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Holland & Hart's ideas were new when firm began in Denver, now they are critical

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As the story goes, attorney Stephen Hart had been working in a downtown Denver law firm for 13 years when he inquired about becoming a partner.

His request was dismissed and he walked out of the building and across the street to another downtown firm where he met his friend Joe Holland.

They hatched a plan to open their own law firm. That was 70 years ago.

Holland & Hart today has 140 attorneys in Denver, and 16 offices in eight states.

"They believed in total client services even before it was a buzz word," said Liz Sharrer, chair of Holland & Hart.

In fact, she said, Hart's walk out of the downtown firm touched off Holland & Hart's entire identity – one that wouldn't be held by old conventions. "Denver was changing so rapidly, he (Hart) felt law firms really were dominated by old firms," Sharrer said.

"The founders really believed in a different kind of law firm – work hard and play hard," Sharrer said. "They were mountain climbers and spending quality time on things that were not the law carried over in how the firm talks to and about people."

Back in the late 1940s the firm was focused on mining and agribusiness. Today the firm still works in the those areas, but also works in intellectual property, with startups and in the state's growing craft beer industry, Sharrer said.

She started her career at the firm 37 years ago and was given the option of flexible hours while her children were young.

"Now flex time at the firm is gender neutral," she said. "But it was a critical piece of retention of women."

At the firm, 27.8 percent of the equity partners are women, compared to the national average of 18 percent, according to the



Stephen Hart thought Denver law firms were old school and with his friend Joe Holland launched Holland & Hart LLP. The partners' mantra was "work hard and play hard."

National Association of Women Lawyers.

The firm was among the first in the 1990s to sign the Colorado Bar Association's "Pledge for Diversity" – making a commitment to racial and ethnic diversity – and it was among the first to launch a foundation in 1998 to raise funds for the community.

"The ideas then were new," she said. "Now they are critical."

Holland & Hart will celebrate its legacy with a 70th anniversary party for all of its alumni and with a series of community service projects.

"It matters to us internally, in terms of reaffirming and honoring the history and the bonds that hold us together and have made us a part of the community," she said.



Holland & Hart chair Liz Sharrer says the firm was ahead of its time in offering flex hours for female associates, pledging to diversity and launching a foundation for charity.