

World IP Day pledges from women across the industry



Peshkova / Shutterstock.com

WIPR hears from influential women in IP, including former US federal judge Kathleen O'Malley, about why this year's World IP Day theme has inspired them to promote women inventors and creatives.

Today marks [World IP Day](#), and the [World Intellectual Property Organization](#) is trumpeting the “can do” attitude of women inventors, creators and entrepreneurs worldwide and their ground-breaking work—with great fanfare.

But why do we need such a theme in 2023? After all, as former US Federal Circuit Judge Kathleen O'Malley tells *WIPR*, “women have pioneered some of the greatest and most influential inventions in history”.

Take [Anna Connelly](#), who back in 1887 patented the first steel exterior fire escape, a device that has undoubtedly saved countless lives.

Fast forward more than 50 years later, and you could find silver screen star [Hedy Lamarr](#) developing frequency hopping technology in between film takes. Her aim? To help Allied forces prevent their radio guidance system from being tracked or jammed by the Nazis.

While her invention was actually never used during the war, the principles of this work were later incorporated into Bluetooth and GPS technology. Yet, Lamarr was only inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame and given the well-deserved sobriquet, ‘the mother of Wi-Fi’ in 2014—more than a decade after her death.

And in 1971, [Evelyn Berezin](#) revolutionised business and technology when she devised the first ever computer based word processor.

In an interview with *WIPR*, Judge O'Malley, who now serves as a board member for the [Council for Innovation Promotion](#), explored the lack of historical attention given to female inventors.

This is a wrong, she adds, that she has been personally affected by.

“My mother was a chemist, and she worked for the government. And she invented a couple of important things during World War II, including coatings for pup tents,” she explains.

“But she wasn't even listed on the patents. And at the time, she didn't think anything of it, after being told: we need to put these men and the government on the patent. But they were her inventions. She later talked about it when she said she didn't even realise at the time how awful it was.”

While O'Malley praises WIPO's focus on promoting greater inclusivity in the global IP system, she also notes that this need—136 years after Connelly's life-saving invention—is “deeply frustrating”.

“I actually gave a speech at my *alma mater* back in 1995. And the reason they picked me to give the commencement address was because it was the ‘year of the woman’, and the aim was to address that women were still lagging behind in many areas,” she reflects.

“Yet, here we are, almost 20 years later, still recognising this gap, so it's frustrating. But, at least, maybe it will get a little more attention this time around.”

And it certainly needs attention. According to the US Patent and Trademark Office, women still account for a mere 13%, or one in eight, of all inventor-patentees in the US— and women are more likely to be listed as inventors on mixed-gender inventor teams.

A 2022 [study](#) released by the European Patent Office (EPO) found the same dismal statistic in Europe. Based on the percentage of women inventors named in all patent applications to the EPO from 1978 until 2019, the study highlights that the women inventor rate in Europe has only limped upwards by 2% since the late 1970s.

As the clamour for progress grows, *WIPR* asked some leading women in IP for their insights and the one thing they will focus on for the next year that fits the theme of ‘Women and IP: Accelerating innovation and creativity’.



'FIGHT EVERY REJECTION AND DON'T JUST ACCEPT NO FOR AN ANSWER.' - JUDGE KATHLEEN O'MALLEY, FORMER FEDERAL JUDGE, AND COUNSEL, IRELL & MANELLA

"I've been shocked by some of the conversations I've had with young women inventors recently. They talk about how frustrating the whole process of getting a patent is, or when someone takes away a patent based on a legal theory that didn't even exist at the time the patent was granted.

"I plan to encourage women to better understand that rejection at the US Patent and Trademark Office should not be viewed as the end of the line. As women, we so often accept a 'no' and assume that that's the right answer from those in positions of authority. But I tell women that every man goes back and says, 'I'm going to fight this rejection'. So, I will say: 'you need to go back and fight as well'."



**'FINDING WAYS TO BRING BALANCE TO FEMALE LEADERS' LIVES' -
ELDORA ELLISON, DIRECTOR, STERNE KESSLER**

“It’s important to take on leadership opportunities that have an impact on accelerating innovation and creativity. But often, when women are in leadership positions, there are constant demands on their time, skills, and talent that are above and beyond what their primary job or role may be. This ranges from heading committees, writing articles, speaking at events, etc. At times, it can be exhausting.

“What is often lacking for women leaders is support for their own growth, development, and wellness. I plan to support my peers by connecting with them on a personal level, having conversations about achieving our goals and objectives, and finding ways to bring balance to our lives.”



'ENSURING THAT WOMEN AREN'T OVERSHADOWED BY 'MAN-INTERRUPTING' AND 'MANSPLAINING' - ISABELLA CARDOZO, PARTNER, DANIEL LAW

“A few years ago I came upon a piece by Indian-Canadian poet and feminist [Rupi Kuar](#) that stated: ‘I stand on the sacrifice of a million women before me thinking what can I do to make this mountain higher so that women after me can see farther’. This statement has become a compass for me and behind every action that I pursue I ask myself if I am ‘making the mountain higher’. This is how I challenge myself, and I believe that it is up to each one of us to find a way to do the same.

“There are actions that we can all take to move this needle: ensuring that every new project is carried out by a diverse pool of professionals, and that women have a voice in their areas of expertise and are not overshadowed by man-interrupting and mansplaining.”



‘SHOWCASING FEMALE INVENTORS AND CREATIVES’ - SUSI FISH, PARTNER, BOULT WADE TENNANT

“In my personal life, I will continue to encourage my daughter, and her peers to view science, technology, engineering and maths subjects as applicable to them. I will do this through visiting relevant museums (the London Science Museum is fabulous), buying books that showcase female inventors and creatives and talking about my experiences.

Through doing this I also hope to normalise gender equality in this area for my son and his peers.

“On LinkedIn, I plan to do a monthly post on a female inventor. I will continue to be involved in Women in IP (IP Inclusive) to support women in the IP profession in the UK, and I will also continue to be involved with the work of the diversity and inclusion committee of the Intellectual Property Owners Association.



'GETTING MORE WOMEN OF COLOUR IN THE IP PIPELINE' - MANITA RAWAT, PARTNER, MORGAN LEWIS

“As one of only a few female patent attorneys in the high-tech space, it is imperative for me to ensure we continue to have women, and especially women of colour, in the pipeline in this profession.

“I'd like to leverage our platform to continue to attract young female talent in the tech space in Silicon Valley, where I'm based. For example, through continuing to host panels with local organisations, such as [APABA Silicon Valley](#), discussing various hot topics related to women in technology and law. Networking is also critical, and groups like ML Women and ML Women in Tech are a great way to invite and engage with female talent in the community.



'HELPING YOUNG WOMEN BECOME ADEPT AT EXPLAINING WHAT IP MEANS, AND HOW PATENTS PROTECT GREAT IDEAS' - ERIKA ARNER, MANAGING PARTNER, FINNEGAN

“When I helped launch the Washington, DC chapter of WIN ([Women in IP Network](#)) in 2020, our mission was to provide a positive, inclusive professional network where women support and cheer each other on for the good of the broader IP community.

“Among the many ways we have collaborated, celebrated, and cultivated success for women in IP, my favourite initiative is our sponsorship of a team of fourth and fifth grade girls competing in the Odyssey of the Mind competition. After winning the 86-team Northern Virginia regional tournament, they recently won the Virginia state championship.

“The WIN-sponsored team stood out among mostly school-sponsored teams and the girls have become adept at explaining what IP means, how patents help protect great ideas, and how WIN supports more women becoming inventors.”



'SUPPORT WOMEN IN GAINING ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS' - CHRISTINA ONDRICK, PRINCIPAL, MCKOOL SMITH

“I plan to accelerate women-led innovation and creativity in conjunction with **ChIPs**’ Innovation Initiative, which aims to help technology companies gain access to resources and strategies for increasing the number of women inventors within their organisations.

“Beyond the inherent value in removing obstacles women face on the road to inventorship, it is good for the economy and businesses. If women were to patent at the same rate as men, commercialised patents could increase by 24% and per capita gross domestic product could increase by 2.7% in the US.”