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**Elaine Charlson Bredehoff**

Leading Lawyers 2004: Labor & Employment Law

By Marie Beaudette  
 Legal Times  
**April 19, 2004**



Charlson Bredehoff's  
 Elaine Charlson  
 Bredehoff

Elaine Charlson Bredehoff has a photo of a lion hanging above the desk in her Reston, Va., office. "That inspires me," she says.

Indeed, the 45-year-old Bredehoff is an aggressive plaintiffs-side employment litigator who isn't afraid to try cases. And she's had her fair share of wins in Virginia and D.C. courts on behalf of clients suing their employers.

Yet Bredehoff more or less fell into employment law when she hung out her shingle in the early 1990s. In fact, the one labor law class that she took at Catholic University's Columbus School of Law was "so boring I thought I was going to die."

Bredehoff started as a general litigator in 1984 at the small McLean, Va., firm Walton & Adams. In her first year, she was trying cases.

And she was winning. Most of the cases she brought went to trial because "it was the concept of a young, dumb female," she says. "No one would settle with me."

But juries seem to love Bredehoff. In just her third jury trial, the judge had to set aside the award in the case as excessive.

After just three years at the firm, 30-year-old Bredehoff made partner. Three years after that, she started her own firm, now known as Charlson Bredehoff.

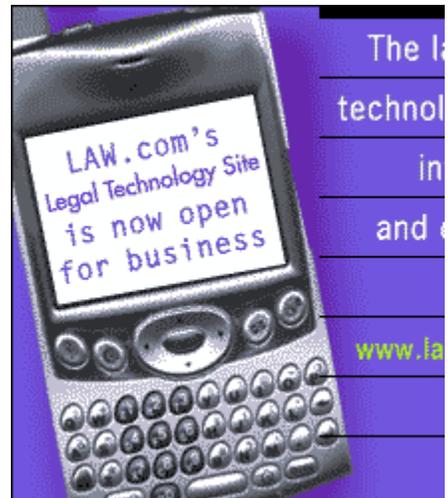
On April 15, 1991, the day she moved in, her new office was a mess. When her phone rang, she had to dig around to find it.

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The call was from a Loudoun County housing official claiming her supervisor verbally abused her because of her gender. Bredehoft took the case, referred from her old firm, and the following year a jury awarded the woman more than \$70 damages and attorney fees, a large amount at the time.

A story about the verdict ran on the front page of *The Washington Post*, and "all hell broke lo Bredehoft recalls. "I became an employment lawyer unwittingly."

By now, Bredehoft has tried more than 100 cases. She says she gets between 50 and 100 ca for her services and had to set up a screening system, which includes an oral interview and a questionnaire, to help her choose cases.

Bredehoft's recent victories include a \$415,000 award in a 2001 case in which she represent suing the Titan Corp. for race, age, and gender discrimination. The man was fired during a re force because he was a white man and the company had already fired too many women and says Bredehoft.

In 2000, she also won a \$3.1 million verdict in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District the former Leesburg police chief, Keith Stiles, who was fired after he reported misuse of tow by the town manager and a town council member. The town settled with Stiles for more than while an appeal was pending.

"She was willing to explore every possible aspect of the case," says Stiles. "She made absolu that she understood the entire scope, all the nuances, the subtleties."

In fact, Bredehoft produced 358 exhibits and convinced the judge to let her put 28 exhibits in notebooks. The jurors asked, Bredehoft says, if they could take the notebooks home with the trial.

"She was worth every penny," declares Stiles, who was awarded more than \$200,000 in attc

One Northern Virginia defense lawyer says Bredehoft is aggressive, persistent, and can be "a opposing counsel, but she's effective.

In fact, he says, if he needed an employment lawyer, he would "have to put her on the short I would consider."