

Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly recognizes exceptional women attorneys who have made tremendous professional strides and demonstrated great accomplishments in the legal field. Smith Duggan Buell & Rufo partner Barbara Hayes Buell was one of those attorneys who received Top Women of Law honors in recognition of her many outstanding achievements.



Barbara H. Buell



Partner

Smith Duggan Buell & Rufo LLP

LINCOLN, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

Early in her career, Barbara H. Buell realized that the laws for men and women were vastly different, especially in the areas of property, marriage, child custody and compensation.

“When I did internships in legal services, one of my first clients said he couldn’t take advice from a woman,” Buell says.

Rather than get discouraged, Buell started her own law firm after law school and began defending clients who were underrepresented and rejected in their quest for a voice.

Buell served as managing partner at Smith Duggan Buell & Rufo in Lincoln until 2021. Nurturing a long-held passion for health care, Buell earned a master’s degree in public health from Boston University and has tried hundreds of cases, mostly in the medical malpractice arena.

When Buell started her law practice, she represented any client who called on her and built a foundation on family law matters, real estate law, and products liability lawsuits.

She represented gay clients and mixed-race couples who faced prejudice, and fathers seeking child custody in an age when courts favored mothers.

“I had great success with taking the underdog’s point of view,” she says, adding that her legal skills were honed as a clinical fieldwork instructor for the Harvard Law School Clinical Program.

Buell also took a job as a Boston taxi cab driver to help support herself when she was starting out.

“You do what you need to do to pay your rent but this was an opportunity to see another side of life,” she says. “Every person walking the face of the earth has their own story.”

Her perch became a master class in human nature, which she draws on today.

“I found that having climbed the ladder the hard way gave me more empathy toward those who were doing something that challenged society’s expectations and the norms of the last century,” she says.

— TERI SAYLOR