

## **Elizabeth P. Hardy: Women in the Law 2010**

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### **Elizabeth P. Hardy**

**Firm:** Kienbaum Opperwall Hardy & Pelton P.L.C., Birmingham

**Education:** Wayne State University Law School (1984)

**Specialties:** Employment litigation, preventive counseling, appeals

When Elizabeth P. Hardy hears that she's considered an influential figure in the labor and employment law sector, she responds that all it takes is hard work.

Or, as her personal philosophy states: "You make out of life what you put into it"

"It's always a challenge," she explained. "You invest yourself so intensely in what you're doing but it takes finding that balance, so you have the energy and wherewithal to do it year after year. I work very hard at it. It's not something I take for granted. It's something you earn, the right to be considered a leader in your field."

As one of the partners at the boutique firm of Kienbaum Opperwall Hardy & Pelton P.L.C., Hardy has been responsible for helming the defense on several monumental Michigan Supreme Court cases.

Among them, *Maldonado v. Ford Motor Co.*, a \$50 million harassment-discrimination case that was dismissed because of plaintiff's efforts to taint a jury pool; *Elezovic v. Ford Motor Co.*, which set precedent regarding what type of notice employers must be given in order to investigate and remedy alleged harassment; and *Gilbert v. DaimlerChrysler Corp.*, where a \$21 million verdict was set aside because of lawyer misconduct.

But Hardy noted that making an impact outside of her practice can be just as rewarding.

Case in point was the 16 years she spent on the Wayne State University board of governors, an elected position.

"It doesn't have any direct correlation to the law," she said, "but it certainly introduced me to a whole range of issues that occur in the community, the education process. I met leaders in the community, from all walks - the medical field, city workers, corporations in collaborative efforts with the university."

During her term, Hardy chaired the 1996-97 presidential search committee, which ended up selecting Irvin D. Reid as the school's leader.

"That was an opportunity to bring together all my lawyering skills and ability to function as a leader, and lead and guide a group to put together a process to launch a nationwide search for the next leader of the institution," she recalled.

"That's the culmination of the credibility you earn when you've been on the board for a number of years and you know the issues, then use the skills I've learned as a lawyer to lead and bring the group together in the process."

On advancements and opportunities for women in law over the years, "We've turned the corner because now we have women who are leaders who are recognized irrespective of gender in the field," she said. "I truly don't feel I get hired because I'm female, and I'm not going to win front of a judge because of it, either.

"I've established my niche, specialty and reputation, and a lot of other women have done it, too. And there are women role models who are senior lawyers, who will make it that much easier for women who are coming along in the system and establishing their practice."