

MVP: Jenner & Block's Amanda Amert

Law360 (November 30, 2018, 4:49 PM EST) -- Jenner & Block LLP partner Amanda Amert's banner year saw her amassing victories on behalf of Northwestern University, The Northern Trust Co., Aon Hewitt Financial Advisors LLC and Morningstar Inc. in Employee Retirement Income Security Act class action suits, making her one of Law360's 2018 Benefits MVPs.

HER BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS YEAR:

Amert, who chairs Jenner & Block's ERISA litigation practice, led clients to victory in a number of notable suits this year. She highlighted wins on behalf of Northwestern University and Northern Trust as particularly sweet accomplishments.

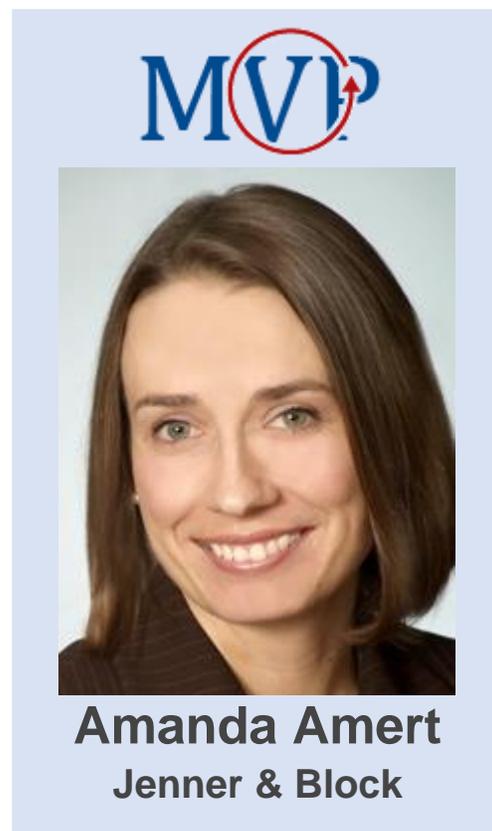
Northwestern was among about 20 universities facing allegations of mismanaging workers' retirement investments. In May, the university joined a more exclusive crew, becoming one of just three schools to beat those allegations in district court.

"We were successful in getting that case dismissed for Northwestern. We were one of only a couple of universities that managed to do that," Amert said. "That was really exciting and terrific, and the client was very happy."

The case now continues in the Seventh Circuit, where Amert scored another significant victory in April on behalf of Northern Trust. Northern Trust was accused of breaching its fiduciary duties by enacting a 2012 pension plan amendment that workers said violated ERISA's anti-cutback provision.

An Illinois federal judge granted Northern Trust's motion to dismiss in March 2017, and the Seventh Circuit affirmed the lower court's decision in April.

"The issues in this case were very important for our client: They went to the issue of how Northern Trust operates its pension plan, which very much affects the bottom line," Amert said. "If you have to pay out



more than you intended to, then the plaintiff has to put more money into compensating retired employees than it had thought it would, and that's a very big deal financially for the company."

HER WORK ON WOMEN'S INITIATIVES:

As a co-chair of Jenner & Block's Women's Forum, Amert was closely involved in a strategic planning initiative that intends to stock 2019 with events and opportunities to help the firm's female attorneys grow.

"Our long-term goal is making sure all our women attorneys are positioned to be as successful as possible in their careers," Amert said. "We expect our initiative to start to be live in January of 2019. [Planning] that has been a tremendously personally rewarding process."

The initiative involves professional development training and the leveraging of client and alumni relationships to help women in their careers, Amert said.

She said she's excited to be part of the Women's Forum at this period in history.

"I've been here for 17 years, and the Women's Forum has probably been there for 40. But we all feel it's a unique time for women professionals," Amert said.

Amert is also involved in an outside initiative to improve women's professional lives: She does pro bono work for Time's Up, an organization born of the #MeToo movement that fights sexual harassment in the workplace.

Amert has helped the organization assess its exposure for liability as it got set up, and she has taken referrals from the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund, representing clients who have been targeted with lawsuits after speaking out about sexual harassment.

PROUDEST MOMENT OF THE YEAR:

Amert saw her relationship with one of the firm's younger female attorneys flourish this year as the two worked together on a pro bono appeal to the Seventh Circuit. Amert was supervising the associate, Leah Casto, in a case called *Daher v. Sevier*, where Casto was representing a client who was incarcerated in Indiana and suing prison officials.

"She was terrific — really smart, really focused," Amert said. "She worked really hard on the case, and I got to sit next to her at counsel table while she argued it."

Amert described the instant she found out Casto won the case as her proudest moment of the year. She said she always gains a lot from working with Jenner & Block's young attorneys.

"One of the most fun things I get to do here is collaborate with younger attorneys. I like to think I have valuable insights for them," Amert said. "And explaining to someone how you do what you do always improves the way you do it. It was a lot of fun, and it's very rewarding, but I'm mindful that I get a lot

out of those interactions, too."

BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF THE YEAR:

This year, Amert juggled representing clients in court, supervising Casto on her appeal and working on the Women's Forum strategic planning initiative, along with staying on top of the daily tasks associated with chairing a prominent law firm's growing ERISA litigation practice. Her packed schedule necessitated handing tasks off to others, she said.

"You have to be able to make the shift from doing everything you used to do on every case to handing it off," Amert said. "You have to develop a good sense of when you should let go of the handlebars, which is hard when it's an area in which you've been working very carefully and hard for a long time."

ADVICE TO HER YOUNGER SELF:

Amert said she would tell her younger self to focus on the big picture of her career, not just the day-to-day, month-to-month goals.

"It's very easy to stay focused on the thing you have to have done five minutes from now and two days from now and not spend a lot of time thinking about your long-term plan and how you want the arc of your career to unfold," Amert said. "I encourage the younger attorneys I work with to make time to think about the long-term — where their careers are going and where they want them to go."

It's important to keep all of that in mind, Amert said, because "the only person who can set out those goals and make sure you're moving toward them for you is you."

— *As told to Emily Brill*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2018 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 1,000 submissions.

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