



Heather Wilson (center) shares a comment that generates smiles from colleagues. Her wisdom and wit resonate with clients and peers alike.

# HEATHER L. WILSON

## Volunteer of the Year

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

At a speaking engagement in downtown Indianapolis not far from her office at Frost Brown Todd (FBT), labor and employment attorney Heather Wilson had just wrapped up a presentation when a stranger approached her.

“A gentleman walked up to me and said, ‘I enjoyed your talk. I never would have known you were a lawyer if I didn’t read the (biographical) materials. You don’t act like a lawyer.’ ”



A passion for serving employers drives Wilson’s efforts as chair of the Indiana Chamber’s Civil Justice Committee.

“To me, he was saying, ‘I can relate to you.’ With most lawyers, there’s this perception that (people) can’t really relate to them. I’ll never forget that. I thought, ‘I’m going to take this as a compliment,’ ” Wilson beams.

It’s easy to see why she connects with people. Take the special bond she develops with clients.

“Sometimes they’re calling with some really difficult issues that are easy maybe to analyze on a piece of paper. But when you have to act on those, it’s a lot more difficult,” she shares. “Firing someone, for example, is a very difficult thing to do for many, many people. I’m very sensitive to that.

“One of the main reasons I love this area (of law) is because you have the ability to make a difference and be considered part of your client’s team. That’s the goal for me: I want my clients to know that I can go in and litigate a case and that I’ll be there if they need me. For them to bring me into the circle to discuss things proactively, that’s such an honor for lawyers.”

Her employment law background and enthusiasm in sharing knowledge to assist businesses has contributed to the growth of the Indiana Chamber’s annual Human Resources Conference & Expo.

Since 2006, FBT has served as presenting sponsor and Wilson has partnered on designing content and making presentations.

“Heather is extraordinarily enthusiastic not only about FBT’s participation in the HR conference, but also her profession,” emphasizes Chamber Director of Conferences Jennifer George. “She recognizes the importance of incorporating fun into learning and is committed to ensuring that attendees have the most up-to-date information about employment law.”

### Laying down the law

Wilson’s great-grandfather spent 18 years in Congress representing the state of Virginia. She grew up under the tutelage of another attorney she greatly admired: her grandfather.

“My grandfather was a trial lawyer and practiced in Virginia. I grew up going to his office and attended several arbitrations,” she recalls.

“I remember traveling with him and listening to both sides. On the way back (home), he would ask me, ‘Who should I find for?’ and we would talk about that. He was such a wonderful mentor. He looked at being a lawyer as a profession, a calling.”

Wilson knew from a young age that she wanted to be an attorney, too, and pictured herself working in a small town for a small firm (her grandfather’s office was comprised of about a dozen attorneys).

So, how did she end up in Indianapolis at FBT? The general service firm employs approximately 475 lawyers across five states.

It all started in Bloomington, where Wilson earned her undergraduate and law degrees at Indiana University.

“I graduated from college in three years and took three years off before I went to law school,” she comments. “I worked for various attorneys, which

was a wonderful experience. One of those attorneys was Ted Najam (currently a judge with the Indiana Court of Appeals), who I still remain close to. I had the benefit very early on of being around very positive role models that were lawyers.”

She gained additional experience during law school working at a full-service firm.

“I thought I would stay and practice in Bloomington, because, ‘How much fun would that be!’ ” Wilson declares.

But an interview for a summer position with the Indianapolis office of Locke Reynolds (which became part of FBT in 2009 as the result of a merger) set her career in a different direction.

“When you start your second year of law school, you do on-campus interviews,” she explains. “If (a law firm) makes you an offer, you work for that firm between your second and third year of law school, with hopefully the idea they would offer you a job (that you would) start after you graduate.”

Immediately, she developed a rapport with the people she met from Locke Reynolds.

“I remember walking out of the interview thinking, ‘That wasn’t really an interview. That was kind of like a conversation. I really

like those guys,’ ” she says.

The feeling was mutual – she got the job.

Fast forward nearly two decades. Today, Wilson is a key member of FBT’s leadership team, serving on its executive, advancement and automotive steering committees, to name a few. In addition, she helped guide the firm’s merger as a member of the management committee.

“That was an incredible honor and experience,” she reflects. “The merger has been a wonderful thing for my practice personally, but more importantly for the (approximately 65) lawyers in this office. It’s given us opportunities that I don’t think we would have if we had stayed primarily an Indianapolis firm.”

Continued on page 53



Wilson works closely with the Chamber each year to develop content – and deliver presentations – for the Human Resources Conference & Expo. Incorporating fun is a must, she says, because it makes a significant impact.



## Frost Brown Todd Proudly Honors One of Our Own

# Heather L. Wilson

*Recipient of the Chamber of Commerce  
Volunteer of the Year Award*

As a labor and employment attorney, Heather has a long history of outstanding service to her community, to her profession, and to her clients and she is honored to work with the Indiana Chamber in the coming year to help fulfill their mission. Frost Brown Todd is proud of Heather’s contributions and commitment to the legal industry. **Congratulations Heather!**

[frostbrowntodd.com](http://frostbrowntodd.com)

201 North Illinois Street | Suite 1900 | **Indianapolis** | 317.237.3800

Indiana | Kentucky | Ohio | Tennessee | Virginia | West Virginia

THIS IS AN ADVERTISEMENT. ©2014 Frost Brown Todd LLC. All rights reserved.

Legal services may be performed by other attorneys in the firm.

**Frost  
Brown Todd** LLC  
ATTORNEYS

## Heather Wilson

Continued from page 49

Wilson recently led another transition, this time involving the Chamber's Civil Justice Committee, which she's chaired since 2009. Mike Ripley, then vice president of health care policy, added employment law and civil justice duties to his portfolio.

"I've appreciated Heather's leadership," Ripley asserts. "She's a thoughtful leader and it's clear that she knows her stuff. She's been instrumental in increasing committee membership, which was one of the goals that had been established."

Wilson describes what motivates her volunteer efforts with the Chamber.

"I have a passion for helping employers and businesses – that's what I love to do. I want businesses to understand what their obligations are from a legal standpoint. And then, if there's something in statute for example that is not fair or is being interpreted in kind of an unfair way toward employers and business, then having the opportunity to make a change (is critical).

"My passion is to be an advocate in a variety of ways for my clients, and I think the Chamber plays a very important role for businesses. It's another advocate for businesses."

### All in good fun

Wilson brings wit to her job.

"As a labor and employment lawyer, you don't have to practice in this area for a long period of time to kind of see the humor in some of the things that happen in the workplace," she remarks. "I can't tell you

how many times I get a call from a client, saying, 'You're never going to believe this!'

"Yes, I probably will," Wilson responds with a smile.

FBT kicked off the Chamber's 50th annual HR conference in April with an engaging session about the evolution of HR, featuring skits covering topics such as civil rights, the Family and Medical Leave Act, sexual harassment and more.

"It's just amazing to see how far we've come," Wilson contends. "We probably have a ways to go, but the workplace has changed so much."

### In closing ...

When asked to describe a defining moment in her life, Wilson lights up. There are several, she reveals.

"Early on in my career, I tried a case with Mr. Reynolds (of Locke Reynolds). That was kind of a defining moment that, 'Wow, I really want to be a litigator. I really want to be in court.' I was probably in the last generation of lawyers that had the opportunity to try a case with him.

"I'll never forget (the experience). I did my direct examination of my witness, and when I sat down, Mr. Reynolds leaned over to me and goes, 'Great job.' He was in his mid-70s probably when we tried that case. He's still quite an icon to many of us here."

For Wilson, connecting with people in the courtroom and beyond is what it's all about.



Didn't get the loan?

Turn to the bank that's 100% invested in your business.

With flexible loans, credit terms, online banking and more, Lake City Bank gives your business the resources it needs to grow. After all, we're the largest bank solely dedicated to Indiana. [lakecitybank.com](http://lakecitybank.com)

Drop in.

**Lake City Bank**

Member FDIC