. "The victory in the Kvinlaug case allowed us to set a [precedent] that Claire's will challenge claims when we believe we have the facts and the law on our side," Orand said.

She added that Hurka proved to

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**SARI ALAMUDDIN:** The litigator heads Morgan, Lewis & Bockius' 20-lawyer labor and employment practice in Chicago.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ "Understand the client's business. A deep knowledge of the client's industry, business priorities, competitors and workforce better equips counsel to manage legal challenges and opportunities."
- ▶ "Be a business partner. Understand what is important to the client in each matter, and decide together the strategy that will enable the client to achieve its goal."
- ▶ Contribute perspectives from other companies that have been there. Look for opportunities to connect clients with one another to share benchmarking and best practices."
- ▶ "Teamwork. Make every person on the team, from partner down to paralegal, invested in the case and getting a good result for your client."

—SARI ALAMUDDIN

be an "experienced and polished trial lawyer" in handling the case.

For Hewlett-Packard, the firm defeated an age-discrimination lawsuit brought by former company employees Gary Van Poperin and Eugene Hargrave in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. The plaintiffs alleged that their age of more than 50 years old led HP to terminate them, not a workforce reduction as

part of the company's acquisition of Electronic Data Systems Corp., as HP claimed.

Hurka and Nina Stillman were the lead Morgan Lewis partners handling the case. "We strategically outmaneuvered the plaintiffs," Alamuddin said.

As for Public Service Co., which is owned by Xcel Energy Inc., the firm quashed a motion by the International Brotherhood of

Electrical Workers to compel arbitration in a health care benefits dispute against the utility in the U.S. District Court for Colorado. The union is contesting the company's change to retiree prescription-drug benefits.

The union has appealed the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit. Charles Jackson was the Chicago-based Morgan Lewis partner in the litigation.

—ANDREW RAMONAS