

INNOVATOR *of the* YEAR AWARDS

Awards Ceremony at Irvine Marriott | September 10, 2025

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OC's Innovators: Year in Review

Last September, the Business Journal honored five local executives and inventors leading the charge in a variety of fields at the tenth annual Innovator of the Year Awards.

From a renowned medtech entrepreneur to a 19-year-old still in college, the winners hail from varying industries, but all have made breakthroughs in their respective spaces over the past year.

The Business Journal recently caught up with the winners to see what's changed since 2024. Their stories are on page 4, this page and page 22. The tenth annual Innovator of the Year Awards is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 10 at the Irvine Marriott.

Bios for the nominees of the upcoming event begin on page 44.

—Peter J. Brennan

Arun Gupta: Increasing Access to Mental Health Care

Gets Medicare Coverage for Digital Therapeutics

■ By YUIKA YOSHIDA

NEWPORT BEACH — **Big Health** is getting more validation for its digital therapeutics.

The company's technology in March was featured in the **Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)**, marking the 100th peer-reviewed paper publication for the mental health-focused company.

It's the latest milestone for Big Health since it received FDA clearance for its self-guided cognitive behavioral therapy apps SleepioRx and Daylight Rx, designed to treat insomnia and generalized anxiety disorders, respectively.

"Many times, when you're building an innovative startup company, you're alone with long nights trying to do something kind of impossible that lots of people have asked if it's going to work or not," former Executive Chairman **Arun Gupta** told the Business Journal last September. "You're short on these sorts of recognition."

Gupta was honored at the Business Journal's **Innovator of the Year Awards** last year



for steering the company—which offers six digital therapeutics in total—achieve clearance so doctors can prescribe them as treatments to patients.

He was also included in the Business Journal's annual OC50 list with this year's theme being rising entrepreneurs.

Big Health scored another large win at the

end of last year when it was announced that prescription digital mental health treatments such as SleepioRx and DaylightRx would be covered by Medicare.

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** finalized three new codes in its 2025 physician fee schedule, which went into effect in January.

Big Health said that it anticipates these codes will be adopted by commercial insurance plans, "paving the way for broader coverage for Americans."

Gupta served as interim chief executive of Big Health until the company recruited a permanent CEO, **Yael Berman**, last April.

This year, he retired as executive chairman.

While still a major investor in Big Health, Gupta stepped down to accept the same role at **Parallel Systems**, according to a spokesperson. Parallel Systems was co-founded by **Matt Soule**, a former engineer for **SpaceX**. The Los Angeles-based startup is developing what it claims is the world's first self-driving electric-powered rail car to help reduce the need for trucks. It launched its commercial pilot in partnership with **Genesee & Wyoming Inc.** after raising a \$38 million Series B round.

"I'm having fun working on this mission and technology with a world class founder, Matt Soule," Gupta wrote in a recent **LinkedIn** post.

Prior to Big Health, Gupta had a long track record of running startups and founded **Quartet Health**, where he raised hundreds of millions in capital by providing insurers and health systems with a way to enhance collaboration between physical and mental health providers. ■

Kamran Ansari: Following the Science with FluxWear

Stanford Student's Hat Now in Five Cancer Centers

■ By EMILY SANTIAGO-MOLINA

IRVINE — While attending **Stanford University**, physics major **Kamran Ansari** has found more medical experts willing to look at the neuromodulation device he created in high school and inform him about the next best move.

Ansari developed a piece of wearable tech, designed as a hat using pulsed electromagnetic field (PEMF) therapy, to alleviate his sister **Nadia's** chronic pain after she was diagnosed in 2017 with a rare autoimmune disease called Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

The two then founded the startup **FluxWear Inc.** to bring the device called **Shift** to more people, with hopes of launching clinical trials for further study. The hat sends low-level electromagnetic fields to different areas of the brain to reduce inflammation that causes peripheral neuropathic, or nerve, pain.

FluxWear has since caught the attention of medical professionals across Orange County—such as former chief executive and chairman of **Edwards Lifesciences**, **Mike Mussallem**, and Dr. **Michelle Khine**, who teaches biomedical engineering at **University of California, Irvine**—and now Ansari has brought the venture to Stanford.



"I think it's an environment where people support innovation and creation, and help," Ansari told the Business Journal.

The university's Director of Pain Research, Dr. **David Yeomans**, recently became a company advisor and is one of the experts helping Ansari consider the impact of the neuromodulation device to other processes in the brain beyond chronic pain.

Ansari is currently back in Orange County for summer break, checking in on the clinical trials with **Hoag Hospital** that began in late 2024. The Shift cap initially began testing in the hospital's **Pickup Family Neurosciences**

Institute until Dr. **Steven Grossman** approached Ansari about using the device for cancer patients with chemo-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN).

FluxWear has now expanded the trials to five Hoag cancer centers in the county.

And after running the non-invasive device by Yeomans at Stanford, Ansari also has his eyes on how the technology can be applied to Alzheimer's disease.

"There's a hypothesis that inflammation in the brain drives the stages of early Alzheimer's," Ansari said of Eagleman's suggestion.

As a result, FluxWear started stem cell research with a group in San Diego trying to evaluate Shift as a treatment approach.

He sees FluxWear becoming a platform technology that can impact overall treatment related to inflammation in the central nervous system, "which is upstream to a lot of diseases and conditions," he said.

As of August, FluxWear has done more than 16 cell line experiments to understand what the device is doing at a cellular level. Ansari said that the team will soon be submitting the data to the **FDA**, a process managed by his sister **Nadia Ansari**.

"Effectively what we're looking at, and what we've been evaluating, is how does this device use extremely weak multi-directional magnetic fields to reduce the chronic inflammation or oxidative stress that drives not just the perception and central sensitization of pain, but other conditions, namely neurodegenerative diseases," he explained.

FluxWear will be submitting for a "breakthrough device designation" with the FDA, according to Ansari.

He nabbed a Business Journal **Innovator of the Year Award** last September and was the youngest recipient to win at 19-years-old.

"I think as we understand the science better and follow it clearer, the understanding is that the mechanism is potentially more broad," Ansari said of the Shift cap.

Ansari doesn't want to appear unfocused.

"We're not doing anything that the science isn't pointing to," he added. ■

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Cheri Tree Sees Codebreaker Expansion

Tops 440k tests; Pens Book to 'Crack the Code'

■ By KEVIN COSTELLOE

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO — Author, speaker, entrepreneur and innovator **Cheri Tree** has been busy since last September when she won one of the Business Journal's 10th annual Innovator of the Year Awards.

She says her company, **Codebreaker Technologies**, will increase revenue by about 40% this year and possibly double its headcount.

"Our revenues for 2024 were roughly \$2.5 million while we focused on finding our capital partner," Tree told the Business Journal on Aug. 7.

"This year we're on track for \$3.5 million. Last year our corporate team was six people and by the end of this year we will likely be scaled up to 10 to 12."

She says Codebreaker Technologies will be opening a new location in 2026 though she did not specify a site.

"We are headquartered here in OC but currently cloud-based with no office, and we are starting to look for office space in Irvine," she said.

"We are also expanding our strategic partnerships and collaborations with organizations that want to intro their networks, companies or communities to the B.A.N.K. methodology and Codebreaker AI."

And to top it off, Tree recently launched her new book, "*Make People Matter: Cracking the Code to Increase Your Influence, Income and Impact.*"

The Meaning of BANK

B.A.N.K. is an acronym for Blueprint, Action, Nurturing and Knowledge, which Tree created to make a 90-second assessment of a personality.

The B.A.N.K. methodology was primarily designed as a sales tool, but it can also



Cheri Tree
Founder/CEO
Codebreaker Technologies

be applied to anyone interested in improving communication with clients or family members.

The assessment started out with four color-coded B.A.N.K. cards and now has been digitized.

Tree, who has a B.S. in Leadership and

Business from **Brigham Young University**, said B.A.N.K. is based on the "art and science of influence."

The methodology is designed to predict why customers buy and what triggers the "yes" versus the "no." The personality assessment looks at values like stability, free-

Codebreaker Technologies



- **FOUNDED:** 1997
- **CEO:** Cheri Tree
- **BUSINESS:** personality profiling, sales
- **WEBSITE:** codebreakertech.com
- **NOTABLE:** Sees 2025 revenue climbing 40% to \$3.5M

dom, learning, action, logic and relationships. The values are used to predict buying behavior and human engagement in nanoseconds, according to Tree.

"The main value proposition of B.A.N.K. is that it is based on a person's values and not their psychological profile or demographic data," she said.

The B.A.N.K. assessment has become a much quicker, more effective assessment model for companies to use and has been driving better results than other assessment models, she said.

The company has been issued two patents for its Codebreaker technology to access intelligence and data, according to Tree.

The Customers

Tree says that some of the organizations booking her to speak and introduce B.A.N.K. to their audiences regionally or nationally include **SHRM, ATD, Action Coach, Momentum Builder's Sales Mastery conference, Paul Mitchell Schools, Blueprint Practice Automation for chiropractors, AgeCode, FinFit Life, Tax Rebels, LeTip International, NIA franchise** and *Selling Power* magazine.

Nowadays, the company lists four primary divisions: Codebreaker Small Business, Codebreaker Direct Selling, Codebreaker Enterprise and Codebreaker Analytics.

The company so far has performed more than 440,000 assessments, with the number increasing by about 4,000 to 5,000 per month, according to Tree. ■

Foster Love Aids its One-Millionth Child

Danny Mendoza's Org Hit Milestone Last Year

■ By PARIMAL M. ROHIT

BREA — **Danny Mendoza** started **Foster Love** after finding out his nine-year-old cousin was living out of his car. Mendoza realized there weren't enough services for children in foster care.

Foster Love, the organization Mendoza founded less than 20 years ago, hit a major landmark last year—the nonprofit served its one-millionth child.

The landmark was part of a successful 2024 for Foster Love, which served more than 200,000 children and youth last year.

Foster Love also reported nearly \$12.3 million in revenue in 2024, up from \$9.1 million in 2023.

Volunteers also donated more than 78,000 hours of their time to Foster Love's programs.

One of those programs was called "Sweet Case," which delivered more than 36,000 duffle bags filled with essential items to Foster Love children and youth.

Mendoza, who worked as a cashier at a **McDonald's** and a paralegal at a law firm before creating Brea-based Foster Love in 2008,



Danny Mendoza's Foster Love hit a significant milestone in 2024: helping its one-millionth child

was one of five people honored at last year's **Innovator of the Year Awards**.

Foster Love helps foster youth navigate the system and find a path to pursue. Children and youth who come to Foster Love youth and children are offered after-school and STEM programs, free bicycles, birthday boxes and access to higher education scholarships.

Other programs include shopping sprees and sibling reunifications.

The organization also works with foster agencies, social workers and others, spreading awareness of Foster Love and its programs.

The nonprofit primarily relies on self-funding nowadays.

Mendoza graduated from **California State University at Fullerton** in 2010. ■



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– Ethisphere, March 2025

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Find a Banker Who Banks on You

By Sean Foley

Everyone in the business world has heard that success is more determined by “who you know, not what you know.” In a work environment that is increasingly virtual and remote, the importance of personal relationships is more important than ever, especially when choosing a business banker. Bankers can have a significant, positive impact on a company, so it’s worth putting the time and effort into finding one who will support the company’s long-term success—especially in times of economic uncertainty.

Business owners, entrepreneurs and especially innovators need a close and trusted banker. They need someone who takes a personal interest in their clients’ success and can help their clients make wise decisions.

The Right Business Bank Can Make a Difference

True relationship bankers will offer valuable financial insights into the current state and potential future of a business. They will have worked with hundreds of businesses and billions in financing. They can analyze a company’s profitability, liquidity, cash flow and capital structure, and make sound recommendations.

For example, an astute relationship banker will emphasize the importance of maintaining financial flexibility—also known as borrowing capacity—in case there is an unforeseen future event. A credit score tells a business how much it can borrow, but a relationship banker will make sure a company doesn’t exhaust its borrowing capacity, which keeps other strategic options on the table.

A true relationship banker will also consider a range of contingencies in the business lifecycle and help executives plan and prepare for important events down the road. One of the worst things a business can encounter is an unhappy surprise. A dedicated business banker is there to help executives anticipate the unexpected and plan accordingly for challenges and opportunities beyond the company’s day-to-day operations.

How to Find the Best Relationship Banker

While it’s tempting to quickly open a business account online, executives should schedule meetings with bankers or relationship managers who specialize in their industry—before they commit to opening an account. This gives them a chance to ask detailed questions about each bank’s services, understand the banker’s approach, and assess the banker’s level of expertise.

At Banc of California, we believe that making a personal connection with the right banker will help determine the course of the company’s future success. We support companies over the full course of the business lifecycle. Our experienced team of relationship bankers provides critical insights and tailored financial solutions companies need to tackle their business goals with confidence. Business owners should choose a banker who is committed to knowing their business better than anyone else in their professional network—perhaps even better than they know it themselves.

About Banc of California, Inc.

Banc of California, Inc. (NYSE: BANC) is a bank holding company with more than \$34 billion in assets and the parent company of Banc of California. Banc of California is one of the nation’s premier relationship-based business banks, providing banking and treasury management services to small, middle-market, and venture-backed businesses. Banc of California is the largest independent bank headquartered in Los Angeles and the third-largest bank headquartered in California. It offers a broad range of loan and deposit products and services through 80 full-service branches located throughout California and in Denver, Colorado, and Durham, North Carolina, as well as through regional offices nationwide. The bank also provides full-stack payment processing solutions through its subsidiary, Deepstack Technologies, and serves the Community Association Management industry nationwide with its technology-forward platform, SmartStreet™. The bank is committed to its local communities through the Banc of California Charitable Foundation, and by supporting organizations that provide financial literacy and job training, small business support, affordable housing, and more. Member FDIC. For more information, please visit us at www.bancofcal.com.

Sean Foley is the President of Banc of California’s Orange County and Inland Empire Region. He oversees the team dedicated to commercial and real estate businesses in the area, and he has deep experience supporting clients and structuring debt facilities that meet their strategic needs.

Learn more at bancofcal.com or contact Foley directly at Sean.Foley@bancofcal.com.





THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA DIVORCE IS HERE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
PAUL NELSON, ESQ.

The Dissolution Solution: A Divorce Lawyer's Advice on the Best Ways to Part Ways (River Grove Books) just published. Featuring a foreword by the *Orange County Business Journal's* very own Executive Editor Peter J. Brennan, it's already receiving high praise.

Nicholas A. Salick, prominent divorce attorney for Kanye West, gave this glowing endorsement of the book: "An indispensable tool to prepare for divorces, whether you are the divorcing spouse, a family law practitioner, or simply curious about the process."

Michael Ashley, Paul's coauthor, sat down with Paul to conduct the following interview:

Q: Why did you want to write this book?

A: My inspiration came from observing my clients' experiences on a daily basis. As a seasoned family law attorney, I frequently encounter individuals who, despite being successful and well-educated in their own domains, are completely baffled by the divorce process. I wanted to provide them with guidance and insight to demystify what lies ahead. Having informative reading material, especially before issues escalate, can be immensely beneficial.

Q: Why is it helpful to read a book like this from a divorce expert?

A: Just as many people now use WebMD to self-diagnose medical maladies, many individuals now turn to erroneous online sources for divorce information. It used to be that people would Google what to do. Nowadays, they query ChatGPT. Or ask their hairdresser. Why not turn to someone who has successfully worked in this field his whole life? Once upon a time, my dad used to say, "If you don't know diamonds, you better know

your jeweler." Here's my update: "If you don't know family law, you better know a family law attorney."

Q: Who is this book for?

A: This book is designed for anyone going through, considering, or completing a divorce. It combines informative content with an engaging writing style. While the subject is serious, we've made it reader-friendly. The book includes numerous real-life stories covering a wide range of topics, including planning, attorney selection, conflict resolution, children, mediation, trial, and life after divorce. Even if you're not personally experiencing divorce, you likely know someone who is or who's contemplating it.

Q: What can readers expect to learn?

A: It's my hope they learn how to correctly approach divorce. Going in with your eyes open is the best preparation. To this end, we are careful to explain common mistakes and errors to avoid. Perhaps surprisingly, in the first two chapters we emphasize the importance of avoiding divorce, if possible. As someone who has personally gone through the experience, I wouldn't wish it on anyone. This book shows you how to avoid needless expenses, how to simplify complex matters, and how to make things less traumatic for yourself and your family.

Q: What's something that might surprise readers?

A: They might not expect to read so many stories with elements of humor. Despite the seriousness of what can be a very difficult situation, we offer lighthearted anecdotes to enliven

the material. My view is always: How can we take chicken bones to make chicken soup?

Q: As a veteran family law attorney, what advice do you have for someone contemplating a high-stakes divorce?

A: Find the right attorney for you. It certainly doesn't have to be me. But you do need someone competent, someone you trust. It sounds funny to say this, but in some ways, your relationship to your family lawyer can be likened to a (short-lived) marriage. That's why we even include vows between lawyers and clients in the book. These are promises both sides can make to facilitate the best working relationship.

A member of the Family Law section of the Orange County Bar Association, Paul Nelson, Esq., also belongs to the Family Law section of the State Bar of California and the J. Reuben Clark Law Society. As a certified Family Law Specialist, he has tried hundreds of family law matters, giving him uncommon familiarity with local judicial officers and opposing counsels. These are strategic advantages evidenced by his winning track record. Paul was chosen as a Super Lawyer for 2021, 2022 and 2023. He also holds an AV Preeminent® rating with Martindale-Hubbell®, the highest possible score for both legal ability and ethical standards.

Paul is the author of The Dissolution Solution: A Divorce Lawyer's Advice on the Best Ways to Part Ways, now available for purchase on Amazon. Filled with practical advice, history, interesting facts, real-world stories, and even viewpoints from other experts, his work is an informative guidebook for anyone going through one of the most difficult processes couples can face.

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Orange County's Small Businesses Unlock AI's Potential

By Jodi Duva

AI is anything but exclusive to large organizations. Today, many solutions are designed to be budget-friendly, easy to integrate, and tailored to small business users. This technology has become a practical and valuable tool for small businesses in Orange County across industries, helping them innovate, streamline operations, and stay competitive.

Home to over 71,000 small businesses that collectively employ nearly 560,000 people, Orange County's economy is dynamic, making it an ideal environment for the adoption of AI. Whether its tech startups in Irvine or long-established companies across the county's 34 cities, businesses of all kinds are discovering the ways that AI can drive growth in one of California's most economically diverse and growing regions.

Cox Business' recent Small Business Survey found that more small businesses are deploying AI in everyday business operations. Two-thirds of those surveyed invested in AI for their company already, while 53% of owners planned to invest even more in AI in the year ahead.

Small business owners are using AI to increase profitability (41%), enhance productivity (41%), and improve customer experience (33%). To do this, small business owners are specifically using AI in marketing, sales, and customer service. For example, AI is being used for online product and service recommendations, order placement, live website chatbots, and customer service calls.

While AI isn't a silver bullet for small business success, it certainly enables entrepreneurs who often end up wearing many—if not all—hats to stay ahead of the competition, offer better customer experiences, and scale more efficiently without significant overhead. This rings especially true in a competitive business environment. AI comes with a slew of security risks, too. So, ensuring your employees have guidelines in place to protect your confidential data and minimize breach opportunities is a significantly important part of the training process.

Owners Often Take on the Chief AI Operator Role

About 85% of small business owners and 72% of employees are comfortable using AI tools in the workplace. And while 62% of owners have provided training for employees, 76% don't plan to offer an AI training course for employees.

With three out of four small business owners saying they are also responsible for implementing and managing AI at their company, it's critical for their teams to be trained and confident using the latest business technologies. So, where possible, entrepreneurs should be sure to weave in ongoing tech training and education not only for themselves but for their teams, too.



Taking this a step further, relying on a trusted third party to serve as a tech advisor and AI implementer can make this load even lighter. According to an IDC survey of North American IT leaders, the IT skills gap affects businesses across all industries and regions. By 2026, it's expected to become a global issue, potentially costing companies \$5.5 trillion in lost revenue, so having a partner in place to help navigate the rapidly changing tech landscape is worthwhile.

Orange County knows this challenge well. Established tech companies and fast-growing startups are vying for the same skilled workers, and the competition for talent is fierce. While OC has established business support networks and myriad resources, companies still need a reliable technology partner to handle the infrastructure that makes AI work.

Finding Reliable Partners to Support AI Initiatives

Among its benefits, AI improves efficiency by automating repetitive tasks like data entry, freeing up teams to focus on higher-value duties. Tools like chatbots and recommendation engines can also help small businesses deliver personalized, round-the-clock customer service.

To take advantage of AI and other technology solutions, high-speed network connectivity is crucial, so small business owners have the bandwidth and support they need.

Cox Business connectivity solutions help ensure consistent access to AI. RapidScale, a comprehensive managed IT and cloud services partner, makes it easier for businesses to strategically adopt advanced technologies and unlock faster benefits. Choosing a reliable technology provider and partner with expertise in these areas ensures support that drives higher returns on investment.

AI helps small teams do more with less. As these tools improve over time and get easier to use, small businesses that embrace AI now—if they haven't already—are putting themselves ahead of the curve. Because AI is more than a trend: It's fast becoming a must-have tool in a small business owner's toolkit.

With proximity to major universities and a diverse economy that nurtures traditional industries and cutting-edge technology sectors, Orange County is one of the nation's most innovative regions. Now is the time to leverage AI for its competitive advantage.

Jodi Duva is California Vice President for Cox Business. She is a resident of Rancho Santa Margarita.



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Navigating Copyright Risks in AI Model Training: Business Leaders Need to Know

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping the business landscape. From startups to established enterprises, AI is driving innovation, efficiency, and competitive advantage. However, the legal framework governing AI is still evolving, particularly concerning copyright. Understanding these emerging risks is crucial for responsible AI adoption and sustainable growth.

The heart of many AI systems, particularly large language models (LLMs), lies in the vast amounts of data used to train them. This training process raises complex copyright questions, as these models often ingest copyrighted materials like books, articles, and websites. Recent court decisions and guidance from the U.S. Copyright Office are beginning to clarify the boundaries of what is permissible, but the legal landscape remains complex and nuanced. Business leaders should consider this additional guidance when navigating the copyright risks associated with AI model training.

Key Cases and Legal Considerations

• Thomson Reuters v. Ross Intelligence: A Cautionary Tale of Direct Competition

This case serves as a crucial reminder that using copyrighted material to train a competing AI tool can be a high-risk endeavor. Ross Intelligence, a legal research AI startup, used headnotes from Westlaw, a legal search tool (owned by Thomson Reuters) to train its own AI platform. The court ruled against Ross, finding that its use of copyrighted material was not considered “fair use.”

The judge emphasized that Ross's AI tool directly competed with Westlaw, offering a similar legal research service. Critically, the AI didn't fundamentally transform the headnotes; it essentially repackaged and repurposed them for a competing product. A key takeaway in applying a “fair use” defense is to ensure the AI application does something fundamentally new or different with the copyrighted material.

• Bartz v. Anthropic: Exploring the Boundaries of “Fair Use” in Generative AI

In this case, a group of authors sued Anthropic, an AI company, for using copyrighted books to train its Claude LLM. The AI model does not reproduce the copyrighted material directly; it instead used the books to learn language patterns and generate new, original content.

The court found that using copyrighted books to train an AI model would fall under the “fair use” doctrine, provided the books were lawfully obtained. However, the court made it clear that using illegally sourced (pirated) material could still constitute infringement. This highlights the critical importance of ensuring that all training data is acquired through legitimate channels.

• Kadrey v. Meta: Market Impact and the Transformation Test

Kadrey v. Meta involves authors suing Meta for allegedly using copyrighted books to train its Llama LLM. In this case, the court focused on how the use of copyrighted works impacted the market for the original works. The Llama LLM is also generative, in that, it does not reproduce the copyrighted material but uses it as training to generate new, original content.

In assessing Meta's fair use arguments, the court acknowledged the transformative nature of using copyrighted works to train a generative LLM but cautioned that transformation alone does not guarantee fair use. The most significant factor, the court explained, is how the use impacts the market value for the original works. The court found that the output from the model was in no way a “recasting or adaptation of the plaintiffs' books.” The court further found that plaintiffs failed to sufficiently allege how Meta's use of their works resulted in any market harm, and on that ground granted Meta's “fair use” defense.

Looking Ahead: The Midjourney Case and Beyond

Beyond training data, questions persist about whether AI-generated outputs are protectable under copyright law. The U.S. Copyright Office, in reports issued in January and May 2025, reaffirmed that works created solely by AI—without meaningful human involvement—are not copyrightable. However, works co-authored with humans may be eligible for protection, depending on the human's contribution.

The May report also stated that training on copyrighted material “clearly implicates the right of reproduction,” suggesting such use could be infringing unless protected by fair use or another defense.

These issues are central to a pending case filed by major film studios (including Disney and Universal) against Midjourney, an AI image generation platform. The studios allege that Midjourney's model creates infringing derivative works and that its training data, scraped from the internet, was obtained without consent or license. This case underscores the growing tension between AI innovation and creators' rights. This case, and others like it, will undoubtedly shape the future of AI and copyright law.

Practical Implications for Businesses

1. Be exceptionally cautious when using third-party materials to train AI.
2. Know where your data comes from. Lawfully obtained data strengthens your defense against copyright claims, while using pirated or improperly licensed content opens you up to significant liability. Implement rigorous data governance policies to ensure compliance. Maintain thorough documentation of your AI model's training process for this purpose.
3. While transforming copyrighted material can support a “fair use” argument, it's not a guarantee of protection.
4. Assess the market for the original copyrighted works and how the AI's use of the original work might impact that market.

Proactive Steps for Businesses

- **Audit Your Data Sources:** If you're developing AI models in-house, conduct a comprehensive audit of your training data sources. Identify any potentially copyrighted materials and assess the associated risks.
- **Vendor Due Diligence:** If you're working with outside vendors or purchasing pre-trained models, don't be afraid to ask tough questions about data sources and licensing. Demand transparency and verifiable proof of compliance.
- **Licensing and Contractual Protections:** Consider seeking licenses for high-risk content categories, such as copyrighted images, music, or software code. Negotiate strong contractual protections (representations, indemnities) with vendors to shield your business from liability.
- **Stay Informed:** The legal landscape surrounding AI and copyright is constantly evolving. Subscribe to industry publications and stay informed about new developments.
- **Consult with Legal Counsel:** Engage experienced legal counsel knowledgeable about developments in AI and the law surrounding it. They can assess your specific AI projects, advise on compliance strategies, and represent your interests in the event of a legal dispute.

Salil

Clients at all stages of their lifecycle trust Salil Bali to protect their intellectual property assets. Whether for a start-up, or a mature tech company with a global IP portfolio, Bali brings out-of-the-box solutions and a scientific background to stop infringers, resolve disputes, and secure favorable outcomes. Bali helps clients in a wide range of industries, from consumer products to LED lighting, software, electronics, biotech, pharma, and medical devices, as well as protect and enforce their IP rights through patent, trademark, copyright, and unfair competition.



Ahmad

Ahmad Takouche is an associate in Stradling's Intellectual Property practice group. He represents clients in complex business and intellectual property disputes in state, federal, and international courts and tribunals. Takouche's experience spans high-stakes matters involving patent, copyright, and contract disputes, as well as business divorce and real estate litigation.





Royal American announces its' new High Jewelry Educational Series event

Industry giants as guest speakers; Susan Jacques, President - GIA and Lita Asscher, President of Royal Asscher Diamond Company

Royal American Diamonds, a private jeweler known for its rare investment-grade diamonds and gemstones, is proud to announce the launch of its new High Jewelry Educational Series. The series will kick off with guest speakers who are leaders in the jewelry industry: Susan Jacques, President of the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), and Lita Asscher, President of Royal Asscher Diamond Co. and a sixth-generation family member of the iconic diamond house renowned for its mastery in diamond cutting.

Lita Asscher, together with her father and brother, Edward and Michael Asscher—who developed the Royal Asscher Suite of diamond shapes—was the first guest speaker, sharing stories about her sixth-generation family's 171 years of experience, expertise, and insights on the diamond industry, and technology innovation, and market trends.

Susan Jacques, with 11 years of leadership at GIA, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the series. Prior to joining GIA, she served as president and CEO of Borsheims Fine Jewelry, reporting directly to Warren Buffett, Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway.

"As the CEO, I have always been driven to help ensure consumers' confidence in the products they're buying, validating the documentation, confirming stated attributes of the gemstones, specialty the 4 C's as well as the—country of origin,"



Lita Asscher - Valaree Sherwood - Jeff Sherwood- Susan Jacques

Jacques stated during her presentation. "This mission to ensure public trust aligns perfectly with Royal American Diamonds' commitment to education and ethical business standards."

Royal American Diamonds is honored to have such distinguished speakers for its Educational Series, which aims to provide valuable knowledge and insights to both professionals and enthusiasts in the high jewelry sector. The company sources its rare diamonds and gemstones from the Royal Asscher Diamond Company of the Netherlands and other premier High Jewelry partners, ensuring the highest quality and ethical standards.

The night was highly attended by many residences of Newport Beach, and Corona del Mar, who were given opportunity to ask our guest speakers further details of their presentation, questions about the current trends of the Industry, the impact of the Trumps tariffs, and more details regarding their respective companies; Royal Asscher Diamonds and GIA.

The series underscores Royal American's leadership position in the industry through its dedication to education, knowledge transfer, and maintaining ethical practices. Stay tuned for more updates and future events in the series.

About Royal American Diamonds
For information: Jeff Sherwood, (949) 257.6343 or visit www.royalamericandiamonds.com.



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Discover the future of spine surgery



Dr. Don Y. Park, founding director of the UCI Health Comprehensive Spine Center's Advanced Endoscopic and Outpatient Spine Program, is setting a high bar for the future of spine surgery in the country.

His pioneering endoscopic surgical techniques and use of augmented reality (AR) is ushering in a new era of ultra-minimally invasive spine care.

Park, who trained extensively in South Korea, where advanced endoscopic spine surgery techniques were perfected, is one of about 50 U.S. surgeons with this expertise, and the only one in Orange County offering this level of surgical care. He has performed more than 600 such procedures to date.

Where most minimally invasive spine procedures involve cuts of one to two inches, Park starts with two ultra tiny incisions of less than a quarter inch. Through one, he inserts a miniature high-definition camera attached to an endoscope. Through the other, he guides specialized instruments to operate using direct endoscopic visualization.

This level of precision allows him to avoid damaging muscle, nerves and soft tissue while effectively treating spinal stenosis, disc herniation and spondylolisthesis.

World's first

In March, Park spearheaded the world's first AR-assisted, biportal endoscopic lumbar fusion.

With the AR headset, he viewed the surgical field magnified as much as 200 times alongside the patient's MRI images and medical details. This eliminated the need to shift attention between multiple monitors, enhancing precision and streamlining the operation.

"We expect AR integration to become more common in spine surgery, especially in endoscopic procedures to decompress delicate spinal nerves, where detailed visualization and ergonomics are crucial," he says.

Lives transformed

The benefits of ultra-minimally invasive spine surgery extend well beyond the operating room. "Most patients are able to go home the same day," the surgeon says. "They also experience fewer complications, faster recovery times and less pain and discomfort than with traditional open surgery."

Park's first AR-guided biportal lumbar fusion patient, a 56-year-old man with severe lumbar stenosis and unstable spondylolisthesis, went home the same day, free of chronic back pain and tingling in his legs. Three months later, he has regained his former activity level.

Another patient, an avid runner in her late 40s with crippling nerve pain from lumbar stenosis and spondylolisthesis, feared open fusion surgery would end her active lifestyle. Park performed endoscopic decompression without fusion and she also walked out the same day, free of pain and able to run again in six weeks.

"I've done many other types of spine surgery, and you can have great success," he says. "But I have seen these techniques have the most impact in patient outcomes and better quality of life."

Named one of the leading U.S. spine programs by *Becker's Hospital Review*, the UCI Health Comprehensive Spine Center is a preeminent academic program whose multidisciplinary team specializes in personalized care for all spinal disorders, including trauma, tumors, scoliosis and spinal cord injury.

Renowned for its high-quality minimally invasive, robot-assisted and endoscopic procedures, the center continues to drive innovation through biomechanics research and each year trains future spine surgeons in the latest techniques.

Learn more at ucihealth.org/spine-care

UCI Health

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At UCI Health, we share a single calling: to improve the lives of people in our community and beyond. Now, we're bringing leading-edge clinical care — and our devoted team of nationally recognized physicians, nurses and researchers — closer to you and your family.

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UCI Health

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- *Dan Carney, Co-Founder of Pizza Hut,
Wells of Life Advisory Board*

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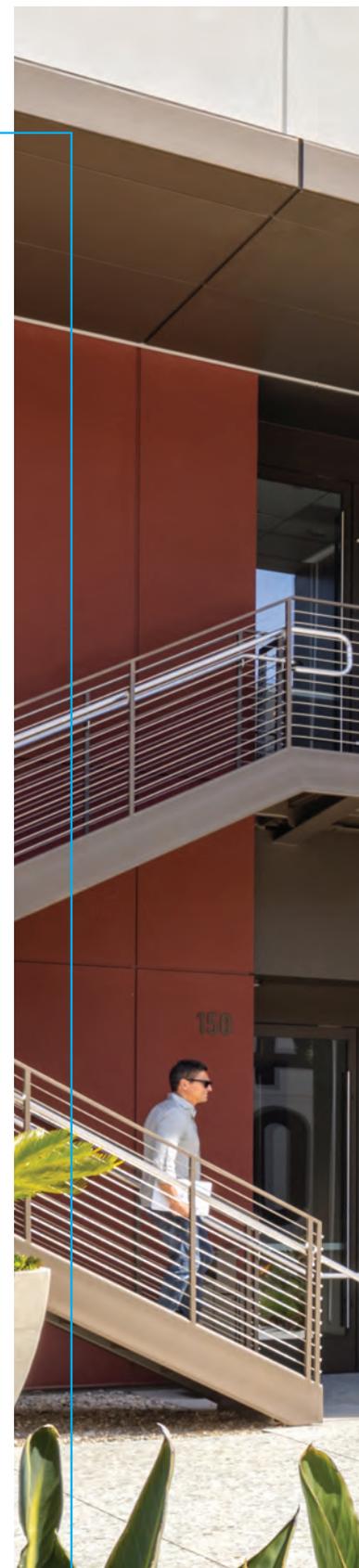


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Fortune Favors *the Bold*

This year's Innovator of the Year honors those who lead with instinct, trust their vision, and shape the future through thoughtful creation and a fearless pursuit of what's possible.

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The Power of Curiosity: Fueling Design Thinking

By Dawn S. Reese, Chief Executive Officer, The Wooden Floor

At **The Wooden Floor**, curiosity is foundational. Curiosity propels our students forward through creativity, inquiry, and empathetic design. Rooted in our mission to inspire and transform the lives of young people through the power of dance and access to higher education, design thinking becomes more than a process; it is the way we think about everything.

As part of our 10-Year Strategic Vision 2021-2031 to **Drive Social Innovation, Grow Impact, and Uplift Our Community** and as we entered our fourth decade of impact, it was important to ask ourselves, how do we continue to drive organizational high performance to remain relevant to meet the changing needs of the children we serve today, and in the decades to come? It was simple. We use our well-developed design-thinking practices, honed over the past decade, and begin to layer strategic foresight concepts to inform our student strategies and programming towards what we call our 6 Cs: **Collaboration, Creativity, Communication, Critical Thinking, Character, and Courage**.

Cultivating a Culture of Exploration

Design thinking thrives in environments where questions are valued as much as answers. At The Wooden Floor, curiosity begins with listening—deep, intentional listening to our students and families, our community partners, and our team. In our creative youth development model, students are co-creators of their shared experiences. Our students' thoughts and ideas are nurtured to guide program innovations, ensuring that every solution is not only impactful, but they are relevant. This co-creative spirit reinforces curiosity as a tool for discovery. And when we approach challenges with a "What if?" or "Why not?" mindset, we empower our team to see opportunities where others may see obstacles. It is part of what drives our organization's culture and employee engagement practices, for which we have been recently honored by the **Orange County Business Journal** as a **2025 Best Places to Work** for the third consecutive year.



The Wooden Floor full-time and seasonal staff on Employee Appreciation Day.

Empathy as a Curiosity Compass

Empathy sits at the heart of design thinking methodology, and at The Wooden Floor, curiosity and empathy work hand-in-hand. Our teams ask, "What does this student need to thrive? What barriers stand in their way?" These questions drive us to dig deeper—not for a single answer, but for layered insights. These

insights inform our holistic youth development approach with dance at the center of student transformation that is strategically integrated with academic services, college and career readiness, and family services.

Whether it's designing a new academic mentoring initiative or reimagining our physical spaces to foster wellness and learning, our staff is encouraged to continuously listen for needs and remain open to rethinking assumptions of what has been done in the past. Being curious keeps us flexible, adaptive, and student-centered.

Iteration Driven by Inquiry

At The Wooden Floor, nothing is static. Programs are piloted, feedback is gathered, and ideas are iterated upon. We strive for excellence not perfection, and continually ask ourselves, "How might we make this even better?" It's through this lens that we've launched innovative collaborations with **Chapman University Crean College of Health and Behavioral Sciences; Vanguard University and Concordia University Tutors through College Corps; UC Irvine Brain Camp; and CSU Fullerton's Giles-O'Malley Center for Leadership**. Together we have expanded college and career readiness efforts to now prepare our



The Wooden Floor students attending UC Irvine Brain Camp.

junior class members and their parents for the social-emotional challenges of stepping beyond their comfortable surroundings and into higher education and we have integrated mental health best practices across our somatic-based curriculum, as well as throughout our organization and team.

Curiosity Inspires Courage

Perhaps most importantly, we believe that curiosity fuels courage. Over a 10-year journey at The Wooden Floor, our students build upon their own innate curiosity, and for our graduates who are the first in their families to enroll in higher education, they are considered pioneers and courageous role models for the students who follow in their footsteps over the years to come.

Dance is the Answer™

We believe when dance is used as a means of social change, innovation flourishes into courageous life-changing outcomes for the children we serve, and moves The Wooden Floor's exciting mission forward, which helps move our community forward. Join us to learn more at TheWoodenFloor.org.



Dawn S. Reese, Chief Executive Officer of The Wooden Floor, is a social innovator who leverages her unique blend of experience in business, technology, education, and the arts to propel young people forward. During Reese's 16-year tenure, The Wooden Floor has seen significant growth and with the opening of its second location in Santa Ana, and licensing of its model. Celebrating its 42nd Anniversary, recent awards for The Wooden Floor include: **2025, 2024 and 2023 Best Places to Work** by the **Orange County Business Journal**, **2022 Nonprofit of the Year Award** by the **Greater Irvine Chamber**, and **2021 Stand Up the Arts Award** by **Ovation TV/Charter Communications**. Reese's recent honors include: **2025 Nonprofit Leader Award** by **National Philanthropy Day Orange County/Association of Fundraising Professionals**; **2024 Orange County Register 125 Most Influential People**; **2023 Empowering Lives Award** by **Templo**

Calvario, **2023 Sam Estes Award for Community Leadership** from the **Santa Ana Task Force**, and the **2022 Orange County Visionary** by the **Los Angeles Times Orange County**, among others.

Reese proudly serves on the Board of Directors for the **Passkeys Foundation** as Immediate Past Board Chair, **OneOC** as Audit Chair, **Orange County Music and Dance** as Finance Chair, and **Santa Ana Chamber of Commerce** as Board Chair-Elect, as well as a Board Member for **Advisors in Philanthropy OC**, and the **MVS Foundation**. Reese began the first part of her career in management consulting specializing in the high technology sector. Currently, she is an evaluator and presenter for **OCTANE's Nonprofit Accelerator Program**.

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Twin California Rulings Mark a Turning Point for AI-Copyright Fair Use

By: Moish E. Peltz, Esq. and Steven T. Cooper, Esq.



In the space of forty-eight hours, two judges of the Northern District of California issued detailed, partially contrasting opinions on whether large language model (“LLM”) training that copies entire books without permission, and whether digitizing and retaining a digital library of such books, is protected by fair use.

On June 23, 2025, Judge Alsup in *Bartz v. Anthropic* found that Anthropic’s ingestion of seven million books was “spectacularly transformative” and therefore qualified as fair use, although the company must still face a separate damages trial for its wholesale downloads from pirate sites.

Two days later, in *Kadrey v. Meta* (June 25, 2025), Judge Chhabria likewise granted Meta summary judgment on fair use for training Llama with the works of thirteen authors. However, he sharply criticized the plaintiffs for failing to produce evidence of market harm, rejected the notion of a “transformative use shortcut,” and emphasized that the fourth fair use factor—the effect on the market—is “the single most important element.”

Taken together, the opinions supply the first judicial roadmap for evaluating AI training under 17 U.S.C. § 107, confirm that fair use analysis survives intact in the generative AI era, and signal that future plaintiffs must marshal credible, data-driven evidence of market substitution in order to survive summary judgment.

What Anthropic Won—and Still Risks

Judge Alsup’s opinion is unabashedly enthusiastic about machine learning: internalizing expressive works to extract statistical patterns is no different, he writes, from the way “schoolchildren learn to write well,” and therefore “does not implicate the competitive or creative displacement that concerns the Copyright Act.”

On that basis fair use factors one and three (the purpose and character of the use, and the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work) weighed heavily for the defendant, and factor four (the effect of the use on the potential market or value of the copyrighted work) favored Anthropic because no infringing outputs were alleged and the court did not find that potential competition from new AI-generated works was protected under the Copyright Act. Crucially, however, Judge Alsup severed the question of how Anthropic obtained its corpus. Downloading from shadow libraries may yet expose the company to statutory damages, and the opinion invites a jury to decide whether the piracy was willful. The clear message: lawful acquisition is not strictly required for fair use, but it remains a costly litigation vulnerability.

How Meta Prevailed—and Narrowed the Precedent

Judge Chhabria agreed that LLM training is “highly transformative,” but refused to let that finding “blow off” the economic analysis. He held that the authors’ two theories of market harm—verbatim regurgitation and lost licensing fees—were “clear losers” because the record showed Llama could not reproduce more than fifty consecutive words and because the Copyright Act does not guarantee a market to license works for the very purpose of transformation. On that deficient record, factor four tipped to Meta, and the court granted summary judgment.

The opinion, however, is narrower than Anthropic’s. It applies only to the thirteen named authors; it preserves a live claim that Meta illegally distributed works while torrenting its corpus; and, expressly countering the view of Judge Alsup, it stresses that better evidence of indirect market dilution—e.g., AI-generated romance novels crowding out human ones—could swing the analysis the other way.

Convergences and Fault Lines

Transformative purpose remains essential but not conclusive. Both judges embraced the human learning analogy, yet Judge Chhabria cautioned that transformativeness alone cannot “inoculate” AI developers. Future defendants are likely to pair this argument with empirical studies on regurgitation rates and market impact. Pirate sourcing serves as a reputational burden rather than an automatic defeat. Judge Alsup viewed mass piracy as a potential bad faith factor, while Judge Chhabria considered it relevant but immaterial without proof of market harm. In either case, maintaining robust provenance records remains the most cost-effective safeguard. Factor four is poised to drive the next wave of litigation. *Kadrey* calls for economic modeling of substitution effects, suggesting plaintiffs will focus on demonstrating how models duplicate materials and diminish markets—such as the news sector in the *New York Times* case—while defendants will stress ongoing demand for marquee authors and the abundance of public domain training data. For now, the spotlight is on model inputs rather than outputs. Neither set of plaintiffs alleged that the LLMs publicly generated infringing works, and the scope of liability for AI-generated outputs remains unsettled.

Action Points for AI Businesses and Enterprises Using Them

Document the data chain—down to the URL. Maintain click-through or purchase records for every ingest source and

track each filtration step. While a clean corpus will not automatically defeat infringement claims, it can significantly reduce a plaintiff’s leverage.

Actively measure and limit memorization. Adversarial prompt audits and n-gram filtering can help demonstrate that the model cannot emit protected passages longer than minimal, non-actionable snippets.

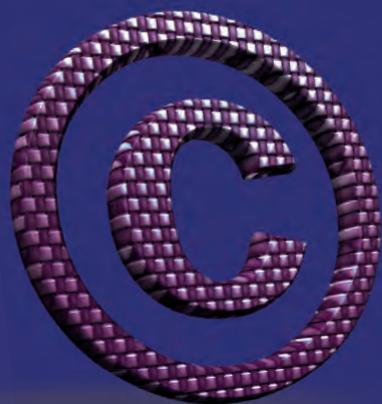
Model market impact before plaintiffs do. Engaging independent economists to assess whether your product might cannibalize—or even expand—sales of comparable human works provides a proactive defense against factor four claims.

Keep reproduction separate from distribution. If torrenting, peer-to-peer retrieval, or third-party hosting is unavoidable, isolate those processes in sandboxed workflows and monitor them closely. Anthropic and Meta still face claims arising from improperly seeded training data that survived summary judgment.

Prepare for a patchwork legal environment until higher courts intervene. At present, these rulings hold sway only in the Northern District of California. Divergent approaches in the SDNY (*New York Times*), the MDL before Judge Stein, and pending visual-arts cases could create a circuit split within the year.

Bottom Line

Both courts agree that teaching machines to write is, at its core, the type of knowledge-building progress copyright law is meant to foster. They diverge on how much economic evidence is needed to ensure that progress does not undermine human creativity. For companies that can prove lawful acquisition, minimize memorization, and substantiate real-world benefits, these “twin pillars” of California fair use jurisprudence offer a solid (but not unshakeable) foundation on which to keep training towards superintelligence.



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Tiodize was founded in 1966 by Thomas Adams to fill the need for a special coating to reduce galling and its effects on titanium parts used in high performance aircraft. This coating and method of application, widely known as the Tiodize Process, has been specified for use on practically every major space, military, and commercial aircraft program since its introduction.

Over the 59 years since, Tiodize has been perfecting their products to help customers like Boeing, Lockheed, GE, JPL, and Northrup prevent friction, wear, and corrosion of their equipment. Tiodize has grown with the aviation industry, offering new products and improving on their existing items as aviation equipment evolves. Tiodize has developed organic and inorganic coatings, lubricants, and composite fasteners and bearings. Their 1175 inorganic lubricant was developed in 1968 for use on the Apollo and is still used today in deep space and low orbit.

In 1988, Tiodize was asked by the United States Air Force to develop a lubricant to replace silver on fasteners used in jet engines. Silver, when exposed to high temperatures, can cause the fasteners to crack, which prompted the Air Force to request a solution from Tiodize.

The product, called 614-7E, took 10 years of careful study and development before Tiodize released it to the public. Tiodize would continue improving on the product, later releasing another version named 614-T9B. It was approved by G.E., Rolls Royce, Pratt & Whitney, and Safran, which led to its wide use on aircraft engines worldwide. But the innovation doesn't stop there.

As aviation continued to develop, newer jet engines started operating at higher temperatures. This meant maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities had to find a replacement for their old graphite grease.

Therefore, Tiodize continued to improve on their existing product line, creating yet another family of lubricants. Thus, the 1.400 Degree Anti-Seize Grease line—composed of the T8E-Paste, T8E-G Light Grease, and T8E-H Grease products—was created.

These three anti-seize products are specifically manufactured to help MROs remove fasteners without the hassle of fasteners galling and breaking during the removal.

Today, because of the Space movement, research has resurfaced. Adams explains "The new research and development that the Moon and Mars projects will bring, will change the world as we know it."

Tiodize has some of the most renowned customers in the space industry including NASA, Space X, and Virgin Atlantic.

Space programs, like the Artemis Program, are requiring new developments of different types of products. The Artemis Program is an effort by NASA to land the first woman and another man on the moon. New technology is needed to explore parts of the lunar surface that have not been reached before. It has helped Tiodize develop new emissivity coatings, such as K2V and IR Black, anodize.

As inorganic coatings are in greater demand for use in space, Tiodize has also developed new dry film lubricants such as their 1175-FX20 and X40X.

As Adams has said, "We want to continue innovating in the best way possible for our customers."



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Meet the Judges:



Dan M. Cooper, MD - Distinguished Professor, Pediatrics & Interim Executive Director, UCI Health

Dr. Dan Cooper is a distinguished professor of pediatrics, interim executive director of the UC Irvine Institute for Precision Health, associate director of the UC Irvine Institute of Clinical and Translational Science (ICTS is UC Irvine's National Institutes of Health Clinical Translational Science Award), and clinical informatics and analytics unit director of the UC Irvine Pediatric Exercise and Genomics Research Center. Dr. Cooper's research seeks to understand the role of physical activity and exercise in growth and development in children and adolescents in health and disease. Ongoing research areas include novel approaches to gas exchange signal transduction during exercise; genomic and epigenetic responses to exercise in circulating immune cells; rethinking protocols for exercise testing in children with a specific focus on children with sickle cell disease and children with cystic fibrosis, and the optimal use of school-based physical fitness testing to mitigate health care disparities.



Sean Foley - President, Orange County and Inland Empire Region, Bank of California

Sean Foley is president of the Orange County and Inland Empire Region at Banc of California. He is responsible for overseeing and expanding the team dedicated to the bank's commercial and real estate businesses in the area, which includes client acquisition, client retention, and portfolio management. Foley joined Banc of California in 2020 and has several decades of experience supporting clients and structuring debt facilities that meet their strategic needs. He has held significant leadership roles at major U.S. banks. Prior to his current position, Foley served as the commercial banking executive at KeyBank in Washington state and spent 10 years as regional president of U.S. Bank's Southern California market. Foley has lived in the Southern California community for more than 30 years. In that time, he has served in leadership roles at many business, community, and nonprofit organizations, including the Mardan Foundation of Educational Therapy, California Bankers Association, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, the Pacific Symphony, and Town Hall Los Angeles. He is currently a member of the Chief Executive Roundtable at the University of California, Irvine. Foley earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and business from the University of Pittsburgh.



Victor Guerrero - President & Chief Operating Officer, Infinity Bank

Victor Guerrero has dedicated more than 35 years to serving the Los Angeles/Orange County communities in banking. Starting out as a teller at Bank of America in 1988, he's worked in many roles in the industry, from operations to sales, credit, and finance. Since 2018, Guerrero has been the founding executive at Infinity Bank, where he serves as president and chief operating officer, and previously served as the founding CFO of Orange County Business Bank. Guerrero finds his greatest joy in helping people achieve their dreams and goals as a banker, advisor, and partner. With 33 years of marriage and two adult sons, Guerrero's family keeps him humble and generally grounded, but never quiet!



Michael I. Katz - Managing Partner, Katz Ruby & Carle LLP

Michael I. Katz is the managing partner of Katz Ruby Carle LLP, a premier boutique litigation firm known for its sophisticated handling of high-stakes disputes. With over three decades of litigation experience, Katz is recognized as one of the leading trade secret lawyers in California and across the United States. His strategic insight and relentless advocacy have driven numerous landmark victories in both courtrooms and behind-the-scenes resolutions. Before founding Katz Ruby Carle, Katz was a partner in the Intellectual Property and Business Litigation groups at Morrison & Foerster LLP, where he led and won complex, high-profile cases. His litigation practice spans a wide array of industries—including semiconductors, software, medical devices, healthcare, biotech, manufacturing, energy, and agriculture—representing clients ranging from Fortune 100 companies to regional businesses and family enterprises. A formidable force in any legal forum, Michael Katz combines legal excellence with strategic discretion, earning him the respect of clients, colleagues, and adversaries alike.



Kyle Leingang - Partner, Stradling

Kyle Leingang is a Stradling partner, chairs the firm's Debt Finance Practice and serves as co-chair of the firm's Recruiting Committee. He represents lenders and borrowers in a wide variety of debt finance transactions, including traditional commercial loan agreements, syndicated facilities, asset-based lines, acquisition financing agreements, public company securities offerings, and seller debt related to M&A transactions. Leingang's experience also includes work related to bank mergers and investment transactions on behalf of the U.S. Department of the Treasury while at a former firm. Leingang is also a leading beer, wine, and spirits lawyer and has represented breweries, distilleries, retailers, lenders, brand owners, and investors in a wide variety of matters within those industries, often as outside general counsel.



Justin Owens - Partner, Stradling

With a focus on complex business disputes and class action defense, Justin Owens' aggressive, yet thoughtful, approach to litigation helps his clients secure early victories and avoid protracted lawsuits. Owens has litigated disputes in all industries and has achieved exceptional results in federal and state court matters, as well as private arbitrations. Following a one-year federal clerkship in the Central District of California, Owens honed his trial skills at a large litigation firm where he handled high-profile lawsuits, including a record-breaking fraud case resulting in a \$5 billion recovery for his client. Since joining Stradling in 2015, Owens has a track record of decisive victories for his clients, earning him the regard of clients and peers alike. Owens has been recognized as a leader in the field of business and commercial litigation and was included in the Orange County Business Journal's 2022 "OC 500 Directory of Influence." Owens has been honored as a "Best Lawyer" in commercial litigation every year since 2022 and as a Super Lawyer in 2023 and 2024. Before that he was a "Southern California Rising Star" for six consecutive years and included on various "top" lists including Super Lawyers' "Up and Coming 25: Orange County Rising Stars List" and "Up and Coming 100: Southern California List."



Richard Reisman - Publisher, Orange County Business Journal

Richard Reisman is publisher of the *Orange County Business Journal*. Reisman joined the Business Journal in 1990. Since then, the publication's acceptance by the business community has been dramatic. Paid circulation and advertising volume has grown significantly, making it possibly the top Business Journal in the country. Prior to the business journal, Reisman was director of marketing for the Orange County edition of *The Los Angeles Times*. Earlier in his career, Reisman practiced law in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. While in private practice in Washington, Reisman served as special counsel to the House Ethics Committee. Reisman holds an MBA from UCLA, where he was awarded the R.C. Baker Foundation Fellowship, and a law degree from George Washington University, where he graduated with honors. Reisman is listed in *Who's Who in America* and has served on numerous boards.



Jeffrey M. Verdon - Partner & Chair of Asset Protection, Falcon Rappaport & Berkman LLP

As a partner at Falcon Rappaport & Berkman, Jeffrey M. Verdon is chair of the Asset Protection Practice Group, headquartered in Newport Beach, CA. For more than 30 years, Verdon and his team have provided specialized taxation and estate planning services to Orange County's wealthy families and business owners, pioneering the integration of risk mitigation with advanced estate planning. Verdon authored *Estate Planning for Women Only*, numerous business articles on Kiplinger's Wealth Creation column, and is a sought-after speaker at financial conferences worldwide.

The 11th Annual
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**CONGRATULATIONS
 2025 NOMINEES!**

AI Demand Pro / Travis Easton
 Alpha Motor Corporation / Edward Lee
 Alvarez Enterprises / Gus Alvarez
 APM Manufacturing / Joe Puccio
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 Hoag / Kathy Azeez-Narain
 iBase-t / Dr. Sung Kim
 Iffel International Inc. / Hema Dey
 KaufmanIT Inc. / Matthew Kaufman
 Laguna College of Art + Design (LCAD) / Steve Brittan
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 Planned Parenthood of Orange and
 San Bernardino Counties / Ramona Thomas
 PowerTap Hydrogen Fueling Corp / Salim Rahemtulla
 Pretika MedTech Corporation / Thomas Nichols
 Rand Technology / Andrea Klein
 Renata Medical / Eason Abbott & Dustin Armer
 RepSpark / Meghann Butcher
 RevHub Orange County / Stephan Erkelens
 Revolv3 / Frank Arellano
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 St. Mary's School / Doug Patterson
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 Toshiba / Maegan Lujan
 Toshiba America Business Solutions / Matthew Bull
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 UC Irvine, Paul Merage School of Business /
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Luncheon & Awards Program

September 10, 2025
 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
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 Table of Ten: \$1850



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AI Demand Pro, Costa Mesa*Travis Easton, Founder & CEO*

Travis Easton is the visionary CEO behind AI Demand Pro, a pioneering legal tech platform transforming how personal injury law firms generate settlement demands. A top-performing attorney and co-managing partner at Easton & Easton, he has led the firm to over \$150 million in settlements in just four years. Known for his expertise in pre-litigation strategy and operational optimization, Easton identified one of the industry's biggest inefficiencies—manual demand writing—and set out to solve it. The result was AI Demand Pro, originally developed in-house and now a nationwide solution. The platform enables firms to generate attorney-quality settlement demand drafts in minutes. Trained on real cases by experienced PI attorneys, it produces emotionally resonant, narrative-style letters that maximize case value and reduce overhead at scale. Easton's innovation has empowered law firms to boost efficiency and enhance client service without compromising legal rigor. A recognized leader—honored by Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, and National Trial Lawyers Top 40 Under 40—Easton is now focused on disrupting the legal tech space by equipping firms with AI-powered tools to improve speed, accuracy, and access to justice.

**Alpha Motor Corporation, Irvine***Edward Lee, Founder & CEO*

Edward Lee is the founder and CEO of Alpha Motor Corp., a U.S.-based electric vehicle manufacturer advancing innovation in sustainable mobility. With more than 21 years of experience, he has led vehicle development for global automotive brands including Lexus, Toyota, and Audi. As the creator of the Lexus LC 500 flagship luxury coupe, Lee has earned widespread recognition for his contributions to automotive design. He holds over 20 patents and has received multiple industry awards for both design excellence and business leadership. Lee earned his degree in industrial design with a focus on transportation from the prestigious ArtCenter College of Design.

**Alvarez Enterprises, Santa Ana***Gus Alvarez, CEO*

Gus Alvarez is the founder and CEO of Alvarez Enterprises, a rapidly growing business group headquartered in Orange County. The company oversees a portfolio of mission-driven companies including Quality Health Partners, InTouch Medical Marketing, and the Medical Magnet Foundation. These organizations serve the healthcare and community outreach sectors, focusing on improving patient engagement, supporting independent physicians, and mentoring future healthcare professionals. Under Alvarez's leadership, Alvarez Enterprises has grown by more than 300% in the past few years and now employs more than 200 people across its companies. Alvarez's entrepreneurial journey began with the creation of Team Alvarez Insurance Services, a Medicare-focused agency that he successfully scaled and sold in 2024.

**APM Manufacturing, Orange***Joe Puccio, CEO*

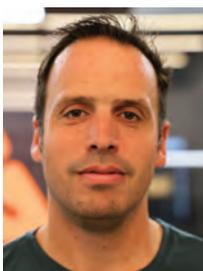
APM Manufacturing is a vertically integrated metal fabrication facility. With five locations totaling more than 100,000 square feet of manufacturing floor space in Southern California, the company maintains in-house expertise with hundreds of unique manufacturing processes. APM serves customers in the technology, aerospace, automotive, military, and space sectors. The company drives innovation from the ground up by utilizing its expertise across multiple foundational manufacturing techniques—providing customers with solutions that are better, lighter, faster, and stronger. APM and its sister companies have matured from a traditional build-to-print parts manufacturer and supplier to a multi-level solutions manufacturer and developer. APM currently delivers to prime contractors in the aerospace and defense industries. The company also partners with the primes, their tier-one suppliers and others to design, engineer, develop, test, and deliver packaged solutions to the customer's specific requirements. APM will reach \$20 million in annual sales in the 2025 fiscal year and is poised to grow to \$40 million in fiscal year 2026 with its current sales backlog.

**Aptiva Care Management, Rancho Santa Margarita***Marc Friedman, Managing Director*

Aptiva Care Management was founded in 2016 with a mission to provide expert guidance, advocacy, and compassionate care to individuals and families facing medical challenges. Since its inception, Aptiva has been deeply involved with the Cerna Foundation and, more recently, The Side House Foundation. These organizations have provided critical assistance to countless individuals and families, offering medical care, counseling, essential supplies, and ongoing support while helping them navigate the complexities of the healthcare system. Beyond its direct client services, Aptiva is committed to broader community support and advocacy. The company has actively contributed to organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and the Traumatic Brain Injury Association, working to advance awareness and resources for those affected by these conditions. Additionally, Marc Friedman created Brain Made Simple, an educational program that has reached thousands across the United States and Canada. This engaging and informative initiative raises awareness about dementia disorders, their treatments, and strategies to slow disease progression. By simplifying complex brain science, Brain Made Simple empowers individuals, caregivers, and healthcare professionals with valuable knowledge and practical tools to improve the lives of those affected by cognitive decline.

**AstroForge, Seal Beach***Matthew Gialich, Co-Founder & CEO*

Matt Gialich is the co-founder and CEO of AstroForge, an aerospace startup building technology to mine asteroids for critical minerals. Founded in 2022, AstroForge is reimagining deep space missions with a fast-moving, vertically integrated approach, focusing on the extraction of platinum group metals (PGMs) from near-Earth asteroids. These metals are critical to clean energy technologies, medical applications, and high-performance electronics. Under Gialich's leadership, the company has raised more than \$60 million and has already launched its first mission to deep space. AstroForge is preparing for its second and most ambitious deep-space mission, Vestri, which will analyze the surface composition of a metallic asteroid. The company now employs over 40 engineers and staff and continues to grow rapidly. Gialich's bold, iterative approach to building space hardware—rooted in lessons from previous missions—is helping redefine how private companies can pursue ambitious scientific and commercial goals beyond Earth.

**ATOMICS, Irvine***Dana Biechele-Speziale, Founder & CEO*

ATOMICS is revolutionizing how digital data is stored and processed by using small molecules. Molecular information can be exceedingly compact—up to 100 million times more compact than transistor or magnetic-based devices—completely invisible to the human eye and can be printed onto any object or surface. This opens the ability to hide information at the smallest of scales. Early adopters include companies in the print-on-demand space to enhance warehouse automations and quality control through invisible asset tracking, brands who wish to protect their products from counterfeiting, as well as sensitive applications in covert data storage with government entities. ATOMICS spun out of Brown University in 2023, where co-founders Dana Biechele-Speziale and Selahaddin Gumus received their PhDs in chemistry and the ATOMICS research started out of a DARPA contract. Since then, they have won a \$1.9 million direct-to-phase II SBIR from the Army, raised a \$350 thousand pre-seed round from SOSV HAX, won more than \$300 thousand at local, national, and international competitions, and hired a team of seven employees.

**Ayana Bio, Aliso Viejo***Frank Jaksch, CEO*

Frank Jaksch serves as Ayana Bio's chief executive officer and is a member of its board of directors. As the founder and former CEO of Niagen Bioscience (formerly ChromaDex, NASDAQ: NAGE), Jaksch has more than 25 years of experience developing plant bioactives and natural ingredient solutions in the life science, food, beverage, and dietary supplement spaces. He has built an ingredient and end consumer product business from the ground up, ultimately taking the company public on NASDAQ. Having been immersed in the world of natural products for decades, Jaksch understands the significant challenges encumbering the industry. To date, sourcing health and wellness natural products from agriculture has proven unsustainable and unwieldy, with product quality suffering from adulteration largely owing to supply scarcity and costly development expenses. At the helm of Ayana Bio, Jaksch seeks to modernize the health and wellness sector and in so doing provide affordable and reliable ingredients. He believes that Ayana Bio's technology platform is key to developing a scientific solution to reliability and cost.

**BDP EnviroTech LLC, Irvine***Eric Li, CEO*

Eric Li is the CEO of BDP EnviroTech, a global leader in game-changing wastewater treatment solutions focused on nutrient removal and energy efficiency. Since its introduction in 2013, BDP's patented low-dissolved oxygen mainstream process and innovative hydraulic circulation system have set new standards in wastewater treatment. Under Li's leadership, the company has grown to over 70 installations worldwide, including a landmark 53 MGD industrial project—equivalent to a 200 MGD municipal plant. BDP has been recognized across France, the United States, India, Taiwan, and mainland China for its technical excellence and high nitrogen removal rates. The company has delivered breakthrough projects for major global clients, such as the BP-Sinopec joint venture, semiconductor plants, and World Bank initiatives. With fully automated systems and modular solutions, BDP reduces operating costs, carbon emissions, and maintenance needs while achieving up to 99% ammonia nitrogen removal. Li's vision continues to drive BDP's expansion into municipal, industrial, and international markets.

**Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD), Irvine***Tim Patz, Worldwide President, BD Advanced Patient Monitoring*

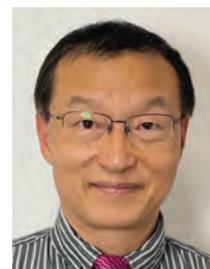
Tim Patz is the worldwide president of BD Advanced Patient Monitoring (APM), a business unit within BD (Becton, Dickinson and Company), a global medical technology company with more than 70,000 associates worldwide. APM, acquired by BD in 2024 and employing about 4,500 people globally, delivers smart, connected care solutions that include the Swan-Ganz pulmonary artery catheter, tissue oximetry sensors, and AI-enabled monitoring technologies. These innovations support clinical decision-making and help improve patient outcomes across critical care settings. Appointed to his current role in January 2025, Patz leads APM's commercial strategy, innovation and R&D initiatives, operational and quality excellence, and the continued integration of APM into BD. Under his leadership, APM continues to expand its global footprint and accelerate innovation in data-driven, patient-centered care. Patz brings more than 20 years of experience at APM, with a strong track record in sales and marketing leadership. He holds a Bachelor of Science in materials science and engineering, a Master of Science in bioengineering, and an MBA.

**Blank Rome LLP, Irvine***Joseph Welch, Partner, Finance*

Joseph Welch is a distinguished attorney at Blank Rome LLP, a leading law firm known for its comprehensive legal services and commitment to client success. Welch specializes in addressing challenges in supply chains, financial volatility, risk mitigation, and maximizing creditor recoveries. With extensive experience in real estate, insolvency, restructuring, bankruptcy, and litigation, he provides clients with in-depth insights and strategies. He serves a diverse range of industries, including lending, leasing, agribusiness, agrifinance, and real estate, and has represented international and Fortune 100 companies, large banks, investors, lenders, ad hoc groups, and official creditor committees. Welch has represented creditors in bankruptcy and insolvency matters, documented numerous multimillion-dollar secured lending transactions, advised some of the largest agricultural companies as outside general counsel, and served as lead trial and appellate counsel in significant cases.

**BodyEnergy Technology Co. Ltd., Irvine***Hui Yan, Founder*

Hui Yan is the visionary founder and inventor behind BodyEnergy, a groundbreaking fitness technology company based in the United States. With a background in science and engineering and a passion for safe and sustainable health solutions, Yan developed the BodyEnergy treadmill—the world's first treadmill powered entirely by human movement, eliminating the need for electricity. The innovation earned global recognition when it was named one of Time magazine's Best Inventions of 2021. Under Yan's leadership, the company has advanced rapidly from concept to commercial prototype and is now in the manufacturing stage. Plans for large-scale deployment are underway, including a high-profile performance at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games featuring 100 Olympic medalists using the BodyEnergy



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treadmill in a tribute to Kobe Bryant. Yan's vision, combining athletic excellence, sustainability, and technological innovation, continues to drive the company's momentum.

c./o Dragon Kim Foundation, Irvine

Jonathan Yan, Rising High School Senior at Sage Hill & Dragon Kim Foundation 2025 Fellow

Jonathan Yan is a gifted rising senior at Sage Hill School and founder of Ride Smart, a program that combines revolutionary computer vision technology that detects vehicles in cyclists' blind spots with community education to improve cyclists' safety. This program was selected and supported by the Dragon Kim Foundation. Yan's career goal is to utilize technology to enhance human health and improve quality of life. He is proficient in programming languages, including Python, Java, and R. He also has extensive experience working with machine learning, having published a paper in PeerJ Computer Science after developing a methodology that utilizes minimal clinical parameters to generate accurate ML predictions. Yan has also competed at the state level with Sage Hill in the DECA competition. Finally, he has interned at UCI, where he combined both his computer science skills and wet-lab techniques to improve cancer treatment. Yan's achievements have been recognized with publications, awards at the Orange County Science and Engineering Fair, and the Congressional App Challenge.

**Caribou Industries, Santa Ana**

Michael Harrah, Founder & President

Philanthropist and developer, Michael F. Harrah is the founder and president of Caribou Industries, a diversified development firm operating 40 subsidiaries across premiere real estate, aviation, hospitality, and entertainment. Since founding Caribou in 1977, Harrah has grown the company to more than 1,100 employees with operations in California, Arizona, Hawaii, and Nevada. A visionary in urban redevelopment, Harrah is renowned for his ambitious commitment to transforming urban environments. He has acquired, developed, or renovated more than 10 million square feet of commercial, retail, and residential space throughout his career, primarily in Santa Ana. Notable projects include the transformational One Broadway Plaza, a 37-story, 700,000-square-foot tower set to be the tallest and most sustainable mixed-use building in Orange County; the Gensler-designed 3rd & Broadway Promenade; and 625 North Grand. Once complete, these projects will have generated thousands of jobs, attracted numerous investment opportunities, and helped to significantly enhance Santa Ana's prosperity. Through all his projects, Harrah remains committed to "preserving the past and ensuring the future" of Santa Ana.

**Cern Corporation Inc., Coto de Caza**

Gregg Klang, Founder & CEO

Cern Corporation was established to address a significant "unmet need" in women's health for a science-based, non-drug treatment, effective for both yeast and bacterial vaginosis. Cern is now in human clinicals in Orange County and has shown effective treatments in both indications including drug resistant pathogen. Cern is receiving global recognition for its development and is now positioning for FDA approval. The company is comprised of scientists and clinicians, several of whom are women, who have successfully developed a treatment for patients for whom drug-based treatments are ineffective, inappropriate, or undesired.

**Chapman University, Orange**

Dr. Pradip K. Shukla, The Shah Family Endowed Chair in Innovativeness

Dr. Pradip K. Shukla serves as The Shah Family Endowed Chair in Innovativeness. This position prepares the next generation of creative, high-tech thinking business leaders in low-tech industries nationally. Dr. Shukla teaches a creativity and innovation entrepreneurial ventures course, and he oversees an Innovative High-Tech Thinkers Speakers Series. Dr. Shukla also is the director of the annual awards program: The Shah Awards - Recognizing Leaders Applying High-Tech Thinking to Low-Tech Industries. Dr. Shukla previously served as vice-chancellor for entrepreneurship at Chapman University. Dr.

Shukla, www.pkshukla.com, has consulted with entrepreneurial firms at all stages—including business plan, inception, growth, succession planning, going public, and liquidation. He received the "Best Advisor" award from C-E-O.org, and founded www.BestCEOAdvisor.com to assist and coach CEOs, executives/managers, teams, and firms. Dr. Shukla has served on the board of directors and advisory boards of for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations. Dr. Shukla was selected in 2019 to receive a Marquis Who's Who in America Lifetime Achievement Award. He received an Innovative Pedagogy Grant Award to develop a new course on The Rise of Asian American Leaders in Business.

**City of Hope Orange County, Irvine**

Amrita Krishnan, M.D., Executive Medical Director, Hematology; Nason-Hollingsworth Endowed Chair for Multiple Myeloma, City of Hope

Amrita Krishnan, M.D., medical director of hematology at City of Hope Orange County, is an internationally renowned physician-scientist who has turned multiple myeloma, a blood cancer, into one of the most promising areas for cancer research. Her work has led to significant increases in survival. She defines the role of optimal therapies after stem cell transplant and leads trials of new therapies. She has been instrumental in leading "first-in-human" trials of myeloma drugs, leading to FDA approval of four of them. These accomplishments are the latest in a lifetime of innovation. She was instrumental in bringing transplant therapy to HIV patients with lymphoma, who were previously denied transplant due to their HIV status. This work led to a national study, and HIV is no longer an exclusion for hematopoietic cell transplantation. Dr. Krishnan, the author of more than 200 research papers, is an expert shaping the future of cancer care. Patients from around the world seek her expertise and compassionate care.

**Clean Earth Rovers, Costa Mesa**

Michael Arens, Co-Founder & CEO

Municipal and nonprofit monitoring programs rely on manual hand-sampling and hand-cleaning of pollutants from waterways. Clean Earth Rovers automates water quality monitoring and management by deploying its DataPod™ smart buoy for scalable pollution analytics and its Rover (Roomba® for the water) to autonomously clean oil, algae, fish kills, and marine debris from lakes, ports, harbors, and marinas.

**Codazen, Irvine**

Mike Merchant, Founder & CEO

Codazen is a technology company at the forefront of reshaping how people experience the internet. With 45 team members and headquarters in Irvine, Codazen partners with world-class organizations to build scalable digital experiences by combining software engineering, design, and data intelligence. Under the leadership of founder and CEO Mike Merchant, Codazen has grown rapidly, achieving multi-million-dollar annual revenues and long-standing partnerships with industry leaders like Meta. In the past year, Codazen launched its boldest innovation yet: Ready3D, a platform designed to transform conventional 2D webpages into spatial, interactive experiences accessible on VR headsets and desktop browsers. This breakthrough positions Codazen as a first mover in building the "immersive web"—a next-generation layer of the internet that blends traditional interfaces with 3D environments. Codazen is also advancing AI-driven technologies to power intelligent design systems and spatial computing tools, enabling brands to deliver richer, more adaptive digital experiences.

**COHN Nutrition, Costa Mesa**

Dr. Howard Cohn, D.C., Founder

For more than three decades, Dr. Howard Cohn, D.C., has been a well-respected and impactful global product innovator for health and wellness companies. His vision has always been to launch his own supplement line bearing his name and legacy. COHN Nutrition officially launched in April 2025 with the flagship product, H2 Blast, a first-of-its-kind, ingestible molecular hydrogen powder. Along with an Affiliate Program and Wholesale Professional Program to help fuel product growth. The company's mission is to harness the power of nature's fundamental elements—carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen (COHN)—to create premium, organic, plant-based supplements. COHN Nutrition is dedicated to empowering the body's innate ability to heal itself and perform at its highest level. In just seven short weeks after launching, the locally based Costa Mesa startup company has grown by tens of thousands of dollars in product sales and gained several hundred affiliates and customers. The company is poised to gain rapid traction as the next phase of the go-to-market strategy rolls out with the second product release set to happen in the coming weeks followed by the growth phase of additional product launches plus expanded marketing and sales efforts.

**Complex Appellate Litigation Group, Newport Beach**

Mary-Christine "M.C." Sungaila, Partner

M.C. Sungaila has practiced at the frontiers of the law throughout her storied career. She leads the Complex Appellate Litigation Group's Orange County office, taking on some of the most high-impact appellate cases in the state and nationwide. Sungaila is also a thought leader in Space Law. Her work in this emerging field has earned her an invitation to a United Nations conference in Vienna, participation in a U.S. State Department Commercial Space Roundtable, and opportunities to curate space law programs throughout Southern California. She even created a flagship Space Law and Policy course at Loyola Law School—the only class of its kind in the state. Sungaila never tires in her pursuit of innovative solutions to emergent issues. She is the creator and host of the groundbreaking podcast, The Portia Project®, one of FeedSpot's Top women-in-law podcasts worldwide. The podcast features accomplished women from law and business, including more than 75 judges across 230 episodes. Sungaila's extensive community service includes serving on the board of the Pacific Symphony and the John Wayne Airport Arts Commission.

**Dexign 3D, Irvine**

Ghazala Miiftah, Founder & CEO

Dexign 3D is an innovation-driven company focused on transforming the global building industry through high-impact sustainability solutions. With a mission to deliver efficient building project delivery with minimal waste while making net-zero buildings a global reality, Dexign 3D is setting new standards for responsible development. Its flagship product, the Innovative Design System (IDS), is a breakthrough platform designed to revolutionize project delivery through precision, innovation, and AI-integrated tools. Dexign 3D Research has developed the True Net-Zero Equation (TNZE), a universal scientific standard for validating and achieving real net-zero emissions in buildings. Under the TNZE framework, two platforms have launched: the TNZE Alliance, which unites forward-thinking leaders and organizations, and TNZE-CC v1, which provides consulting and certification services for both new and existing buildings. In recent years, Dexign 3D has gained industry recognition, including a Global Architecture Award (Build Awards 2023) and a finalist placement in Octane OC's High-Tech Awards 2024. As the company scales, many more transformative technologies and products are set to emerge from the IDS platform.

**DoozerAI, Laguna Hills**

Paul Chada, Co-Founder & CEO

Paul Chada is the co-founder and CEO of DoozerAI, where he's pioneering the next wave of autonomous digital co-workers that go beyond traditional automation. A developer at heart, Chada has uniquely lived the entire automation evolution—from building a Gartner-rated enterprise process automation platform at Singularity (now Tungsten Automation) to building an AI-first digital agent platform at DoozerAI. Chada studied AI at the University of Edinburgh and has nearly three decades of hands-on experience in the automation world. Chada combines deep technical expertise with global and Fortune 500 enterprise sales success at companies including Dreamworks, Qualcomm, and Activision. His insights on agentic AI have been featured in InfoWorld and CIO.com, where he talks about the potential of autonomous agents. His experience spans both building automation platforms and deploying them at scale, giving him practical insight into what businesses need from AI automation. DoozerAI's technology powers a variety of digital agents used daily by organizations globally and is also proud to power the Wyland National Mayor's Challenge, processing personalized impact reports at scale while demonstrating real-world AI agent capabilities.

**DreamHost, Brea**

Chris Ghazarian, COO & General Counsel

DreamHost is a premier managed WordPress hosting provider, giving over 400,000 small businesses, developers, and content creators the tools they need to own their digital presence. Powered by over 350 team





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members and web professionals worldwide, DreamHost is committed to helping its customers find success on the Open Web with dedicated support resources and top-tier talent. Recently, DreamHost expanded its product offerings and team during a period of rapid growth, with clear milestones and a comprehensive product vision made possible by a forward-thinking leadership team, including the chief operating officer and general counsel, whose innovative legal and operational strategies have helped guide the company through complex digital, regulatory, and operational transformations. Learn more at DreamHost.com.

Drop Socials, Irvine

Adrourshan Mardirossian, Founder & CEO

As a SoCal founder of a company, Mardirossian is energized by his community but also aware of the unique tension between social energy and disconnection. He and his team are addressing one of the most pressing generational shifts unfolding here and beyond with his company, Drop Socials. There are platforms to connect with people across the world, but not with the people right in front of us. It's become harder than ever for people to make new connections in real life, and consumer behavior is outpacing existing platforms. Thus, Mardirossian and his team have built a geolocation-based app that lets people discover other users in their proximity and connect with them in real time. He is paving a new space that bridges the gap between two massive markets: social media apps and connection apps. A few highlights about Drop Socials: strong early traction and validated demand, with more than 1,000 users concentrated in SoCal, a B2B professional version in development to utilize Drop's application to enhance strategic networking at professional events, and a clear roadmap to replicate GTM strategies and scale.

**e360, Irvine**

Brad Bussie, Chief Technology & Security Officer

Brad Bussie is an award-winning cybersecurity expert with more than 16 years of experience in information security. He is the chief technology and security officer at e360 and is a recognized author, security strategist, and industry thought leader. Bussie's expertise spans cybersecurity, identity and access management, vulnerability management, governance, risk, and compliance, ensuring e360's solutions remain robust and adaptable in an evolving threat landscape. Before joining e360, he held senior roles at Trace3, Steatthbits Technologies, and Quest Software, demonstrating a broad and deep knowledge of security architecture and risk services. Bussie is passionate about helping organizations protect their most sensitive data through practical, data-centric security strategies such as Zero Trust frameworks. He has spoken at global industry events and is dedicated to simplifying complex security challenges for leaders across commercial, federal, intelligence, and DoD sectors. His mission is to provide actionable guidance that enhances organizational cyber resilience without oversimplifying the complexity of security. He holds a Bachelor of Science in information systems security and an MBA in technology management, complemented by premier certifications including CISSP, Security+, and ITIL v3.

**e360, Irvine**

Mike Strohl, CEO

Since joining e360 in 1994, Strohl has played a crucial role in developing key business partnerships and establishing e360 as an award-winning enterprise technology partner dedicated to providing solutions that empower the modern enterprise. As a trusted advisor to prominent healthcare, financial services, entertainment, education, and public sector organizations across the United States, e360 assists its clients in achieving their business goals through the delivery of essential technology, services, and solutions in Cybersecurity, digital workplace, modern infrastructure, cloud solutions, and managed services. e360 has received numerous accolades for its success and growth, including 10 years on the prestigious Inc. 500|5000 list; 16 consecutive years on CRN's Solution Provider 500; 12 consecutive years on the CRN Tech Elite 250; and recognition in the CRN Fast Growth 150 and CRN Triple Crown Awards. In 2025, e360 was named Citrix Partner of the Year for the ninth time in the history of its decades-long relationship. The company has also been acknowledged as Partner of the Year by Cisco, Google Cloud, Microsoft, and NetApp, among others. Strohl holds a Bachelor of Science in business administration from San Francisco State University.

**EndoCyclic Therapeutics, Irvine**

Tanya Petrossian, Ph.D., Founder & CEO

Dr. Tanya Petrossian is the founder and CEO of EndoCyclic Therapeutics, a company developing the first curative, non-hormonal therapeutic for endometriosis. Endometriosis affects an astounding 10% of women in their reproductive years, yet remains one of the most under-researched and misdiagnosed conditions in medicine. Before founding EndoCyclic in 2017, Dr. Petrossian held R&D and commercial product leadership roles at both large and emerging life science companies, including Allergan and Affymetrix, where she led a team that launched the first FDA-cleared whole genome diagnostic. Working in women's health for several years before founding EndoCyclic, she made the decision to build the company with a singular focus—to cure the disease that has plagued her for decades. EndoCyclic's platform uses innovative pH-sensitive peptides to precisely target diseased tissue while sparing healthy cells. In 2025, the company received a perfect NIH grant score of 10 for both innovation and commercial viability. Dr. Petrossian holds a Ph.D. from UCLA and completed postdoctoral training at Sanford Burnham Prebys Institute and UCSD, as well as fellowship training at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

**enVeno Medical Corporation, Irvine**

Robert Berman, CEO

Robert Berman is CEO of enVeno Medical Corporation, an Irvine, California-based, late clinical-stage medical device company preparing for FDA approval of VenoValve—a first-in-class surgical replacement vein valve to treat severe deep venous chronic venous insufficiency (CVI). The condition affects about 2.5 million to 3.5 million people in the United States and causes debilitating leg pain, ulcers, and loss of mobility. For many, CVI means missed work, trips to wound care, isolation, and the inability to perform everyday tasks without pain. VenoValve addresses the root cause of CVI. Manufactured in Irvine from porcine tissue and mounted on a stainless steel frame, it is surgically implanted in the femoral vein to restore one-way blood flow and improve circulation. Berman raised more than \$130 million while guiding the company through its U.S. pivotal trial, demonstrating that 85% of patients achieved significant clinical improvement in disease severity at one-year, with sustained quality-of-life gains and limited device-related safety concerns. Under his leadership, enVeno secured FDA



Breakthrough Device Designation and is on track for FDA approval in H2-2025—poised to bring long-overdue relief to patients suffering from severe CVI, addressing a multibillion-dollar market.

Esperto Medical, Irvine

Raymond Jimenez, CTO

Esperto Medical is a medical device startup out of Caltech that builds non-invasive blood pressure monitoring devices. Esperto's technology builds on the foundations of vital sign monitoring pioneered by other Orange County-based companies, including Edwards Lifesciences, Masimo, and Baxter. Esperto's unique approach enables safer, more accurate blood pressure monitoring in the hospital and remote patient monitoring settings, where tools from current medical providers have fallen short.

**Evolus, Newport Beach**

David Moatazedi, President & CEO

David Moatazedi is the president and CEO of Evolus (NASDAQ:EOLS) having joined the company in May 2018. Under his leadership, Evolus has achieved significant milestones, including regulatory approvals for injectable aesthetic products including Jeuveau®/Nuceiva® and, more recently, Evolysse™/Estyme®, operating today in eight countries. The company focuses on performance beauty and has seen a remarkable revenue growth of 32% in 2024, reaching \$266 million, and has consistently grown over 30% for five consecutive years. Moatazedi previously served as senior vice president of U.S. medical aesthetics at Allergan™, where he managed a portfolio of leading aesthetic brands and led several successful acquisitions. He has nearly two decades of experience in the industry and holds an MBA in marketing and a Bachelor of Arts in chemistry.

**Exfluentia, Rancho Santa Margarita**

Cameron Jonsson, CEO

Cameron Jonsson is the founder and CEO of Exfluentia, a leading healthcare technology company transforming provider engagement. With a career spanning over two decades, Jonsson is an accomplished entrepreneur, former advertising agency owner, and executive with a proven history of driving success. He has managed more than \$1 billion in ad spending across marketing, user acquisition, and pioneering technology solutions. A passionate advocate for growth and innovation, Jonsson plays an active role in the Orange County start-up ecosystem, mentoring entrepreneurs and supporting non-profits to achieve their business objectives. His leadership seamlessly blends strategic vision with a dedication to creating meaningful, technology-driven impact. Known for his unwavering commitment to ingenuity and his deep devotion to family, Jonsson embodies a balance of professional excellence and personal integrity in every endeavor.

**Eyedaptic, Laguna Hills**

Jay Cormier, Founder & CEO

Jay Cormier is the founder and CEO of Eyedaptic, which he launched in 2016 with the mission of revitalizing the quality of life for people with age-related macular degeneration (AMD). This is one of the largest unmet needs in eye care today, affecting more than 150 million people worldwide with no existing cure or therapy. AMD leads to a loss of central vision, making everyday tasks—such as reading a bill or finding canned goods in a grocery store—difficult or impossible. Together with co-founders, who have deep technological backgrounds as well as ophthalmology retina specialists, the team set forth to use augmented reality with embedded natural vision software to accomplish this goal. After three years, working with nearly 100 patients, a successful clinical study, and hundreds of hours of beta usage, Eyedaptic's first product was introduced at the end of 2019. Revenue is now growing fourfold per year, and Eyedaptic is helping people with vision impairments across the globe.

**Faradaysemi, a TDK Company, Irvine**

Parviz Parto, Founder & CEO

As a founder and CEO, Parviz Parto is passionate about driving innovation in semiconductor and power solutions. Over the past decade, he's had the privilege of leading cutting-edge advancements in integrated power technologies, shaping the future of AI, 5G, IoT, and cloud computing applications. Throughout his career, Parto's built high-performance teams, fostered strategic partnerships, and spearheaded technological breakthroughs that deliver efficiency, scalability, and transformative impact. As the company navigates an evolving industry landscape, Parto remains committed to advancing semiconductor and power integration to meet the demands of next-generation systems. He is always eager to engage with leaders, innovators, and visionaries to discuss industry challenges, emerging trends, and strategic opportunities that drive progress.

**Finally Quiet Inc., Aliso Viejo**

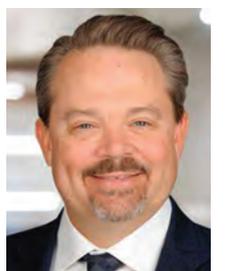
Peman Montazemi, Founder & CEO

Peman Montazemi is the founder and CEO of Finally Quiet!, a medical technology startup based in Orange County, California, focused on revolutionizing wireless communication and hearing protection in high-noise clinical environments. With over 24 years of experience in medical devices and diagnostics, Montazemi has previously commercialized 13 successful products and been part of four exits totaling over \$2.8 billion. Finally Quiet! is his latest venture—a patented, AI-driven communication platform that connects humans to real-time data through speech recognition in loud workplaces, starting with dentistry. The company has developed a second-generation prototype, filed global IP with Knobbe Martens, and was awarded the 2025 Innovator of the Year in Healthcare & Innovation by the Greater Irvine Chamber of Commerce. Backed by a world-class leadership team and clinical advisors, Finally Quiet! is currently raising its seed round and preparing for pilot launches across dental and surgical clinics nationwide. Under Montazemi's leadership, the company is quickly emerging as a category-defining solution in clinical communication technology.

**Fisher Phillips LLP, Irvine**

John Polson, Chairman & Managing Partner

John Polson is chairman of Fisher Phillips, an international labor and employment law firm with more than 700 lawyers. Since taking the helm



Behind Every Medical Advancement Is a Person Who Dares to Say, "We'll Go First"

We are honored to recognize Tom for being nominated by OCBJ for Innovator of the Year. Tom has been at the forefront of transforming the ophthalmic landscape—changing the standard of care for glaucoma, advancing the treatment for corneal disease, and pioneering innovation in retinal care. With bold thinking and real-world solutions, Tom continues to push boundaries and redefine what's possible, one breakthrough at a time. This nomination is a testament to Tom's relentless pursuit of next-generation therapies that help patients preserve vision and improve outcomes across cornea, glaucoma, and retina diseases.

Help us congratulate Tom on this well-deserved nomination!



Tom Burns
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

GLAUKOS[®]
TRANSFORMING VISION

2025 INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES

in 2022, Polson has driven rapid expansion, resulting in a nearly 30% revenue growth, new domestic offices in Alabama, Maine, and Utah, four new international offices in Mexico and Japan, and more than 10 new industry and practice groups. Starting his legal career at Fisher Phillips straight out of Loyola Law School in 1991, Polson went on to co-manage the firm's Irvine office, now its largest. Polson joined the firm's management committee (i.e., board of directors) in 2014. His subsequent appointment to chairman in 2022 was historic as Polson is the first partner outside Atlanta to hold the position since the firm's founding in 1943. Innovation is part of the DNA of Fisher Phillips under his leadership. The firm is an industry frontrunner, developing new generative AI technologies that will forever change the legal industry, earning the firm awards and client accolades for its technology driven client service.

Free Wheelchair Mission, Irvine

Nuka Hart, CEO

Nuka Hart serves as CEO of Free Wheelchair Mission, a humanitarian nonprofit that provides brand-new, durable wheelchairs to individuals living with disabilities in developing countries. Since joining the organization in 2017, Hart has led Free Wheelchair Mission through a period of sustained growth and impact. With a network of distribution partners worldwide, the nonprofit has provided 1.5 million wheelchairs across 95 countries. For less than \$100, a wheelchair can be built, shipped, and delivered, providing hope, renewed dignity, and new opportunities. Under Hart's leadership, the organization has expanded its global reach, strengthened strategic partnerships, and introduced new mobility solutions to better serve people living with disabilities. In June 2023, Hart led the team to expand wheelchair production by partnering with Krypton Industries, a second wheelchair manufacturer, increasing the organization's capacity to produce more wheelchairs to serve more people. Additionally, under Hart's leadership as CEO, the Free Wheelchair Mission team developed a cutting-edge new wheelchair design, GEN 4 JOY.

**Glaukos Corporation, Aliso Viejo**

Thomas Burns, Chairman & CEO

Thomas Burns is chairman and CEO of Glaukos Corporation (NYSE: GKOS), a leading global ophthalmic pharmaceutical and medical technology company focused on developing and commercializing novel therapies for the treatment of glaucoma, corneal disorders, and retinal diseases. Having served as CEO since 2002, Burns has been instrumental in shaping the company's strategic vision and innovation-driven culture, helping grow Glaukos from an early-stage startup into a diversified, global, high-growth ophthalmic industry leader. Under Burns' leadership spanning 23 years, Glaukos pioneered a completely new treatment paradigm for glaucoma called micro-invasive glaucoma surgery (MIGS) and more recently launched iDose® TR, a revolutionary first-of-its-kind, long-duration, intracameral procedural pharmaceutical designed to deliver 24/7 glaucoma drug therapy inside the eye for extended periods of time.

**Gloves for Grief, Irvine**

Terra Pickett, Co-Founder & Executive Director

Terra Pickett is the co-founder and executive director of Gloves for Grief, a nonprofit organization based in Orange County, California. Formed in 2023, the organization was born out of Pickett's personal loss and a vision to transform grief through movement, mindfulness, and community. In just over two years, Gloves for Grief has served more than 1,000 grieving individuals through wellness events, support groups, and healing-centered programs, marking significant early growth and impact. Before launching the nonprofit, Pickett spent over a decade in the luxury fashion industry, most recently as director of sales at St. John Knits. After the loss of her son Weston in March of 2022, Terra felt called to create something meaningful from her pain. Her journey through grief revealed a need for more holistic, accessible support—and led to the founding of Gloves for Grief with co-founder Ashley Guarrasi. Pickett was recently honored with the Resilience Award and named an Inspirational Member by the Mission Viejo Chamber of Commerce. She lives in Orange County with her husband, son Wyatt, and two stepchildren.

**Heads Up Vest (Quest Vest LLC), Seal Beach**

Joe Pehanich, CEO, Creator & Owner

Joe Pehanich and his wife, Lauryn, have been coaching soccer for over 20 years. In forming Heads Up Vest with co-innovators Frank Phung and Alvin Phung, they developed a unique training solution to teach players the elite movement of scanning the field—playing with the head up. "As coaches, we had a problem. So, we created the solution." For decades, experts recognized the importance of head scanning as a crucial part of teamwork, yet players continued to struggle, relying on their peripheral vision to identify teammates wearing practice vests that hang as low as the hipline. So, Pehanich and his team developed the first garment-based solution—the HEADS UP VEST® training vest, which employs a patent-pending design that restricts team identification to the neckline, forcing players to lift their heads and take in their surroundings. In three short years, Heads Up Vest has become the trusted provider of player-awareness-training vests to thousands of clubs and schools across the nation, as well as to countries such as the UK, Spain, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and the Netherlands.

**Hoag, Newport Beach**

Kathy Azeez-Narain, Senior Vice President, Chief Digital & Customer Innovation Officer

Kathy Azeez-Narain leads the development of Hoag's digital strategy and transformation to maintain Hoag's position as an innovator in delivering both the highest quality care and exceptional patient experiences. This includes optimizing the relationship between patients and their health information data, utilizing digital tools to develop, design, and enhance patient experience, and effectively moving patients from offline to online by way of a comprehensive digital eco-system. Azeez-Narain is a digital product leader with more than a decade of experience in product development and marketing within the financial services industry. She joins Hoag from American Express, where she held various leadership roles driving digital product, marketing, and data strategies for the company.

**iBase-t, Lake Forest**

Dr. Sung Kim, Chief Technology Officer

Since 1986, iBase-t has been driving innovation in the world's most complex manufacturing environments. Headquartered in Southern California with a growing global footprint, iBase-t is a midsize enterprise with deep domain expertise across aerospace and defense, electronics, industrial equipment, nuclear, satellite and space, and shipbuilding. Its flagship platform,

Solumina, is purpose-built for highly regulated industries where safety, precision, and traceability are critical. Solumina seamlessly integrates manufacturing execution, supplier quality management, and maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO), enabling manufacturers to improve efficiency, ensure compliance, and deliver higher-quality products—faster. In industries where every action on the shop floor can affect the safety of a commercial flight or the success of a space launch, minimizing human error is essential. Under the technology leadership of Chief Technology Officer Sung Kim, iBase-t has accelerated innovation and established itself as a strategic force in digital transformation. The company is a trusted partner to nine of the top 10 aerospace and defense manufacturers, with consistent double-digit growth and successful cloud deployments at leaders like Northrop Grumman, Pratt & Whitney, and GE Aerospace.

**Iffel International Inc., Anaheim Hills**

Hema Dey, CEO

Hema Dey is the visionary founder and CEO of Iffel International, an award-winning on-demand AI marketing agency based in Anaheim Hills, California. With over 30 years' experience across more than 35 countries—including leadership roles in Paris, London, and Shanghai—Dey pioneered the SEO2Sales™ methodology, now enhanced with generative engine optimization (GEO), to help clients attract qualified leads and close high-value deals. Under her leadership, Iffel International has grown into a future-ready MarTech agency powered by a hybrid team of human talent and AI. The firm proudly serves clients across healthcare, legal, manufacturing, and professional services, and operates as a HIPAA-compliant digital marketing partner—supporting privacy-first solutions for the healthcare industry. Dey is also innovating with cloned AI agents that act as digital sales professionals, enabling business owners to scale with efficiency, secure ready-to-close leads, and optimize client acquisition. She is a World Class New Zealander (2013) and gLEnnovate Global Innovation Award winner, continuously pushing the boundaries of marketing through her SEO Lab and global thought leadership.

**KaufmanIT Inc., Irvine**

Matthew Kaufman, CEO

Matthew Kaufman has provided IT leadership for more than 20 years. Prior to founding KaufmanIT Inc. in 2010, he served in various roles across the engineering, professional services, legal, and financial services sectors. Kaufman holds a Bachelor of Science in computer engineering and an MBA, both from UC Irvine. Kaufman founded KaufmanIT with the goal of becoming a leading IT services provider to small businesses throughout Southern California. His highly credentialed, all-U.S. team of 25 engineers and technicians, now delivers enterprise-level solutions that provide peace of mind at an accessible price point to companies with up to 500 users nationwide. After years of steady progress, thanks primarily to client referrals, KaufmanIT has experienced significant growth, expanding by approximately 70% over the past couple years. Kaufman's commitment to his employees and clients has gained notice, as evidenced by KaufmanIT being named a "Best Place to Work" by the Orange County Business Journal in both 2024 and 2025. KaufmanIT has also been named to the prestigious MSP501, a global ranking of top managed service providers, for three consecutive years.

**Laguna College of Art + Design (LCAD), Laguna Beach**

Steve Brittan, President & CEO

Throughout his career in college education, commercial architecture, and local government, Steve Brittan has brought extensive leadership experience at the intersection of art and design. His innovative, forward-thinking approach to the environmental, economic, social, and technological impacts on the arts has gained him recognition as a published writer and speaker. Brittan has served on academic and corporate boards, fine art and graduate design jury panels, and mentored technology startups. His expertise in sustainable urbanization and art and architecture education has led to speaking engagements on podcasts, national conferences, and panels. He taught art and architecture at institutions including Columbia University, RISD, Boston Architectural College, and Harvard University, where he earned his master's degree in architecture with distinction in design. He received his bachelor's degree in architecture with distinction in design from the University of Cape Town. Steve is passionate about practice-based learning and established multi-disciplinary collaborations for students and faculty with internationally recognized design industry partners and private art institutions. He is currently president and CEO of Laguna College of Art + Design.

**Lionheart Longevity & Wellness, Newport Beach**

Howard Leonhardt, CEO

This med spa is aimed at longevity and wellness. With patent technologies created by our CEO, Howard Leonhardt, the company can treat aging skin, hair loss, ED, and joint health.

**Live Good Inc., Irvine**

Jennifer Chi, Founder & CEO

Jennifer Chi has devoted her entire career to working on human rights matters. Born in Detroit to a Taiwanese American family, Chi received a Bachelor of Arts in international relations and philosophy from Stanford University. During her undergraduate studies, she assisted scholars at the Hoover Research Institution think tank in analyzing disease migration in developing nations. Her first job out of college was at a public interest law firm where she counseled detained children who had been trafficked into the country. Chi spent time at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., working on policy issues concerning school construction and safety in the post-Columbine era. She earned her law degree from George Washington University before becoming an investigator examining factory production in Asia and working on human rights cases. As a human rights investigator, Chi observed countless workers overseas get sick from toxic materials while laboring excessively long hours for minimal compensation. Through her international experiences, Chi formed a vision of a new mode of commerce that would prioritize human and environmental health.

**Makani Science, Irvine**

Greg Buchert, M.D., CEO

Greg Buchert, M.D., MPH, is CEO of Makani Science, based in Irvine. He has been an innovator and entrepreneur throughout his career. He has more than 25 years of C-Suite

HIDDEN COSTS OF DIVORCE IN CALIFORNIA: THE STUFF NOBODY BUDGETS FOR



By Paul Nelson, Esq



When people think about divorce in California, they usually picture two big financial buckets: property division and spousal support. But the real surprises often come from the *unplanned* expenses that sneak in along the way. These are the costs that don't get mentioned in the initial strategy meeting but have a way of showing up on your credit card statement when you least expect it.

1. Capital Gains Taxes on the Family Home

Selling the marital residence can trigger tax consequences — especially if you haven't lived there for at least two of the last five years. California's real estate market can turn a nice sale into a hefty tax bill, and it's often the spouse least familiar with the family finances who gets blindsided.

2. The "Equalization Payment" Sticker Shock

Splitting assets isn't always clean. Sometimes one spouse keeps a larger share of a certain asset (like a business or investment property) and writes a check to the other to balance it out. The numbers can look tidy on paper... until you realize how much cash you'll need to come up with to make it happen. And what happens if the cash is not there and a payment plan is needed?

3. Retirement Account Division and Penalties

Yes, your retirement accounts are community property. No, you can't

just transfer half without special paperwork. (The exception is an IRA) Without a Qualified Domestic Relations Order (QDRO), you risk paying taxes and early withdrawal penalties — and those can eat into your nest egg fast.

4. Duplicate Living Expenses

Going from one household to two means doubling up on mortgages or rent, utilities, insurance, and even furniture. It's a real financial adjustment, especially if your budget has been built around sharing those costs.

5. Professional Fees Beyond Your Attorney

Accountants, appraisers, forensic experts, and financial planners can all be critical in a divorce — and they don't work for free. In high-asset cases, these experts aren't optional; they're often the key to making sure property is valued and divided correctly.

Bottom Line

California divorces can be expensive in ways that don't show up in the obvious "what's mine, what's yours" discussions. The smartest move you can make is to identify these hidden costs early so you're not negotiating a settlement that looks good on paper but leaves you financially stretched. In divorce, as in life, it's not just about the big numbers — it's about the small ones that quietly add up while you're not looking.

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experience in health plan leadership roles. He is the former president and CEO of Blue Shield of California's Promise Health Plan, serving more than 500,000 Medicaid, Medicare, and Dual Eligible members. He previously served as the CEO that launched Centene's first Medicaid Managed Care Plan in California and later as chief medical officer of HealthNet's 4 million members. Buchert was a founding executive for CalOptima Health Plan in Orange County. Makani Science is an early-stage company leveraging technology developed at UC Irvine by Drs. Michelle Khine and Michael Chu. Its continuous respiratory monitor uses a stretchable electronic sensor embedded in a wireless wearable monitor that can be used on individuals of all sizes from a premature infant through a full-sized adult. Unlike other products, it can be used on ambulatory individuals. The continuous data is captured in the cloud to create a one-of-a-kind respiratory database.



Medtronic, Irvine

Brett Wall, Executive Vice President & President

Brett Wall is the executive vice president and president of Medtronic's Neuroscience Portfolio, which includes five operating units: neuromodulation, cranial and spinal technologies, neurovascular, pelvic health, and ear, nose, and throat. These units generate more than \$10 billion in annual revenue and employ around 18,000 people globally. Wall is also a member of Medtronic's executive committee and serves as the executive sponsor of the Medtronic African Descent Network. His previous roles include senior vice president of Brain Therapies at Medtronic, president of Neurovascular and International at Covidien, and various leadership positions at ev3, Inc., Micro Therapeutics, Boston Scientific, and C.R. Bard. Wall is actively involved in the community, serving on the board executive committee for OCTANe and the CEO Roundtable at the University of California, Irvine.



Orange County United Way, Irvine

Christopher Ticknor, Chief Transformation Officer

Christopher Ticknor is the chief transformation officer for Orange County United Way, where he leads the overall strategy for the nonprofit's marketing and development operations. Since joining Orange County United Way in 2019, he has played a crucial role in building the organization's relationships, growth, and engagement capabilities with donors, charitable organizations, and residents. Ticknor has led Orange County United Way's digital transformation in a variety of ways to adapt to ever-changing needs and support individuals and families during times of great need. He spearheaded a collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to optimize 2-1-1 Orange County and improve its contact center data, connecting Orange County residents to local nonprofits and government agencies more quickly and efficiently. He also pioneered a one-of-its-kind collaboration with AWS to build AssistOC, a web app that allowed individuals to submit requests for financial assistance during the pandemic. He continues to be deeply involved in building solutions to tackle some of the community's biggest social challenges.



Outside the Lines Inc., Anaheim

J. Wickham Zimmerman, CEO

J. Wickham "Wick" Zimmerman is a dynamic leader who drives spectacular results with a steady, measured, and motivational management style. Since co-founding Outside the Lines (OTL) in 2007, he has guided the company to phenomenal growth, propelling it to be named one of the country's "fastest-growing companies" by Inc. 500 / 5000 four times in a 10-year span. As the CEO of OTL, Zimmerman leans on his background as a civil engineer to tackle challenges with innovative solutions. Under his leadership, OTL has grown from a small start-up to a national firm with installations in 24 states and several international locations. Known primarily for its show-stopping water features and realistic rockwork, OTL is a design-build construction company that creates high-quality themed environments and sophisticated water features. The imaginative creations designed, developed, and built under Zimmerman's leadership have provided entertainment and engagement at some of the country's busiest retail centers, city and private parks, corporate offices, aquariums, and more.



Pacific Capital, Corona

Chad Willardson, Founder & President

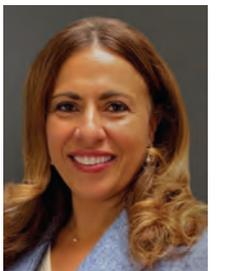
Chad Willardson, founder and president of Pacific Capital, is reshaping the future of fiduciary wealth management through their unique approach to family office services for high-net-worth entrepreneurial families. He's built a firm that simplifies complex financial decisions for entrepreneurs and helps them enjoy life by removing their stress about money. Under Willardson's leadership, Pacific Capital has launched proprietary tools like the Financial Life Inspection®, and he's secured over 10 trademarks and 15 patents in the financial industry. His focus on helping entrepreneurs win big in business and at home attracts a unique type of client who's looking for success beyond the money.



Planet Innovation, Irvine

Mona Elkebir, VP Commercial Operations

Mona Elkebir is a highly accomplished senior commercial executive in the medical device sector, leading the commercialization of world-first, groundbreaking medtech products and driving innovative corporate growth strategies through her work at Planet Innovation and previously at BIT Group. Elkebir managed the successful merger of her previous company BIT, with a competitor, Planet Innovation, in 2022 that has subsequently doubled her business' size. Over her tenure at both BIT and Planet Innovation, she helped grow revenue from a modest \$1.5 million to nearly \$100 million through attracting companies to develop and manufacture their products in Irvine. This growth is underpinned by Elkebir's leadership in developing and commercializing life-saving medical technologies. One example of her achievements includes the commercialization of a medtech device used in ER facilities which diagnose life-threatening diseases. She subsequently enabled the deployment of this product in developing nations to save newborns at risk due to disease. Elkebir is also an



Titan HST
Mass Communication, Incident Reporting & Business Continuity Platform

FOUNDER & CEO

Congratulations Vic Merjanian
named one of OCBJ's

INNOVATOR 2025 NOMINEE

Titan HST creates order in chaos. Headquartered in Newport Beach, CA. Titan HST's next-gen software and hardware platform provide unrivaled business continuity powered by multi-patented Mesh Networking, Augmented Reality, and privacy-centric Micro-location.

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INNOVATOR 2025 NOMINEE

We are very honored to be nominated for this high achievement award. At Aptiva Care Management, when we make a positive difference in people's medical care, healthcare, and quality of life, it's truly our best reward!

MARC H. FRIEDMAN
Founder & Managing Director

APTIVA
CARE MANAGEMENT

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active supporter of the Orange County community, holding board positions with the National Charity League and being involved with the University of California, Irvine.

Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties, Anaheim

Ramona Thomas, General Counsel & Vice President of Risk and Compliance

Ramona Thomas is the general counsel and vice president of risk and compliance for Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties (PPOSBC). Over the past year, Thomas has risen to prominence as a legal innovator thanks to her successful fight against politically motivated efforts to illegally block the construction of a Planned Parenthood health center in the city of Fontana. In December 2023, Thomas and PPOSBC's legal team sued the city of Fontana for illegally blocking their long-planned health center. However, instead of simply hoping the courts would side with PPOSBC while Fontana City Council sought to delay the case, Thomas worked with Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California to change the law. She helped draft legislation that would forbid a municipality from blocking a reproductive health care facility, as long as it met state standards. Assembly member Rebecca Bauer-Kahn sponsored the bill, AB 2085, which passed in September 2024. Under this new law, the district court ruled in January 2025 that Fontana must permit the long-planned PPOSBC health center.



PowerTap Hydrogen Fueling Corp, Aliso Viejo

Salim Rahemtulla, President & CEO

Richard Reisman, publisher of the Orange County Business Journal, is pleased to nominate Salim Rahemtulla, a USC undergraduate and MBA, for the 2025 Innovator of the Year Award. As co-founder of PowerTap, Rahemtulla leads a nimble team of five, driving innovation in compact, zero-emission hydrogen production for transportation. PowerTap is undergoing significant growth with an in-process equity investment accelerating the commercialization of its third-generation technology. This Gen3 unit scales production from 100 kilograms per day to an impressive 1,250 kilograms per day, enhancing efficiency and incorporating advanced carbon capture. Key accomplishments include securing a rare hydrogen purchase agreement with a fuel cell electric truck OEM, developing an off-the-shelf component assemblage for rapid station deployment, and forging deep relationships with major off-takers and oil and gas majors. PowerTap is positioned to deploy hundreds of hydrogen fuel stations across North America.



Pretika MedTech Corporation, Irvine

Thomas Nichols, CEO

Thomas Nichols leveraged 25 years of experience as CEO of Pretika Corporation, which successfully launched more than 23 consumer products in the beauty space—to develop a new MedTech device designed to digitally monitor wound healing. Pretika MedTech has reimaged wound care with Embedded Diagnostic Connected Wound Care Technology—a non-invasive, multispectral, hyperspectral, and



digital imaging device embedded within dressings with wireless and BLE enabled connectivity directly into the EHR patient record system. This allows clinicians to monitor in real time the healing process of acute and chronic wounds remotely without having to disturb the wound. Nichols's device utilizes a cloud-based platform for ML | AI alert technology, along with pattern recognition, to analyze patient data to identify patterns and trends. This enables clinicians to monitor post-surgery recovery, wound healing, and disease progression, either remotely or in-person, without the need to remove surgical dressings, bandages, or wraps. Currently, Pretika's devices are investigational and undergoing the FDA 510(k) Class II Clearance Pathway under Radiology (class LLZ).

Rand Technology, Irvine

Andrea Klein, CEO

Andrea Klein is the founder and CEO of Rand Technology, a global independent distributor and supply chain solutions provider specializing in semiconductors and board-level components. Founded in 1992, Rand has grown into a sophisticated, full-service partner for Fortune 500 companies, offering sourcing, testing, engineering, and logistics services across 10 countries and five continents. With approximately 250 employees, Rand supports customers in high-stakes industries such as automotive, aerospace, AI, and medical technology. Under Klein's leadership, Rand became the first ISO-certified independent distributor and remains the only 100% woman-owned company of its kind. She spearheaded the creation of the Rand Certified quality program, integrating aerospace-grade testing and a 72-point inspection standard to combat counterfeit risk and ensure traceability. Her innovative, sustainability-focused approach has enabled Rand to thrive during volatile global conditions. Klein is widely recognized as an industry pioneer and passionate advocate for women in technology, speaking regularly to inspire the next generation of leaders.



Renata Medical, Newport Beach

Dustin Armer & Eason Abbott, Co-Founders; CEO & COO

Dustin Armer (CEO) and Eason Abbott (COO) are the co-founders of Renata Medical, a startup company headquartered in Newport Beach that specializes in the development and manufacturing of medical devices for congenital heart defects (CHD) in infants and young children. Prior to establishing Renata Medical in 2019, Armer held leadership roles in teams that developed transcatheter aortic, pulmonic, and tricuspid heart valve products. With more than two decades of engineering experience, Armer has led product and business development from idea generation to market-ready solutions through commercialization for cardiac patients. Prior to co-founding Renata Medical with Armer in 2019, Abbott worked at Edwards Lifesciences in Orange County as a R&D engineer, specializing in disruptive technology for heart valves, catheter delivery systems, stent design, and new product development. The two co-founders worked closely with one another on R&D projects at Edwards Life Sciences before founding Renata Medical when they felt compelled to start a dedicated business focused on engineering medical devices for children living with CHD. Armer and Abbott lead the U.S. commercialization mission for Renata



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Today we're proud to congratulate **Brett Wall**,

our Executive Vice President and President of the Neuroscience portfolio, on his nomination for **OC innovator of the year**. Brett's leadership reflects the purpose and vision that guide everything we do.

2025 INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES

Medical's first FDA-approved device, the Minima Stent System, approved on Aug. 28, 2024. The stent is designed with patented "growth technology" for pulmonary artery and aortic vascular stenosis, and it has been trialed and approved specifically for infants and children to accommodate their growth into adulthood without the need for open-heart surgery. Over the last 35 years, only 3.8% of cardiovascular devices have been FDA approved for pediatrics. The two founders, along with CMO Dr. Evan Zahn, partnered early with the FDA to identify unmet needs and create this technology that aims to improve patient care for a lifetime.

RepSpark, Anaheim

Meghann Butcher, Founder & CEO

Meghann Butcher is the founder and CEO of RepSpark Systems, a leading B2B eCommerce platform for the golf, apparel, footwear, and accessories industries. She co-founded RepSpark 17 years ago with a vision to streamline the wholesale process through smart, cloud-based solutions. Her journey began in Southern California, inspired by her father's work in apparel. With a background in sales analytics and litigation consulting, Butcher built RepSpark to solve inefficiencies in the brand-retailer relationship. Today, the platform is known for its digital catalogs, reporting tools, and simplified online ordering capabilities, which help brands get paid faster and more easily. Under her leadership, RepSpark has grown strategically and earned recognition for its innovation and customer satisfaction, including a spot on the Inc. 5000 list three years running. Butcher is a magna cum laude graduate of Vanderbilt University with degrees in psychology and communications. Named a Top 50 Women Leader of L.A. in 2023, she's also a mom of three and a dedicated hot yoga fan, always striving for balance in work and life.



RevHub Orange County, Irvine

Stephan Erkelens, President, Co-Founder & CEO

With more than 40 years of experience in starting and scaling businesses, social enterprises, and nonprofits, Stephan Erkelens represents a unique blend of multicultural skills and experiences, including broad commodities production and trading in both producing and consuming nations. Offering hands-on expertise in day-to-day nonprofit management and large-scale resource mobilization, he has invested himself in strategic initiatives involving nonprofit management and philanthro-capitalism. He has developed considerable experience in the nonprofit sector, public-private partnerships, and, more recently, in merging entrepreneurial for-profit ventures in support of nonprofit sustainability. In the last 10 years, Erkelens has focused on developing programs and companies that address some of the greatest social and environmental challenges affecting industries in Orange County. Subsequently, he founded RevHub Orange County (RevHubOC) in 2019, a first-of-its kind startup incubator for social enterprises—mission-driven, for-profit companies leveraging profit-generating solutions to address key social and/or environmental challenges. To date, RevHubOC has incubated 37 social enterprises and raised more than \$3 million through its flagship investment instrument, RevFund, advancing a blended-finance strategy to de-risk early-stage, impact-first companies and accelerate scalable outcomes.



Revolv3, Laguna Beach

Frank Arellano, Founder & CEO

Frank Arellano has a rich business history, with experience in both startups and corporations. Over his 25-plus-year career, Arellano has strategically led a multibillion-dollar acquisition integration program, established a global technology management office, and devised plans to enhance internal processes for better performance. His innovative spirit and passion for innovation have been evident throughout his career, as he has actively sought out startup opportunities and founded successful ventures. With a diverse and versatile team, Arellano is guiding Revolv3 to play in the big leagues, bringing a versatile product to market for corporate entities and scaling subscription businesses alike. Despite tough competition, Arellano's business acumen and forward-thinking ideas have driven positive financial performance for Revolv3. His investment in attracting and developing a diverse mix of talent has fostered creativity and enabled the company to identify new opportunities and develop innovative solutions. Under his guidance, Revolv3 has emerged as a young leader in the PayTech industry, providing businesses with a reliable, efficient, and scalable platform to optimize their subscription payments. Arellano's mission is to disrupt the payment ecosystem with innovative breakthrough technology and provide unique insights for the betterment of merchants. With Revolv3, merchants and ISVs receive ongoing support and recommendations from an experienced payment orchestration and optimization partner.



Service to Success, Irvine

Peter Cline, Co-Founder & Head of Product

Peter Cline is a serial social entrepreneur and Army veteran who co-founded Service to Success (S2S). The firm helps Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and contractors, and SMBs reach and hire from the military community. S2S has witnessed remarkable growth. In addition to providing recruiting services and live hiring fairs with more than 1,000 registrants, the firm—under Cline's direction—created MilMentor.com, which provides free, on-demand career mentors from companies like Google to thousands of military jobseekers at no cost, while helping great companies reach the community. Cline's leadership in product, as well as his growth efforts attracting Fortune 500 and government contracting clients, has been instrumental in scaling the company and helping thousands of military-connected jobseekers.



Ship & Shore Environmental Inc., Signal Hill

Anoosheh Oskouian, President & CEO

Anoosheh Oskouian is a recognized leader in the climate technology sector and the president and CEO of Ship & Shore Environmental, a global engineering firm specializing in air pollution abatement solutions. With more than two decades at the helm, she has transformed the company into a major force in sustainable manufacturing, pioneering the design and deployment of cutting-edge pollution control systems such as regenerative thermal oxidizers (RTOs), electric thermal oxidizers (ETOs), and energy recovery solutions across industries worldwide. A



From Innovation to Impact: How Hema Dey Is Redefining Marketing in the AI Age

When business leaders talk about "marketing innovation," they often mean creative campaigns or clever branding. Hema Dey means something very different: engineering growth through marketing technology systems.

As founder and CEO of Iffel International, Dey is recognized as a martech innovator and the creator of the SEO2Sales™ model—a proprietary framework that transforms search engine visibility into real, bankable revenue. It's an approach that fuses marketing strategy, sales readiness, and business development into one integrated growth engine.

"Visibility is worthless without conversion," Dey says. "The goal isn't just to get found—it's to get chosen."



Hema Dey

In practice, that means starting with hard data: understanding a company's market position, competitors, and buyer behavior. From there, Dey aligns marketing campaigns with sales enablement tools, CRM integration, and AI-powered targeting to ensure prospects are nurtured through every stage of the funnel. The result? Organizations move faster from "we're interested" to "let's sign."

Her adoption of AI and agentic automation is both practical and visionary. For sales teams, AI can score leads, predict buying windows, and surface the right offer at the right moment. For marketing teams, it can generate content at scale, personalize outreach, and measure performance in real time. And for executives, it delivers something priceless—clarity on what's working and what's wasting resources.

Across industries—from manufacturing to healthcare to professional services—Dey's strategies have helped companies scale without losing efficiency or focus. It's a discipline that blends technology with the human art of selling.

"AI is the accelerator," she says. "But the engine is still your business strategy. If you don't have that, all the technology in the world won't get you where you want to go."

For leaders ready to move from marketing experiments to sales-ready systems, Dey offers a clear path: start with strategy, harness the right tools, and measure every step. The future of growth isn't about more noise; it's about more results.

Contact Iffel International at www.iffelinternational.com.



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START SELLING.

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It needs a sales engine.



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chemical engineer by training, Oskouian began her career working on high-impact industrial projects in petrochemicals, nuclear, and chemical manufacturing. Her technical foundation, combined with strategic vision, has enabled her to scale clean air innovations globally, helping clients across sectors reduce volatile organic compounds (VOCs), comply with environmental regulations, and meet net-zero goals. Under her leadership, Ship & Shore Environmental has been recognized for its role in advancing cleantech, earning distinctions such as the Los Angeles Business Journal's Sustainability Award and inclusion in the U.S. EPA's Best Available Control Technology (BACT) efforts.

Smart Energy Water (SEW), Irvine

Deepak Garg, Chairman, Founder & Co-CEO

Deepak Garg is the chairman, founder, and co-CEO of Smart Energy Water (SEW). A respected leader in the technology and utility industry, Garg has more than two decades of experience in product development and is responsible for driving innovation, vision, and strategy at SEW. He has spearheaded SEW's initiatives to build innovative digital platforms that address the challenges of global energy-water transformation and help utilities connect with people. He has successfully established high-power technology teams to develop the No.1 digital customer experience (CX), digital workforce experience (WX), and smart AI/ML analytics platforms that address key business challenges for electric, water, and gas providers. All SEW platforms leverage next-gen technologies such as AI, machine learning, and IoT to power customer and workforce experiences. Backing on scalability, modularity, flexibility, and security, SEW clients deliver award-winning experiences and set new benchmarks for the industry. Driven by Garg's stellar vision, SEW has navigated more than 45 geographies to serve over 450 energy and utility companies connecting more than 1.5 billion people. Garg's passion and dedication to transforming the energy and utility industry is mirrored in the company's vision to engage, educate, and empower. Garg founded SEW, guided by five core values: sustainability, integrity, innovation, compassion, and performance. Over the years, he has brought together like-minded people, developed high-powered business and technology teams, and started a SEW family—now more than 1,500 strong—that aims to connect billions of people with their energy and water providers. SEW been recognized by Inc. 5000 and is one of the fastest growing companies in America. Garg is an active contributor in the Forbes Technology Council. He is also propelling the energy-water transformation conversations with other utility and tech leaders with the WE3 platform. The thought leadership space brings perspectives from industry leaders on the key themes affecting the energy and water world to spark change and accelerate industry innovation. Garg has received multiple industry recognitions, including EY Entrepreneurship of the Year, Best CEO Award, Innovator of the Year, and more. Before SEW, he held senior leadership positions with Fortune 500 companies and successfully developed direct and indirect business solutions for diverse markets. Garg holds a Master of Science in computer science and a bachelor's degree in engineering, along with executive management from Stanford Graduate School of Business and MIT.

**St. Mary's School, Aliso Viejo**

Doug Patterson, Head of School

Doug Patterson is redefining what school can and should look like. As head of school at St. Mary's in Aliso Viejo, Patterson leads the only preschool through grade 8 International

Baccalaureate (IB) World School in the region. He has reimagined education to prepare students not just for tests, but for an unpredictable future. With more than 20 years at St. Mary's, Patterson has transformed the school into a national model by combining the rigor of the IB program with the creativity and relevance of design thinking. This approach empowers students to tackle real-world problems, think critically, and lead with empathy. Patterson recently led a major campus expansion that includes a state-of-the-art design center focused on hands-on learning and real-world problem solving. He has also driven record enrollment growth, expanded academic programs, and championed faculty development. His leadership is reshaping education at St. Mary's, paving the way for students to think boldly, build creatively, and develop the skills they'll need to lead in the world ahead.

**StarQuiz.ai, Irvine**

Alp Can Cizem, Founder & CEO

Alp Can Cizem is the 23-year-old founder and CEO of StarQuiz.ai, an inspiring and cutting-edge, AI-powered formative assessment platform giving educators real-time insight into student learning. A first-generation Turkish American and serial entrepreneur, Cizem has built three startups with the same technical co-founder since age 18. His first venture, Hobbimates, launched during COVID and scaled to more than 15,000 UC students through in-person events. His second, Huxli.ai, emerged in the early GPT-3 era and grew to 300,000 users and \$11,000 in monthly recurring revenue on a bootstrapped budget. In 2024, Cizem founded StarQuiz after observing teachers "hacking" Huxli to power adaptive classroom learning. StarQuiz has since piloted at UC San Diego, Chapman University, and leading Turkish high schools, with results boosting midterm grades from 82% to 87% in one Chapman case study. The team is now expanding LMS integrations and positioning StarQuiz as core infrastructure for modern instruction. Cizem has re-enrolled at UC San Diego to incubate StarQuiz in live classrooms, blending his entrepreneurial vision with firsthand classroom experience to drive lasting innovation in education.

**STEALTH Ventures Corporation, Irvine**

Ali Sina, CEO

Ali Sina is the founder and CEO of STEALTH Ventures, a groundbreaking AI venture studio that has built and launched over 300 startups across EdTech, clean energy, HealthTech, and AI-native SaaS. With academic foundations from USC and an MBA from Pepperdine, Sina began his career in finance before pivoting to AI in 2015, driven by a conviction that AI could unlock entirely new ways of thinking, building, and living. In 2017, he launched STEALTH with a bold mission: to engineer an assembly line for startups—powered by AI, driven by automation, and designed to scale human potential. The studio now operates with a \$1 billion internal innovation fund and a proprietary parallel-processing model that tests more than 1,000 startup ideas at once, rapidly



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spinning out the highest performers into independent ventures. Under Sina's leadership, STEALTH is not just investing in the future—it's building it. His ecosystem of companies includes Forkaia®, an education and career acceleration platform helping people build lives that matter, and Insolar, a clean energy solution focused on mass-market solar transition. Both are examples of how AI can rewire broken systems—making them more intelligent, efficient, and accessible. Sina's ultimate vision is the development of artificial superintelligence (ASI) not as a singular sentient entity, but as a distributed intelligence network built across sectors—using startups as nodes to prototype intelligence in the real world. By embedding smart systems into real businesses, his work turns theory into utility, and AI into something usable, measurable, and transformative. Recognized by Apple News, The Irvine Standard, and other publications, Sina is a published author, technologist, and serial founder. His work is reshaping not just what startups do, but how they are created—and what intelligence itself can become.

Titan Health and Security Technologies Inc., Newport Beach

Vic Merjanian, Founder & CEO

Vic Merjanian is the founder and CEO of Titan Health and Security Technologies Inc., a next-generation technology company committed to making the world a safer place. Under his leadership, Titan HST has become a premier provider of integrated software and hardware safety solutions across multiple industries, including sports and entertainment, education, hospitality, healthcare, enterprise, and media production. The platform offers cutting-edge, two-way mass communication tools that are instantly accessible through mobile apps, text, web, email, auto-call, and social media—helping organizations respond quickly and effectively to emergencies. Titan HST supports numerous high-profile clients, such as the Honda Center and Delta Center. Merjanian has led the company through vigorous R&D, resulting in 35 patents across innovative technologies such as multi-channel mesh networking, augmented reality, and micro-location. His work continues to play a critical role in reducing emergency response times, minimizing property damage, and, most importantly, saving lives in critical situations.



Toshiba, Lake Forest

Maegan Lujan, Director of Solutions and Services

Maegan Lujan is a trailblazer in the Orange County business and philanthropic community. She currently serves as the director of solutions and services at Toshiba, where she has flourished since joining the organization in 2012. Lujan's journey to Orange County began with a dream. At 14 years old, she ran away from the foster care system to move to Orange County to become a successful businessperson. Channeling her energy towards self-improvement, growth, and innovation, Lujan is a leader and brand strategist supporting a Toshiba product portfolio worth \$50 million. Beyond her work at Toshiba, Lujan enjoys helping people from all walks of life. She is an executive committee board member at Orangewood Foundation, a nonprofit organization driven to help youth in need in all essential



areas. Whether initiating monthly volunteer opportunities or leading large-scale events in support of Orangewood, she weaves the organization's mission into every facet of her work. For her passion and intellect, Lujan has won awards from a local level to national industry honors.

Toshiba America Business Solutions, Lake Forest

Matthew Bull, Director, Technical Services Programs

Matthew Bull is a highly accomplished technology leader with more than two decades of experience driving innovation in business intelligence and managed services. Currently, Toshiba America Business Solutions' director of services programs, he develops industry-leading technologies supporting managed print as a service (MPaaS), e-commerce, and cloud-based solutions. Bull was previously Toshiba's director of business intelligence and MPaaS operations, overseeing enterprise analytics platforms supporting hundreds of thousands of devices and clients. Bull is known for delivering consistent and measurable improvements in operational efficiency, analytics adoption, and customer satisfaction across his 13 years at Toshiba. Testament to his innovativeness, Bull was recently named inventor on the patent for Toshiba's recent Encompass Tag and Asset Generator (eTAG) product. With a global perspective and a passion for team development, he continually shapes the future of technical service offerings at Toshiba. Bull is additionally an active member of the swimming community, serving as a certified USA Swimming referee. He regularly volunteers his time at local and regional swim meets, supporting youth development and competitive excellence.



UC Irvine, Irvine

Stacy Branham, Associate Professor

Dr. Stacy Branham is an associate professor of informatics and the director of the Inclusive Studio for Innovative Technology and Education (INSITE) at UC Irvine. Together with community partners and students with disabilities, Branham investigates digital accessibility, yielding novel technologies and design and policy guidance. Accessible profile images developed in Branham's lab now ship on millions of Google Chromebooks, enabling blind users to independently choose a representative system profile image for themselves. ReadWithMe leverages Amazon Alexa to enable blind parents to read picture books with their children. AccessEdBot provides advice to blind high schoolers about how to prepare for college STEM majors. These and other projects have been recognized by best paper awards at top research conferences and have been supported by more than \$24 million from funding entities including Jacobs Foundation, Toyota, Intel, and the NSF. In 2021, she received the NSF CAREER Award and was named one of the "Brilliant 10" rising STEM researchers by Popular Science. In 2025, she was named one of the 20 Irvine Gamechangers by Irvine Standard newspaper.



UC Irvine's Paul Merage School of Business, Irvine

Ian Williamson, Dean

Ian O. Williamson is the dean of the UC Irvine Paul Merage School of Business, a globally ranked institution known for its leadership in digital transformation, AI, and inclusive innovation. Since assuming leadership in 2021, Dean Williamson has positioned the Merage School at the forefront of business education by launching trailblazing programs in AI, sustainability, and leadership development. Under his tenure, the school has significantly grown its industry partnerships, research output, and philanthropic support—advancing strategic collaborations with global companies and public institutions. Dean Williamson champions a vision that aligns technological innovation with human-centric values, preparing a diverse new generation of business leaders to thrive in the digital economy. With more than two decades of experience across four continents, his leadership fuses academic excellence with practical impact, elevating both the student experience and the school's regional and international influence.



ViridiSTOR LLC, Tustin

Terry Mullin, CEO

Terry Mullin is an active innovator and business builder in Orange County. He has formed and led teams in market-leading companies that have brought first in class software and hardware to the market. Within his latest venture, ViridiSTOR, Mullin has launched a new era in compact content management systems to deliver information to the more than \$1 trillion event, conference, and trade show industry. His innovations not only make sense but reduce monetary costs and environmental costs. At the same time, Mullin has innovated and patented other products including an oral irrigation system that will aid millions in the recovery from oral surgery. Mullin has other patents pending in wireless networking, retail management, Alzheimer's memory retention systems, and sustainable products. Mullin stays active in the community, volunteering to teach audio engineering to middle and high school students, and by instructing in project management practices—based on his book *The Project Management Paradox*—and finance through his e-book *AYBONI™ Economics*.



Wilson Creek Winery, Temecula

Bill Wilson, Owner & CEO

Bill Wilson is the visionary owner and CEO of Wilson Creek Winery, a thriving 90-acre family estate in Temecula Wine Country. Since launching the winery in 1996, he has grown production to more than 100,000 cases annually and welcomes over 1,500 guests every weekend. Under his leadership, the winery celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, a testament to steady growth, innovation, and deep local roots. Wilson's honors reflect both business acumen and community commitment, including the Spirit of Entrepreneur Award, Citizen of the Year, and the Wely Award as Tourism Professional of the Year. He also earned the 2025 Green/Sustainability Award from the ACG Orange County chapter for pioneering regenerative farming such as cover cropping, soil health monitoring, and rotational grazing, while mentoring future growers via school programs. An engaged civic leader, Wilson serves on the Rancho California Water District Board (elected 2015, re-elected 2024), Visit Temecula Valley, and the Temecula Valley Winegrowers Association. His inclusive, hospitality-driven ethos has made Wilson Creek a regional leader in both wine and tourism.



Fisher Phillips Proudly Commends Our Chairman & Managing Partner, John Polson, and all of the 2025 Orange County Business Journal Innovator of Year Nominees.



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