

## RISE TO THE TOP



**Though women continue to make inroads in law, the upper ranks of firms are still male-dominated**

But for all the progress female lawyers have made in terms of numbers — in Atlanta, approximately 45 percent of all associates at law firms are female — they're not making as much progress at the partnership level.

According to "It's About Time," a joint study by the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers, the Atlanta Bar Association, the Women in the Profession Committee and the Georgia Commission on Women, the percentage of female attorneys at the partner level at Atlanta law firms is about 17 percent.

A similar study conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based National Association of Law Placement showed that of the 44 cities surveyed, 18 cities/areas had a lower percentage of female partners than Atlanta.

Those cities with fewer female partners included New York City; Nashville, Tenn.; Charlotte, N.C.; and the Ohio cities of Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati.

The city in the survey with the high-Miami, where 23.7 percent of its 515 partners were female.

This disparity, some believe, stems from the fact that women often need to take time out from their careers for their families.

"Only women can have children. That's just got to be taken into account," Price said. "At Alston & Bird, up with alternative career paths and solutions that allow balance."

Women make up roughly 50 percent of law school graduates, and many of these women are looking for law firms with a culture that accommodates those possibilities while allowing for a successful career as an attorney.

It's becoming increasingly clear that top talent, must make adjustments. Several firms, such as Alston & Bird, have added flextime and day care.

In addition, attorneys at King & Spalding will have access to a nearby day-care facility when the firm moves into its new Midtown office in September.

Recently, Kilpatrick Stockton LLP and Smith, Gambrell & Russell LLP teamed up to open a day-care facility.

The "It's About Time" study also addressed part-time policies and when it was released in November 2004, area firms took notice.

Most, if not all, Atlanta Law firms have instituted part-time options for both male and female attorneys under certain circumstances.

"We found that part-time arrangements can work if both parties are respectful and flexible," said Annette Idalski, an associate at Hunton & Williams LLP.

Idalski serves as president-elect of the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers (GAWL) and any will assume leadership of the organization May 11, replacing current GAWL President Stephanie

**By Allison Shirreffs**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Then Chilton Varner joined the law firm of King & Spalding LLP in 1976, only a handful of the attorneys were female and Liz Price, of Alston & Bird LLP, said when she first started in law 20 years ago, she'd show up for a deposition and be mistaken for the transcriptionist.

Today, more than 40 percent of the attorneys at King & Spalding, Atlanta's largest law firm according to the most recent Book of Lists, are women and this past fall, the law firm welcomed a class of attorneys that was more than 50 percent female, the highest percentage of women in an incoming class in the firm's history.

And Price, now a partner at Alston & Bird and the fourth female president of the Atlanta Bar Association, said the female members comprise 30 percent of the ABA's total membership and of new lawyers that join, half are female.

# Women rise to the top in law

Friese, managing partner of Friese & Price Law Firm LLC.

Firms where part-time programs were documented, communicated and monitored — and where part-time attorneys were accepted and not stigmatized — had higher retention, increased profitability and improved morale.

“Firms are seeing that if they don’t [make adjustments], they’ll lose talent. At the end of the day, it’s a value proposition,” said Idalski, who notes that replacing a midlevel attorney can cost a firm more than \$200,000.

However, Robert Hays, chairman of King & Spalding, said more can be done. “We want to put women in a position to build a strong career, and they need to be able to look around and see other women who are successful at work here, which is demanding, and in the home environment,” Hays said. “Having those type of role models — which we do have — is helpful to us.”

In fact, 30 percent of those elected to partnership at King & Spalding this year were women, a benchmark figure for the firm.



**Price**

Alston & Bird LLP



**Varner**

King & Spalding LLP



BYRON E. SMALL

**“It’s About Time”:** Annette Idalski and Stephanie Friese of the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers, which co-led the study that showed the percentage of female attorneys at the partner level at Atlanta law firms is about 17 percent.

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Hunton & Williams LLP

But as for the question of whether an attorney can make it to partner while

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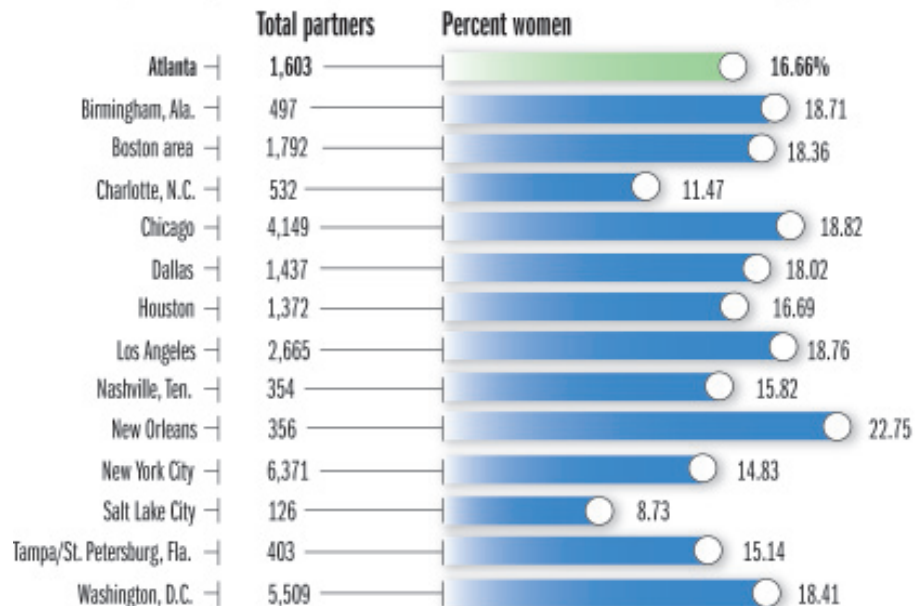
Annette Idalski Hunton & Williams LLP working part time, it is true it can’t happen everywhere. But that is changing. Two women who work in Varner’s practice area at King & Spalding worked part time while raising their children and now are partners in the firm.

“It took longer, but they saw that as a trade-off, and the firm is delighted to have them,” Varner said.

At Alston & Bird, the firm implemented an “Alternative Career Path” policy in 2004, a modernization of a reduced-hour policy the firm has had for 15 years.

## Women at work

The 2005 percentage of women partners at law firms in several cities, including Atlanta.



Source: The 2005-2006 National Association for Law Placement Directory of Legal Employers

“One of the things that is attractive to young women is to see that other women have substantive positions of leadership, even those pursuing an alternative career path,” said John Latham, Alston & Bird’s diversity partner.

“There’s still a lot of work to do to complete the journey, but we’ve seen significant changes,” said Mary Gill, a partner with Alston & Bird and the adviser for the Alternative Career Path program.

In the past 10 years, Alston & Bird’s total number of attorneys has increased 108 percent and

the total number of female attorneys increased 166 percent.

The number of women partners increased by 114 percent, compared with the total increase in partners of 71 percent.

At King & Spalding, Varner, who has become the role model she never had, notes today’s female law school graduates want an opportunity to be successful attorneys and have a work-life balance.

“What they’re looking for today is what I was looking for all those years ago,” Varner said.