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## Lawyers Weekly Diversity Heroes

# Maria E. Recalde

**With a doing-it-her-way determination, this Boston lawyer is making a difference in the system by 'changing things from within'**



Diverse in race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, heroic in their efforts to overcome discrimination, the five lawyers profiled in this first-ever special section are, fittingly, Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly's Diversity Heroes.

Given the demographics of the bar at this time in history, as young lawyers of different races, cultures, countries and sexual preferences continue to join the ranks of licensed practitioners in Massachusetts, you can expect to see more Diversity Heroes honored on these pages in years to come.

This year's honorees — four attorneys and one judge — have demonstrated by their achievements that they have been able to move beyond the slights and slurs, or whatever barriers may have been placed in their way as members of minorities, as they sought to advance in their profession. They seem to have emerged from those often-searing experiences not with bitterness but with an eagerness to share those experiences and tell their life stories.

Future Diversity Heroes may well draw inspiration from the example set by these first five.

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### **MARIA E. RECALDE**

**Birth:** Oct. 28, 1963; Managua, Nicaragua

**Education:** Boston College Law School (1988); Wellesley College (1985)

**Bar admission:** 1988

**Professional experience:** Founding partner, Sheehan, Phinney, Bass & Green, Boston (2002-present); partner, Burns & Levinson, Boston (1996-2002); associate, Burns & Levinson (1988-1996)

**Honors/achievements:** Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys Las Primeras Award (2003); Boston Lawyers Group Award for being first Latina to become partner in member firm (Burns & Levinson) (1996)

**Role models:** Maternal grandfather — "Excellence and determination, I learned that from him. He wasn't much talk, just a lot of doing." Lawrence M. Levinson, founding partner of Burns & Levinson — "He had me working with his clients from Day 1. I learned a great deal from him about integrity in the profession."

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Crisp and direct with her comments, sure of herself and her career choice, Managua-born Maria E. Recalde seems anything but ambiguous to someone meeting her for the first time.

And so it may come as a surprise that a profession known as much for nuance as for certitude would appeal to this 43-year-old practitioner, a founding partner at the downtown Boston office of New Hampshire-based Sheehan, Phinney, Bass & Green.

"I love the law," Recalde says definitively, "because I love the ambiguity of the law."

As revolution and economic upheaval ravaged her home country of Nicaragua in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Recalde, then an undergraduate at Wellesley College, was wondering whether her future would be here or in her homeland. That streak of determination that so characterizes her personality explains her choice to remain in this country.

"When I decided to go to law school, it was because I'd made a decision to stay in the United States and make it on my own," Recalde says. She settled on a career as a lawyer, she adds, "because I believed that, in practicing law, I could make a difference."

Not that her advancement as a lawyer, from associate at Boston's Burns & Levinson to expert at Sheehan in Internet and electronic-commerce law, intellectual property and other business litigation issues, was easily achieved. To the contrary, the barriers were thrown in her way early.

"When I was still at law school, we were having a meeting of minority students with a career counselor, who told us: 'Look outside Boston [for jobs] because it's inhospitable to minorities.' I literally got up and said, 'Just watch me,'" Recalde recalls of that meeting. "I was furious that someone would want to deny me something without my even trying.

She ended up at Boston's Burns & Levinson — "a firm that could say, 'With all the lawyers in the country, we want you to work here.' Then I set a goal — I wanted to become a partner at Burns & Levinson. I took on every opportunity I could to excel, and I became the first Hispanic partner at that firm."

Recalde's achievements as an attorney in a plum practice area are considerable. A major portion of her work at Sheehan, in addition to her focus on Internet and e-commerce law, involves counseling clients in domain names, consumer privacy, website audits and other issues that only a technologically savvy practitioner can tackle.

Beyond her law practice, Recalde's Latina roots run deep in her professional activities. She maintains active memberships in the Hispanic National Bar Association, where she has chaired its Internet/E-Commerce Committee, and in the Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys.

MAHA has recognized Recalde for her accomplishments, endowing her with its Las Primeras ("The First Ones") Award in 2003 for "her unique contributions, vision and leadership within the Latino community in Massachusetts."

That commitment to community continues. In September, Recalde was appointed to the Wellesley College Development and Outreach Council, an advisory panel to her alma mater's board of trustees. She volunteers as a tutor in the education/training program of the YMCA of Greater Boston and as a mentor for Hispanic professionals in financial services and accounting.

Recalde's guiding philosophy in these outreach activities is based in a belief in the importance of providing minorities with opportunities *and* sustained support.

"I believe that giving people opportunities because they're [members of] a minority — without the required support — may be detrimental," she says, "because you may set them up for failure." Instead, she advises, "Pay attention to what you need to do to take them along."

In 1999, Recalde threw her hat in the ring as a candidate for election to the council of the Boston Bar Association. Others wanted her to give of her time and energy to an organization more sharply focused on minority-bar-related issues, but she persevered and won the BBA seat.

Once again, that doing-it-her-way determination had prevailed. "People look at what I've done in a minority context," says Recalde, who clearly prefers a mainstream approach. "I believe I can make a difference in the system because you can change things from within."