

Exclusive: Here are Portland's most diverse law firms

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The technology sector has lately become a driver in promoting the importance of gender and racial diversity.

Such influencers as Intel Corp., which employs around 20,000 workers in Hillsboro, have signed on to national and local proclamations calling for equality in all aspects of the production and supply chains.

It makes sense that tech would lead such a charge, as its engineers, coders and executives connect through myriad social and workplace networks that magnify workforce makeup in transparent and illustrative ways.

In contrast, the law sector has historically struggled to keep up with technological advances – paper transactions remain a big part of the sector's communications norms – which can make it difficult to, among other functions, track industry demographics.

Our methodology

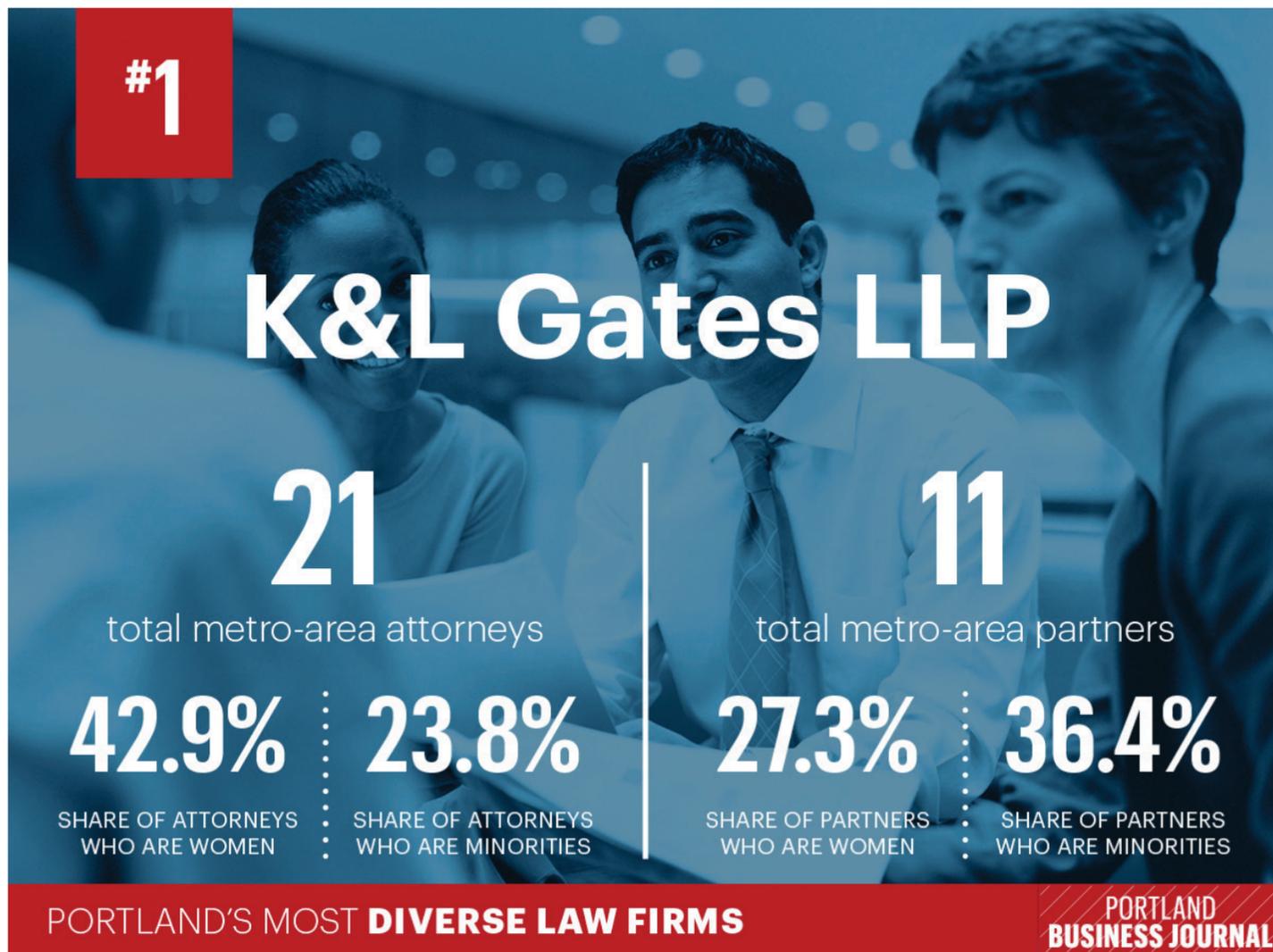
Firms with more than 20 local attorneys were ranked based on the share of women and minority attorneys in their metro area workforces. The percent share for total attorneys and for partners were added together to determine each firm's Diversity Ranking.

We took this into consideration in delving into a study, spearheaded for the PBJ's print edition by research director Brandon Sawyer and managing editor Erik Siemers, into diversity levels among Portland's law firms. Based on Sawyer's numbers (assembled in slideshow form by designer Briana Brujin; you can get there by clicking on the picture above), Portland's firms are less diverse in terms of gender and race than their national counterparts.

Less than one-third, or 32.6 percent, of attorneys at the 69 Portland-area firms that responded to a survey for the Business Journal's Law Firms List are women, compared to 35 percent nationally. In terms of minorities, just 6.7 percent of the Portland-area attorneys are racial minorities, compared to 12 percent among national firms, as reported by the American Bar Association.

It's an issue that's increasingly being addressed by such firms as Stoel Rives, the city's largest law firm.

"To serve our clients, we need



to recruit and retain the best talent available," said Penny Serrurier, the firm's co-managing partner. "If we aren't attracting diverse talent, we're not getting the best people. And if our workplace isn't welcoming to everyone, we're not going to be able to keep them."

To help local firms broaden their base, the Oregon State Bar Association launched a 2014 initiative to make "diversity and inclusion" a part of every program the group offers. Doing so helps firms "effectively serve diverse clients with diverse needs; understand and adapt to increasingly diverse local and global markets; devise creative solutions to complex problems; and improve access to justice, respect for the rule of law, and credibility of the legal profession," the group wrote when the initiative launched.

At Stoel Rives, the city's largest law firm, the figure of women partners has risen from 17 percent in 2006 to 28 percent in 2016.

The firm has boosted those numbers through diversity-aimed fellowships, including a "returnship" program for experienced women lawyers who want to return to the profession after time away, said Serrurier, the firm's co-managing partner. "We also

have attempted to educate our employees about hidden bias and how to create an inclusive work environment."

Brendan Gutierrez McDonnell, administrative partner for K&L Gates, which ranked first on the PBJ's Diversity Ranking list, said that while the climate's getting more diversified, there's still a ways to go. More firms need more diverse partners, he said, as well as other positions commensurate with their numeric representation in the profession.

But programs such as the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity have helped. Starbucks' corporate counsel Sung Yang and Portland-based K&L Gates partner Shiao Yen Chin-Dennis are 2014 LCLD Fellows.

"This created a partnership opportunity for our office to work with Starbucks and to advance our mutual mission of fostering a diverse and inclusive culture in the legal profession," said McDonnell. "Starbucks and Sung are having a positive impact as they create opportunities for diverse lawyers to do interesting and challenging legal work."

Serrurier said such programs can pay off down the road.

"We were one of the first firms in Portland with a significant number of

women partners, and as a young lawyer, I benefitted from working with a large number of successful female partners," she said. "At the same time, we know we need to do better, and there may be more of a recognition today that we need to continually improve if we want to achieve our goal of becoming a more diverse and inclusive law firm."

Andy is the Portland Business Journal's digital managing editor, overseeing the daily digital news operation. Sign up here to receive the free news-packed emails he curates every day.