

An Orange County Business Journal Special Report

WOMEN IN BUSINESS AWARDS

CATCH UP WITH LAST
YEAR'S WOMEN IN
BUSINESS WINNERS
PAGES 14, 16

BIOS OF THE 2026
NOMINEES
PAGE 48



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2025 Women in Business Winners: Where Are They Now?

■ By NANCY LUNA

Last year, the Business Journal honored five outstanding professional women for their contributions to their organizations, professions and the Orange County community.

Selected from 233 nominees, the **Women in Business** winners were **Anna Ricardo**, chief financial officer at **MeriCal**; **Hagan Kappler**, co-founder and chief executive of **Daisy**; **Annette Morgan**, chief operating officer of **City of Hope Orange County**; **Rebecca Hall**, president and chief executive of **Idea Hall**; and **Kelly Blair**, chief financial officer at **Mark IV Capital Inc.**

The Business Journal recently caught up with the four of the five winners to see what's changed since last year (Blair was unavailable). See pages 14 and 16 for their stories.

What's Next?

The 32nd annual Women in Business Awards is scheduled for Sept. 17 at the **Irvine Marriott**. **Charlene Reynolds**, director of **John Wayne Airport** and a 2024 Women in Business Award recipient, will deliver the keynote address.

Bios of the more than 240 2026 nominees begin on page 48.



2025 Women in Business and JPMorgan Chase award winners: Annette Morgan, Anna Ricardo, Kelly Blair, Katie Webb Brundige, Meghan Clem, Rebecca Hall and Hagan Kappler

Anna Ricardo: Leading Beyond the Spreadsheet

■ By JOSEPH PIMENTEL

ANAHEIM — **MeriCal** CFO **Anna Ricardo** can often be found walking the manufacturing floor of the supplement maker rather than sitting behind a desk.

She looks for ways to improve efficiency and automate. She looks for machines sitting idle, which could mean lost production. A bottleneck on the line could ripple through the company's profit and loss statements.

"I like to see how things work," Ricardo told the Business Journal. "There's a lot of low-hanging fruit with experience that you can walk on the floor and see that flow through to the P&L."

She's applied that strategy since starting at MeriCal three years ago—where she was charged with fixing what she called a "mess" at the Anaheim manufacturing firm, owned by Chicago-based **Linden Capital Partners**.

Over two years, she tightened the company's financial backbone by bringing in a controller, building out a data analytics team and aligning staffing levels with actual production needs.



The result: EBITDA jumped from about \$400,000 in 2023 to \$3.7 million in 2024 and then up to \$13.1 million in 2025.

The Business Journal honored Ricardo for her exceptional work at the publication's 31st **Women in Business Awards** ceremony last year. This year's event will be held Sept. 17. Ricardo also received the Business Journal's **CFO of the Year Award** earlier this year.

Beyond the Numbers

Ricardo has built a career helping manufacturers improve operations, a niche she discovered after working at companies including **Inter-national Vitamin Corp.**, **Abbott Laboratories** and **Gilead Sciences**.

While her role requires her to work with spreadsheets, she said the most valuable data does not come from a report.

It comes from the operators doing the work.

"They often have some of the most valuable suggestions to reduce labor and waste," she said. "My job is not just to run the numbers and look in the rearview mirror reporting what happened. It is to affect the future."

Putting Mentorship to the Test

Ricardo describes herself as collaborative and believes in mentoring. She holds employees to high expectations while also investing in their growth.

The strongest teams are built by hiring people whose strengths complement her skill sets.

"I don't want people with my same skill set," she said. "I want people who strengthen my weaknesses."

The result: a well-balanced team.

"I'm always looking for somebody who's hungry," she said. "I want to teach them what I know, to round them out, but they have to be looking for an opportunity that I can provide to them. Otherwise, it's going to be a short-term [employment]."

She added: "There's nothing I wouldn't ask you to do that I'm not willing to do."

That leadership philosophy was put to the test earlier this year after Ricardo suffered serious injuries in an e-bike accident.

She said the day after she was injured, she had a meeting with the board.

Rather than worrying about the business, she watched her team step in seamlessly, led by a controller she had mentored over the years.

"Immediately, my controller stepped in,



MeriCal CFO Anna Ricardo, center

didn't miss a beat," she said. "But had we not done all that mentoring together for the last two years, I don't know if that would have been seamless."

Looking back at the situation, she paused. "It made me step back and be really proud of my team," Ricardo said.

Looking ahead, Ricardo hopes to add one more accomplishment before retiring in the next several years: helping guide a company through a successful sale, an experience she has yet to have despite decades in finance.

"I don't want to have any regrets," she said. "I want to end on top." ■

Hagan Kappler: Daisy Sets Sights on 100 Locations

■ By KEVIN COSTELLOE

COSTA MESA — **Daisy**, a fast-growing three-year-old startup that turns houses into smart homes, plans to expand to as many as 100 locations nationwide next year—growth fueled largely by new franchises.

"We now have 46 locations across the country, continuing to see growth," CEO and co-founder **Hagan Kappler** told the Business Journal on July 31. "Next year we should have about 70 to 100 sites."

Most of the additions will be franchises, though some acquisitions next year are also possible, she said.

Last October, Kappler won a Business Journal **Women in Business Award** for leading the Costa Mesa-based company, which raised \$36 million in venture capital funding in less than two years. Daisy installs and services home technology systems ranging from **Ring** doorbells and smart lighting to security systems, automated shades, home theaters and whole-home audio systems.

"Most people don't realize how much is possible with technology in the home today," Kappler said.

Over the last year, Kappler said she's been



Hagan Kappler
Co-Founder, CEO
Daisy

on the road a lot, keeping up on the latest home-tech developments, by attending trade shows and conferring with manufacturers.

"I'm out in the field visiting with our teams, doing ride-alongs to homes," she said.

In March, she was named to **Inc.**'s 2026 Female Founders 500 list.

Daisy Care Provides Extended Service

Daisy doesn't install and walk away.

It provides long-term service to keep it all working through **Daisy Care**.

It has been "terrific and really successful," Kappler said.

"That's where we provide ongoing service, complimentary every quarter to clients and just sort of trouble-shoot a few things, provide advice on what's happening in the technology in their home," Kappler says.

Such tech services will be a \$31 billion industry and that is growing 10% to 15% on its own.

The base is still installations also including TV, video, audio security, automated shades, lighting and security systems as well as home theaters and audio.

More Women in Industry

Daisy is seeking to have more women as new owners among its franchisees.

"Bringing in women we think was important because at least 50% of our clients are women," Kappler says.

The company has 300 employees across the company, with 30 in Costa Mesa.

Branches are in Northern California, Michigan, Florida, New York City, the Hamptons, New Hampshire, Massachusetts

and Connecticut.

Pricing Depends on Job Size

Pricing depends on the amount of work involved.

"You've got huge projects for 20,000-square foot homes in the Hamptons. Those can be multi-million-dollar multi-year contracts. And then you can have the \$500 Ring doorbell unit," she said.

Kappler is an East Coast transplant, growing up in New Jersey, graduating from **Williams College** in Massachusetts and then moving with her husband several times before eventually settling in Newport Beach.

Her résumé includes working for **Goldman Sachs**, **McKinsey & Co.**, **Starbucks** and **Trane** as well as receiving a MBA from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business.

She co-founded Daisy with industry veteran **Dion Persson** 2023.

Daisy made its first acquisition in 2024 and raised \$36 million in venture funding within its first 16 months.

The company's investors include **Goldcrest Capital**, **Bungalow** and **Fifth Down Capital**. ■





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Rebecca Hall: Landing Another Major Client, Angels Baseball

■ By EMILY SANTIAGO-MOLINA

COSTA MESA — **Rebecca Hall**'s public relations firm has worked on some of Orange County's major real estate projects—from developing the original branding for the \$4 billion **OCVibe** to coordinating the beginnings of the **Dana Point Harbor Partners** rehabilitation project, whose cost has since grown to \$700 million.

"We've worked on some of the biggest things that have ever happened in Orange County," Hall told the Business Journal. "We're looking to continue to work with great organizations who want to make a great impact themselves."

This year, Idea Hall added another notable Orange County organization to its client roster, the **Los Angeles Angels**, to help the baseball team introduce its newest president, **Molly Jolly**.

Hall knew Jolly previously through serving together on the board of nonprofit **CASA** (Court of Appeal and Special Advocates). She said they met for lunch in February, shortly before Jolly's appointment was announced the next month.

"She's an amazing leader to work with," Hall said.

Founded in 2003, the PR firm is on track for 20% annual revenue growth in 2026 with the Angels as a big driver, according to Hall.

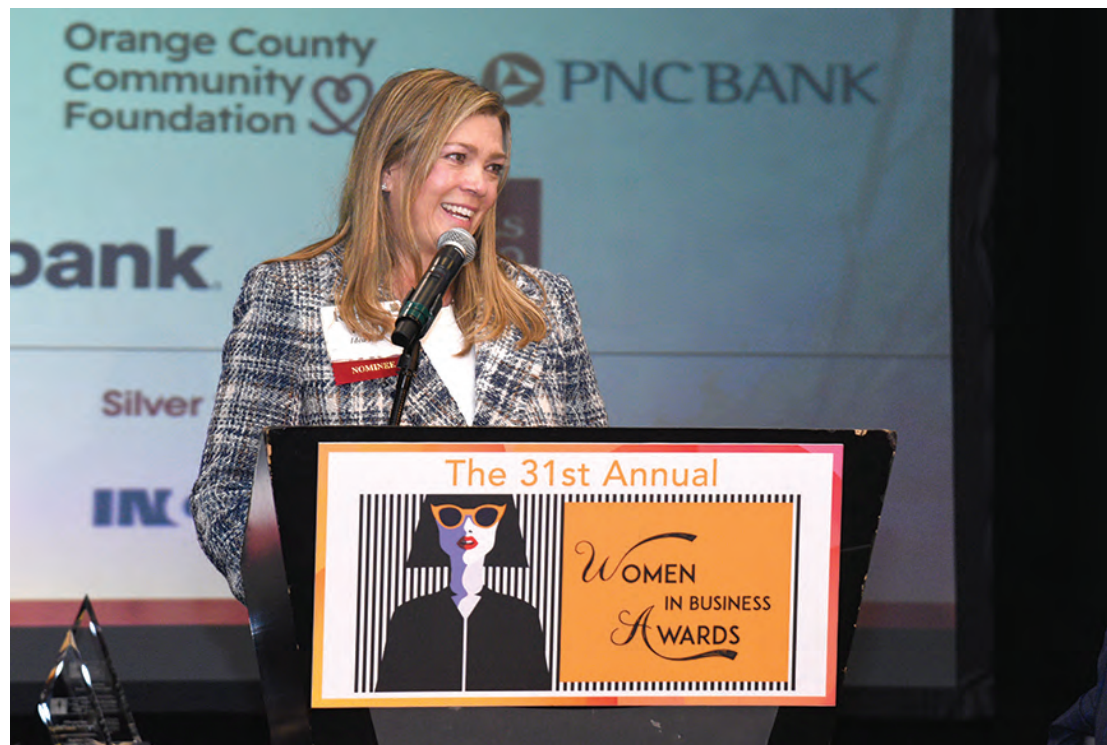
Idea Hall's newer clients also include **StorQuest Self Storage**, **Barclay Butera Interior Design** and Irvine-based **Golden State Foods**, one of the world's largest suppliers to fast-food



restaurants with annual revenue of \$5 billion.

Hall said her firm was recently selected by Golden State Foods to work on a "significant" project, though she could not disclose details.

Hall won a Business Journal **Women in Business Award** last October.



Rebecca Hall
Founder/CEO
Idea Hall

Areas of Growth

One segment that Idea Hall is expanding for existing and new clients is crisis communications and issues management. The firm has so far hired eight new contractors as crisis experts as the area is one of "tremendous growth," according to Hall.

"We're in such a turbulent environment, and things can become a crisis so quickly in this kind of environment, and so more organ-

izations I think realize that they need outside counsel to stay objective and hopefully avoid the crisis moment," Hall said.

Clients have also been approaching the firm on the best ways to be "found" online via search engines and AI platforms. Hall said the firm's focus is helping clients, and their services or products, be "the answer" for inquiring customers.

"The answer engines prioritize what others say about you and give priority to the most the highest authority," she said. "So, if you're written up in the Business Journal or in the Wall Street Journal or (win) an industry award, that can really move the answer engines to source you as the expert."

Another recent trend is new clients, who may have fallen behind in the digital race, approaching Idea Hall about setting up digital marketing strategies. Hall even brought

back a former head of marketing, **Carson Turbedsky**, to help improve and "push harder" into the firm's digital marketing capabilities.

"That's what I love about this industry, it's always changing. It's always innovating, and so that's part of the discipline you have to have as an agency leader," Hall said. "You can never become complacent." ■

Annette Morgan: Hospital Opens, Next Phase Begins

■ By YUIKA YOSHIDA

IRVINE — Around this time last year, Chief Operating Officer **Annette Morgan** was focused on one of **City of Hope Orange County**'s most significant achievements: the opening of its cancer specialty hospital.

"I feel like I'm in such a different state of mind given that we made it through state license survey and things are a little bit less chaotic," Morgan told the Business Journal.

The six-story, 174,000-square-foot facility is the newest piece of City of Hope's growing 72-acre Irvine campus, which includes the Lennar Foundation Cancer Center outpatient facility that opened in 2022.

City of Hope in 2019 announced that it would invest \$1.5 billion to increase cancer care in Orange County, aiming to reduce the number of patients traveling outside the region for treatment.

Morgan received the Business Journal's **Women in Business Award** last year for overseeing the planning, design, activation and growth of City of Hope's local network.

She joined the organization in 2018 as the second employee after spending a combined seven years as an executive at **Providence St. Joseph Hospital** in Orange and **Providence Mission Hospital** in Mission Viejo.

Hospital Ramps Up Staffing

Since opening in December, the hospital has served 3,500 patients to date, according to Morgan.

Morgan said opening the hospital was a major milestone, but the work is far from finished.

"We've moved from getting ready to open-



Annette Morgan
COO
City of Hope OC

ing to now focusing on how do we continue to expand access," she said.

So far, they've hired around 700 staff with plans to add 100 more positions.

"We're in that phase of continuing to build relationships across staff and departments and continuing to open more beds to serve more patients," Morgan said.

To help accommodate the growing work-

force, philanthropist **Ron Simon**'s nonprofit, **RSI Dream Communities**, gifted \$25 million to City of Hope last October to secure future land for workforce housing.

RSI is also providing \$1.25 million in rent subsidies a year until land be-

comes available.

About 160 employees have been approved to receive subsidies, allowing them to remain living locally.

Connected Care

With the hospital connected to the Lennar outpatient cancer center, patients now have access to an evaluation and treatment center.

"That has made a huge difference for our patients because when Lennar was open as a standalone, if we had a patient who had some sort of issue in the middle of the night, they ended up going to another hospital's emergency department," Morgan said.

The new hospital has also allowed City of Hope to offer higher-acuity services closer to home including cellular therapies, gastrointestinal (GI) and thoracic surgery programs.

"The reason those launched when we opened the hospital is that oftentimes they're higher-risk treatments and patients need 24/7 support," she said.

Morgan said that City of Hope is currently focused on expanding access to its hematology program for patients with leukemia, myeloma and lymphoma. ■





Empowering women who inspire change.

Marsh McLennan Agency proudly supports the Orange County Business Journal's Women in Business Awards, honoring the remarkable women leading innovation, growth, and change in the community.

Strong leadership by women drives success and builds resilient businesses that uplift everyone. This celebration recognizes those who break barriers, inspire others, and shape the future of business in Orange County and beyond.

Congratulations to all the honorees — your achievements light the way for the next generation of leaders.

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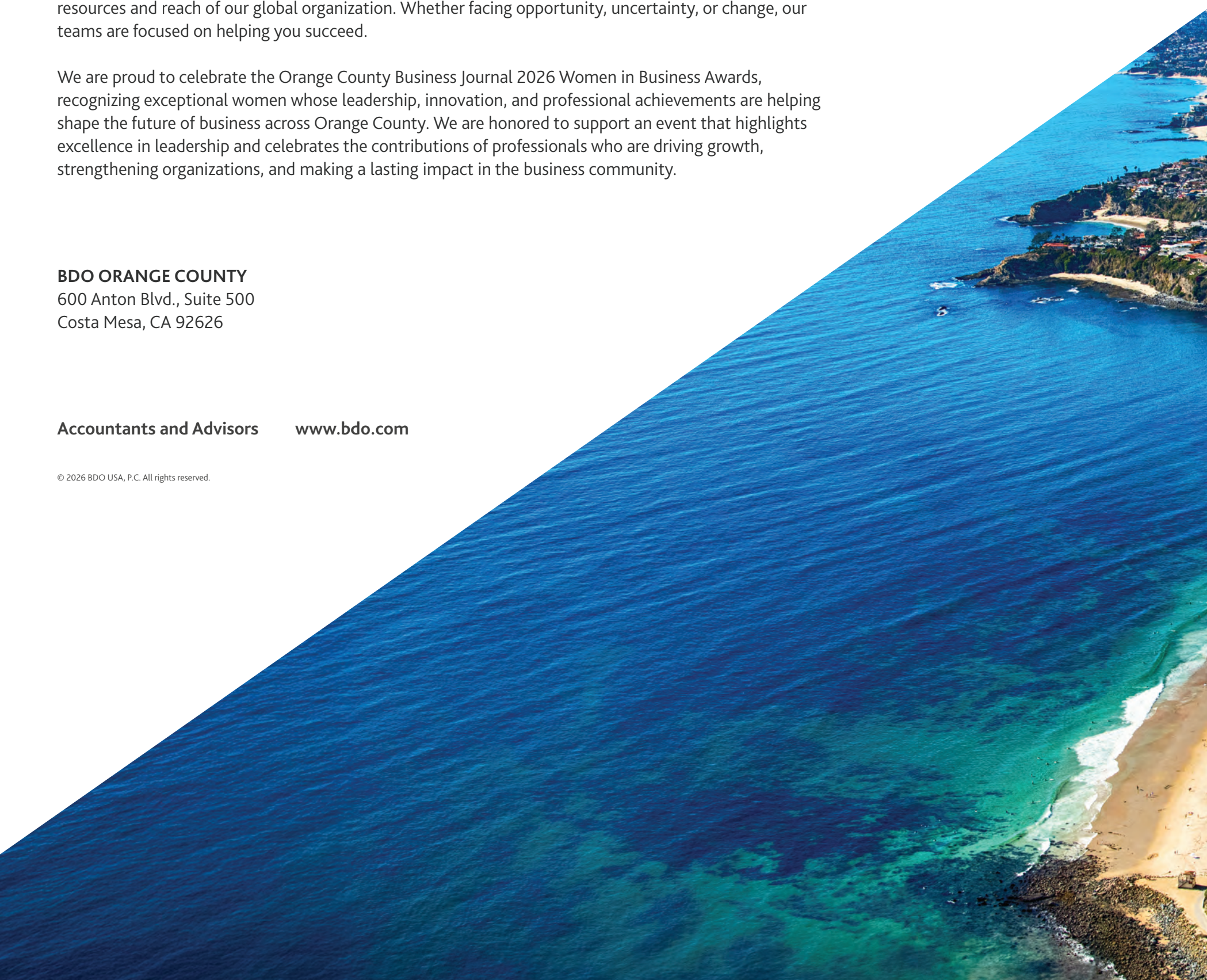
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We are proud to celebrate the Orange County Business Journal 2026 Women in Business Awards, recognizing exceptional women whose leadership, innovation, and professional achievements are helping shape the future of business across Orange County. We are honored to support an event that highlights excellence in leadership and celebrates the contributions of professionals who are driving growth, strengthening organizations, and making a lasting impact in the business community.

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Kate Klimow

Chief Operating Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor of Advancement Operations, UC Irvine

The UC Irvine Foundation is honored to recognize Kate Klimow's exceptional operational leadership, which has helped guide the university through one of the most transformative periods in its history. Her strategic guidance has helped power the university's Brilliant Future campaign, which raised more than \$2.4 billion, making it the largest philanthropic effort in Orange County history, and engaged more than 93,000 alumni, strengthening UC Irvine's culture of philanthropy for generations to come.

Tatyana Popkova

Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Vice President of Ambulatory, UCI Health

UCI Health is honored to recognize Tatyana Popkova's strategic vision, which over her five years at UCI Health has strengthened the organization's role as a trusted academic health partner, built on the expertise of UCI Health's physicians and care teams, across the region. Under her stewardship, Tatyana has pioneered innovative business models that position ambulatory care as the future of academic medicine, doubling the network in size, expanding access to care at the right time and place, and surpassing 1.8 million outpatient visits in fiscal year 2026. Her focus on team-based, quality care was also recognized in the 2025 Vizient Ambulatory Quality & Accountability Ranking, honoring the network as one of the nation's best.

We honor these pioneering women on this well-deserved recognition.

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Kate Klimow

**Chief Operating Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor
of Advancement Operations, UC Irvine**



Tatyana Popkova

**Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Vice President
of Ambulatory, UCI Health**



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Erin Burke | Partner, Jones Day Law Firm

Erin L. Burke is a partner at the law firm of Jones Day. She is a civil litigator and trial lawyer, who focuses on representing multinational companies in high-stakes, complex litigation. Her clients span a variety of industries, including aviation, consumer goods, off road vehicles, retailers, medical devices, hospitals, and other healthcare entities. Erin represents clients in individual and class action litigation in both state and federal courts across the United States. Several of the cases she has tried have been recognized as "top defense verdicts" in California. She has also held a number of leadership positions at Jones Day and is currently the Partner-in-Charge of Jones Day's Irvine Office. Erin is committed to giving back to the community. She is very active with Jones Day's pro bono Laredo Project, where she serves immigrants by assisting them to understand the asylum process while upholding the rule of law. Erin is also a passionate advocate for children and families in crisis, and she currently serves as **Olive Crest's Board Chair**.



Kristina Shahoian | Global Client Programs Marketing Lead, Accenture, PLC

Kristina Shahoian has a robust background in marketing and strategic leadership, she currently serves as the Global AI Marketing Program Lead at Accenture. She holds an M.B.A from Thunderbird School of Global Management and a B.A. in Communications from San Diego State University. Kristina's career is marked by her deep commitment to innovation and excellence in digital transformation, having spearheaded major initiatives across global markets. At Accenture, Kristina has been instrumental in leading cross-functional teams to drive growth and value in the AI sector, managing global events, and executing integrated marketing campaigns with measurable success. Kristina's leadership extends beyond her professional achievements, she is committed to serving her community as an advocate for vulnerable populations, keeping children safe and eradicating human trafficking. She has seen firsthand the trauma caused to victims and the incredible impact of providing a nurturing healing environment to survivors.



Jill Wallace | CEO, Casala Group, Inc.

Jill Wallace, after a distinguished career in public administration and city leadership, founded Casala Group, a government affairs consulting firm. For over a decade, Casala Group has been dedicated to assisting both private sector and non-profit clients navigate local governments throughout Orange County to obtain entitlements, permits, and community support for their project. A mother of four and third generation Orange County native, Jill is committed to serving the community. In addition to the Olive Crest Board of Directors, Jill devotes her time to the Camp Pendleton Marine Foundation, Casa Teresa home for single mothers, various educational insitutions and the Catholic Church. Jill has seen firsthand the effect on foster youth when they age out of the child welfare system. She is passionate about making housing available for them as they transition into independence.

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CAILYN'S (AKA MOON) STORY OF HOPE

Moon's journey is a testament to the power of perseverance, support, and opportunity. After spending much of childhood in foster care, Moon faced significant challenges, including housing instability, frequent school changes, and limited support. While ambitious and full of potential, higher education and long-term career success once felt out of reach.

Everything changed when Moon was welcomed into a supportive adoptive family and connected with the Independent Living Skills (ILS) program. Through guidance, practical life-skills training, and consistent encouragement, Moon gained the confidence to navigate adulthood, pursue educational goals, and build a foundation for long-term success.

With support from advocates who believed in the possibilities ahead, Moon learned how to navigate college applications, housing, employment, and financial independence. More importantly, Moon developed the confidence to move forward instead of allowing past circumstances to define the future.

Today, Moon has accomplished milestones once thought impossible, including pursuing higher education, building a meaningful career, and creating stability for younger siblings. Moon credits much of

this success to the support system that provided encouragement, resources, and opportunities during pivotal moments.

Moon's story serves as a powerful reminder that when young people are given access to support, education, and a community that believes in them, they can overcome adversity and achieve extraordinary outcomes. It is a reflection of how investment in future leaders creates lasting impact, not only for individuals, but for entire families and communities.

"I went from questioning what my future would look like to pursuing my goals with confidence and purpose."

- Moon

When we invest in the next generation, they create opportunities that change lives for years to come.



South Dakota Modern Trust Laws: Direction, Control, and Flexibility

Modern trust laws, available only in progressive trust law jurisdictions such as South Dakota, have revolutionized trust formation and administration in the United States, delivering tremendous direction, control, and flexibility to settlors, beneficiaries, and their advisors.

While many still think of trusts as static, rigid, and inflexible, the reality is very different today. Top-tier jurisdictions have spent decades developing industry-leading trust statutes that have fundamentally changed how trusts are structured, administered, and adapted over time. In fact, when comparing trust jurisdictions across the United States, one of the most important differentiators is the availability and strength of these modern trust law tools.

Together, these laws have transformed and even revolutionized trust planning, creating opportunities for trusts to adapt to changing laws, family circumstances, and planning objectives. Each of the tools outlined below plays a distinct role in sophisticated trust planning, allowing trusts to evolve alongside the families they are designed to serve.

Directed Trusts

Directed Trusts, only available in a handful of states across the country, including South Dakota, continue to change the trust world through unbundling asset management and trust administration functions, putting control back into the hands of settlors, beneficiaries, and their advisors.

Through bifurcating liability, the Directed Trust model creates a legal framework allowing trustees and beneficiaries to work with asset managers and independent trust companies of their choosing. This structure allows different parties to serve in specialized roles, creating a more flexible and collaborative framework for trust administration and providing families and advisors with more control over investment management, distributions, and other important trust functions.

Trust Protector

The Trust Protector concept is often used in conjunction with a Directed Trust, and allows the settlor, beneficiaries, and their advisors to modify and control many important aspects of the trust and provide direction to the trustee with respect to investment management, jurisdiction, and trust distributions.

Acting as a “super trustee,” the Trust Protector enhances the control aspects of the Directed Trust by providing for direction or restraint of trustee powers. In practice, this creates a level of oversight and flexibility that traditional trust structures did not allow.

Decanting

Decanting, appropriately referred to as a “do over,” is essentially distributing assets from an irrevocable trust to a new trust with different, and presumably more desirable and flexible terms, leaving the unwanted terms in the original trust and not binding on the assets.

Many states do not have a decanting statute and not all decanting statutes are created equally. It is important to evaluate the differences among the statutes when selecting proper situs for a trust, as the strength of a jurisdiction’s decanting statute can have a significant impact on long-term flexibility.

Family Advisor

South Dakota was the first state in the nation to enact legislation creating the Family Advisor. The Family Advisor is another modern trust law tool that delivers additional control and flexibility to settlors, beneficiaries, and their advisors, particularly when used in conjunction with a Directed Trust.

Similar to a Trust Protector, but acting in a non-fiduciary capacity, the Family Advisor has the power to modify, control, and participate in many important aspects of trust administration. Often referred to as a “Trust Protector Light” because of its non-fiduciary status and limited powers, the Family Advisor can be an excellent option for settlors of trusts and beneficiaries who want family advisors, such as attorneys, CPAs, or investment advisors, to provide input on important trust matters without elevating the position to that of a fiduciary and the additional liability that role may carry.

Modification and Reformation

Modification and reformation are additional tools that progressive trust jurisdictions make available to advisors and their clients, allowing them to substantially alter the terms of an existing irrevocable trust, often without the need for court approval.

It is important to note that modification and reformation both result in keeping the original trust, whereas decanting results in the transfer of assets from an existing trust to a newly created trust. All of these tools have the potential to significantly change an irrevocable trust and provide flexibility when trust terms no longer align with a family’s circumstances or planning objectives.



Additional Modern Trust Laws

While the modern trust laws discussed above primarily focus on providing greater direction, control, and flexibility in trust administration, progressive trust jurisdictions such as South Dakota have developed additional modern trust laws that strengthen asset protection, privacy, and long-term planning opportunities. Together, these modern trust laws provide families and their advisors with a broader range of planning options than ever before.

Domestic Asset Protection Trusts (DAPTs)

Domestic Asset Protection Trusts (DAPTs), available exclusively in a handful of jurisdictions, including South Dakota, are designed to help protect assets from future third-party liability, including lawsuits and certain creditor claims, while permitting settlors (the person establishing the trust) to retain some control over the trust assets and receive discretionary benefits from the trust during their lifetime.

Because not all DAPT statutes are created equally, the jurisdiction selected can have a significant impact on the strength of the protection available. South Dakota has one of the oldest and most progressive self-settled domestic asset protection statutes in the United States, including a two-year fraudulent transfer “look-back” period that is among the shortest in the country.

Purpose Trusts

Purpose Trusts expand the traditional role of trusts beyond beneficiary-based planning. Unlike traditional trusts, which are established for the benefit of one or more beneficiaries, Purpose Trusts allow assets to be held and administered for a specific purpose.

In progressive trust law jurisdictions such as South Dakota, Purpose Trusts create opportunities to preserve family assets, support philanthropic initiatives, protect unique property, and accomplish other long-term planning objectives that may extend for generations.

Privacy and Quiet Trust Laws

Privacy and Quiet Trust Laws have become an increasingly important consideration for many families when selecting a trust jurisdiction. South Dakota has enacted comprehensive privacy statutes that help preserve confidentiality while providing families with greater control over the administration of a trust.

South Dakota is widely considered to have the strongest trust privacy and Quiet Trust statutes in the United States, providing families with enhanced privacy protections while offering greater control over how and when trust information is shared.

Collectively, these modern trust laws have transformed the trust industry by providing families and their advisors with greater planning opportunities, flexibility, and control than ever before. To learn more about any of the modern trust laws discussed, we invite you to visit our website at www.bridgefordtrust.com and contact Bridgeford Trust Company’s team at info@bridgefordtrust.com.

While all trust administration and corporate governance functions at Bridgeford Trust Company are performed and executed through our two offices in South Dakota, education, planning, and marketing activity is coordinated through Bridgeford Advisors, Inc. dba Bridgeford—a legally distinct sister company of Bridgeford Trust Company—with locations in California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota. To connect with our team in California, please contact David Warren, President & CEO of Bridgeford, at dwarren@bridgefordadvisors.com or by calling (949) 798-6262.



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Currency and Commodity Hedging for Middle Market Organizations

Market volatility continues to reinforce the importance of currency and commodity hedging for middle market companies. After years of swings in currencies, commodities and interest rates, businesses are reevaluating how they manage risk and protect margins.

After more than five years of market volatility, many companies are taking a longer-term approach to hedging. In 2025 alone, the U.S. dollar declined roughly 10% in the first half of the year before stabilizing, underscoring the need for strategic planning and flexibility.

“We’ve seen all kinds of things happen. What we’ve mainly seen is a real push to look at longer-dated hedges versus short term,” said Michael Orefice, managing director for Foreign Currency and Commodity Sales at Fifth Third Bank. “Clients want to help their business not just today but into the future.”

Managing currency risk

For businesses that import goods, source materials overseas or sell products internationally, currency fluctuations can directly affect profitability. Unexpected exchange-rate movements can quickly alter margins.

Increasingly, organizations are turning to hedging strategies to mitigate risk.

Hedging oil prices

Fuel markets remain vulnerable to geopolitical, supply chain and weather-related disruptions. Even modest fuel-cost increases can pressure companies with significant transportation, logistics or operational expenses.

For businesses with significant fuel exposure, hedging can reduce budget variance and improve predictability. Orefice cites the example of a mid-size building services company with several million dollars in annual fuel expenses.

“They’ve got \$3 million to \$5 million of annual expense for fuel. This was a business that hadn’t ever hedged before,” he said. “Instituting a hedge program enabled the company to protect against rising fuel costs. Had they not executed on their hedge program, they would have spent an additional \$3.5 million on fuel over an 18-month period.”

Companies can use a variety of instruments to manage price risk.

Futures vs. forward contracts

A futures contract allows a company to secure a price for a commodity it expects to purchase or sell in the future. These standardized contracts are traded on public exchanges and are widely used to manage exposure.

Forward contracts offer a more customized alternative, as they are privately negotiated agreements that can be tailored to a company’s pricing, timing and delivery needs.

Businesses with irregular payment schedules may benefit from specialized forward solutions. For example, a company with unpredictable transactions in Europe could use a window forward contract to hedge currency risk over a designated time range rather than on a single date.

“This type of forward gives businesses the opportunity to deliver or to receive a currency within a certain date range at the same price,” Orefice said. “They can be very customized to the client’s needs in terms of both prices and duration.”

Commodity Risk

Currency exposure is only one risk businesses face. Commodity price movements can significantly impact operating costs, particularly for manufacturers and firms dependent on energy, agricultural products or industrial metals.

In 2025, commodity markets experienced uneven performance. Precious and industrial metals advanced while energy and grains lagged. Supply disruptions, climate-related challenges and global economic conditions all contributed to market uncertainty.

Because commodity market volatility remains persistent, many businesses are extending their planning horizons and implementing strategies designed to protect



critical inputs three-to-five years into the future.

“Drought conditions are affecting agricultural prices across most of the U.S. and need to be considered as part of a hedge program,” Orefice said. Similar supply chain and production challenges continue to influence metals and other commodity markets.

Managing these risks requires ongoing review of exposures, market conditions and the benefits and costs of a hedge program. As volatility persists, a thoughtful hedging strategy can help businesses manage uncertainty, protect margins and support long-term growth.

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ORANGE COUNTY
GRANTMAKERS
Philanthropy. Community.

Philanthropy. Community.

Orange County Grantmakers (OCG) serves as a bridge between funders and nonprofits, creating space for trust-based partnerships that drive equitable growth throughout the region. We exist to make philanthropy in Orange County more effective, more connected, and more impactful.

Why Join Us?

- Connect with others doing similar work in the local space
- Explore opportunities to collaborate
- Learn, build relationships, and stay informed on local initiatives
- Focus on Orange County-specific needs
- Understand how your work fits into the broader ecosystem
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*As of August 2026



Orange County
UNITED WAY

Business Angels, Powered by PNC Bank: Celebrating Business Brilliance in Orange County

PNC Bank has embraced a philosophy that might sound a little unexpected for a bank: be brilliantly boring with money. By that, they mean being pragmatic, disciplined and responsible in managing finances. While banks don't usually aspire to be boring, for PNC Bank it's a point of pride because steady financial stewardship is the foundation for brilliant outcomes.

The same is true in business. Many of the qualities that drive long-term success are brilliantly boring. They're not flashy or exciting. Instead, they're habits rooted in consistency, preparation, continuous learning and a commitment to doing the right things day after day.

Those are the traits that define the leaders recognized through Business Angels, Powered by PNC Bank, a collaboration between PNC Bank and Angels Baseball. Launched in 2024, the multi-year recognition program celebrates Orange County professionals who are making a positive impact through business innovation, industry leadership and community engagement.

Playing the Long Game

For PNC Bank Regional President Jarrod Ingle, the program is about more than celebrating achievements — it's about recognizing the people whose leadership, consistency and vision help strengthen Orange County's business ecosystem. "It's no secret that Orange County is home to leaders who shape our booming business sector through top-tier talent development, sustainable growth and robust innovation. Through Business Angels, we celebrate and honor those whose contributions, both in the office and out, are helping to drive our economic landscape forward."

When Ingle spoke with this year's honorees, a common theme emerged: The habits and leadership strategies behind exceptional results are often remarkably simple. Much like PNC's brilliantly boring philosophy, the honorees credited their success to consistently focusing on the fundamentals.

Getting the Basics Right

For Priti Jhaveri, vice president, global finance, at Infinite Electronics, Inc., success comes from intentionally creating space for the unexpected. "Every day I leave about 20% to 25% of my day unstructured. I call this my white space. This is my insurance for the unplanned — the unknown." Similarly, fellow honoree Carol DeNembo, chief marketing officer at Mountain Mike's Pizza, attributes her success to a commitment to continuous learning. "One of the things I do during [my commute] is listen to podcasts or audible books, something that's industry-related or specific to my role that helps me to stay fresh, learn new strategies and keep my finger on the pulse of what's new."

Building Strong Teams

When asked about building high-performing teams, the honorees emphasized that exceptional organizations are shaped by intentional leadership and sustained by steady, proven practices. For Sandy Brooks, vice president at SA Recycling, assembling a winning team starts with bringing diverse strengths together and maintaining strong communication. "I like to have a nice mix of those with industry experience, those with technical skills, and those who have a can-do attitude."

Likewise, Kim Boren, chief financial officer at Paciolan, believes culture and capability go hand in hand with team building. "Bringing in smart, capable people that can get the job done makes a tremendous difference."

The importance of strong teams was a common thread among the honorees — many of their most memorable career moments revolved around helping others reach their potential. For Jhaveri, one of her proudest professional accomplishments was empowering future leaders. "My home run moment was when I was able to successfully prepare others in the organization to lead when they were called upon."

Paying It Forward

While Business Angels, Powered by PNC Bank honors individuals who are making an impact across Orange County, the program is ultimately about inspiring leaders, whose daily actions, thoughtful decisions and commitment to their teams help drive what comes next.

Because whether in banking, business or baseball, lasting success rarely comes from a single grand slam. More often, it's built through steady habits, sound decisions and brilliantly boring practices that compound over time.



Consistent results through economic cycles? Brilliantly boring.

A lot can happen in 160 years. The economy can rise, fall and do things that surprise even the most seasoned financial professionals. Yet throughout all those changes, helping businesses adapt and thrive is what we do at PNC Bank. Working across a multitude of industries, we take a diligent, calculated, boring banking approach to help companies achieve long-term results. Through our deep discovery process into the financial needs of your company, we're able to gain unique insights that enable us to craft industry-leading solutions designed to keep it ahead of the curve. And of the competition. Something we have had experience with for 160 years.

**Find out what our boring banking philosophy can do for your business.
Contact Jarrod Ingle, regional president and head of Corporate Banking,
at jarrod.ingle@pnc.com, or visit pnc.com/cib.**



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2026 ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR

ORANGE COUNTY WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Kelly Galligan



RUTAN



Pacific Symphony invests **10% of its annual budget** in education and community engagement, bringing the transformative power of music to students across Orange County.

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Thank you for being part of our mission and supporting your Pacific Symphony.



When Women Thrive: Women's Health Is Community Health

BY SHELLEY M. HOSS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ORANGE COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

In Orange County, women's health is a bellwether for the well-being of the entire community. While Orange County women generally boast better health outcomes than the state and national averages across 200 indicators, significant disparities emerge when data is broken down by zip code or race/ethnicity. This stark reality underscores the urgent need to address health inequities to ensure that every woman can thrive, which ultimately benefits the community as a whole.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISPARITIES

A closer examination of health data reveals that systemic issues continue to challenge women in various communities.



Dr. Shaista Malik

Latinas in Orange County, for example, experience disproportionately high rates of obesity and diabetes, exacerbated by post-pregnancy weight retention and financial stress. Dr. Shaista Malik, Founding Associate Vice Chancellor for Integrative Health, Susan & Henry Samueli College of Health Sciences, notes, "Socioeconomic status is the dominant driver of these disparities. Poverty creates a cascade where healthcare often competes with basic needs."

Dr. Allyson Brooks, Ginny Ueberroth Executive Medical Director Endowed Chair of the Women's Health Institute at Hoag, says, "Black women continue to experience significantly worse maternal health outcomes, reflecting longstanding systemic inequities, including racism. They are more likely to have their pain dismissed and often receive less breastfeeding support than other mothers."



Dr. Allyson Brooks

Locally, data gaps exist due to the relatively small Black population, making it difficult to fully understand and address these disparities.

ROOT CAUSES AND CHALLENGES



Dave Lugo

The root causes of health disparities are multifaceted, involving socioeconomic factors, chronic stress, environmental toxin exposure, language barriers, and limited transportation. "Women in lower-income neighborhoods face a pervasive caregiving burden that causes them to deprioritize their own health," explains Dave Lugo, CEO of MOMS Orange County.

These challenges are present at three critical life stages:

- 1. Reproductive Years:** New mothers from underserved communities encounter pressures surrounding breastfeeding, postpartum mental health, and family planning. Jennifer Roberson, Program Manager at BreastfeedLA, which serves Orange County families, highlights the importance of support systems, stating, "Community engagement is crucial to uncovering and addressing these gaps."
- 2. Midlife (45-60):** Women often juggle caring for both children and aging parents, leaving little time for self-care. Health deferred in younger years can evolve into serious conditions. This group is frequently referred to as "the invisible" due to the lack of attention to their unique challenges.
- 3. Older Adults (61+):** As the only Orange County demographic projected to grow over the next 15 years, older women face increased risks of dementia. Caregiving responsibilities often delay their own health care until conditions become severe and costly.



Jennifer Roberson

PROGRAMS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Thankfully, innovative programs are helping close these gaps. Hoag has developed a comprehensive model designed to meet women where they are, rather than requiring them to navigate complex healthcare systems on their own. The Melinda Hoag Smith Center for Healthy Living offers a range of services at low or no cost, including dental, legal, behavioral health, and wellness services. As Dr. Brooks explains, "By co-locating nonprofit partners on our campus and connecting patients with these resources before they leave the hospital, we're removing barriers and making it easier for women to access the care and support they need."

WOMEN IN ORANGE COUNTY

ALMOST 1 IN 10
OC women between
26-34 years do not
have health insurance

50.5%
of the OC population
are women

41.0
median age of OC women

Source: COUNTY OF ORANGE | 2026 Women & Girls of Orange County Report

Hoag's telehealth services and expanded urgent care options further reduce barriers to care for busy women and families. "Our Hoag On Demand service connects patients with a nurse practitioner in as little as 20 minutes, making high-quality care more accessible when and where women need it," says Dr. Brooks.

At the UCI Susan Samueli Integrative Health Institute, culturally appropriate models bring integrative, preventive care to underserved Latinx women. Dr. Malik describes the initiative: "Group acupuncture, nutrition education, and diabetes prevention programs provide accessible, culturally relevant care that addresses the community's needs."

MOMS Orange County also plays a pivotal role by serving 2,500 clients annually through culturally competent home visitation and health education programs, especially in the Latinx and Vietnamese communities. "Trust built over 34 years is our key asset," says Dave Lugo. "Our bilingual home visitors, many of whom are former program participants, provide crucial support from prenatal care through 18 months postpartum."

EMPOWERING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

As we continue to uncover and address these disparities, community engagement remains essential. Jennifer Roberson of BreastfeedLA emphasizes, "We must actively listen to the voices of those affected and tailor our programs to meet their specific needs."

When women thrive, the entire community benefits. By addressing the root causes of health disparities and implementing innovative, culturally sensitive programs, we can foster a healthier, more equitable future for all. By ensuring that every woman in Orange County has access to the care she needs, we build a stronger, more resilient community.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Partnering with the Orange County Community Foundation (OCCF) provides a unique opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of women and, by extension, the community. By collaborating with OCCF, you can help address the pressing health disparities and systemic issues affecting women in Orange County. The foundation offers numerous ways to get involved, whether by creating a personalized philanthropic plan that reflects your values or by contributing to existing funds that support women's health initiatives.

Additionally, OCCF facilitates connections with nonprofits that resonate with your philanthropic passions, ensuring your contributions make a meaningful impact. Engaging with OCCF also allows you to involve your family and future generations in charitable activities, fostering a legacy of giving. By working together, we can amplify our efforts and create a healthier, more equitable community for everyone.

To explore how you can be part of this vital work, visit oc-cf.org.



Shelley M. Hoss

 **Orange County
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Don't miss our landmark documentary series now appearing on KLCS-PBS. Brought to you through a collaboration with OC World, an award-winning multimedia nonprofit founded in Orange County in 2020, the series explores six areas of significant need in our community.

In our upcoming episode, *Women's Health Drives Community Health*, we examine women's health challenges across life stages and in underserved communities. Hear from local experts on the urgent need to address health inequities to ensure that every woman can thrive, which ultimately benefits the community as a whole.

Watch now at oc-cf.org/PowerOfCommunity

Orange County
Community
Foundation ♥



ESTATE PLANNING FOR WOMEN: A PRIMER FOR PROTECTING WEALTH, FAMILY AND BUSINESS LEGACY

Women in business often balance several demanding roles at once: executive, entrepreneur, spouse, parent, caregiver and steward of family wealth. With those responsibilities come estate-planning concerns that may be very different from those faced by other family members or business partners.

A thoughtfully designed estate plan can help a woman maintain control of her assets, prepare for unexpected life events and protect the people and organizations that depend on her.

WHY ESTATE PLANNING IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN

Effective estate planning addresses the distinct financial, family and professional responsibilities faced by successful women business owners. It can help protect their business and personal assets from lawsuits, creditors and other potential threats while preparing for unexpected life events and establishing a clear business succession strategy.



In his book, *Estate Planning for Women Only*, Jeffrey Verdon presents practical insights and protective planning strategies every woman should understand to help preserve wealth, maintain independence and protect her family legacy. The book also explores complex family dynamics, including blended families, inheritance concerns, and the emotional and financial challenges that often arise after the loss of a spouse. *One hundred percent of the book's proceeds are donated to the Wounded Warrior Project.*

By planning proactively, women business owners can retain control, prepare for life's uncertainties and protect everything they have worked so hard to build.



JEFFREY M. VERDON MANAGING PARTNER

With over 40 years in law, Jeffrey M. Verdon has been practicing law in the areas of taxation and comprehensive estate planning since receiving his Masters of Law (LL.M. Taxation) from Boston University in 1979.

Verdon Law Group, LLP was founded with a singular purpose: to preserve and protect the legacies of affluent families and successful business owners from unforeseen lawsuits, creditors, and predators. and to transfer those legacies to future generations with the least amount of estate tax permitted by law.



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*The best man for the job
is a woman.*

Verdon Law Group proudly congratulates the 2026 Orange County Business Journal Women in Business nominees on their outstanding achievements, inspiring leadership and meaningful contributions to the Orange County community.



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Beyond Investments: Bringing Every Part of Your Financial Life Together

By Alice Hsu, Senior Vice President and Private Wealth Advisor, U.S. Bank

One of the most common misconceptions I encounter is that wealth planning starts with a portfolio. More often, it starts with a question: How do I take care of my family, my business or the causes I care about when life changes?

In my experience working with individuals and families across Orange County, some of the most meaningful conversations are not about market performance or portfolio allocation. They are about life. They are about family, legacy, philanthropy, business ownership, retirement, and the values clients hope to pass on to future generations. These goals rarely fit neatly into a single financial category, which is why comprehensive planning requires a broader perspective.

Many successful individuals have assembled a network of advisors over time. They may work with an investment manager, an attorney, an accountant, a banker, and other specialists. Each advisor plays an important role, but too often these relationships operate independently. As a result, critical decisions may be made in isolation, creating missed opportunities or unintended consequences elsewhere in a client's financial life. The most effective planning happens when every component and all of the professionals involved work together to achieve the client's goals.



Alice Hsu

That includes investments, but it also includes banking and lending strategies, trust and estate planning, tax considerations, business interests, charitable giving, and family governance. When these areas are coordinated, clients are often better positioned to make informed decisions with greater confidence and clarity.

Trust management is a particularly important part of that conversation. Many people assume trusts are only relevant for ultra-high-net-worth families or those navigating a major life event. In reality, trusts can serve a variety of purposes and may play a valuable role in helping families protect assets, provide for loved ones, support charitable goals, and facilitate the transfer of wealth according to their wishes.

Just as importantly, trust planning can provide continuity. Families evolve over time. Children grow up, businesses change hands, and priorities shift. A thoughtfully designed trust structure can help ensure that a family's intentions remain clear and that assets continue to be managed in alignment with long-term objectives.

Trust management is not simply about legal documents. It is about stewardship. It is about helping ensure that wealth serves a purpose while

creating a framework that can adapt as circumstances change. For many families, having a trusted institution help administer and manage those responsibilities can provide both practical benefits and peace of mind.

This becomes increasingly important as wealth transitions from one generation to the next. One of the most common concerns I hear from clients is not whether they have accumulated enough wealth, but whether future generations will be prepared to manage it responsibly. These conversations often involve much more than financial planning. They involve education, communication, family values, and long-term vision. Families who discuss goals, expectations and responsibilities before a transition occurs are often better positioned than those who avoid the conversation until a crisis or major life event forces it.

Creating opportunities for meaningful discussions today can help families avoid unnecessary complexity tomorrow. When family members share a clearer understanding of goals and expectations, they are often better equipped to navigate future decisions together.

Technology has also transformed the planning process. Advanced modeling tools allow advisors to evaluate different scenarios, assess potential outcomes, and adjust strategies as circumstances evolve. These capabilities can provide valuable insights, helping clients better understand how decisions made today may affect future opportunities.

But technology, by itself, is not the answer.

The most effective planning combines sophisticated tools with experienced guidance. Numbers and projections are important, but understanding a family's priorities, concerns, and aspirations is equally critical. Every client has a unique story, and every plan should reflect that reality.

Ultimately, true wealth planning is about more than growing assets. It is about creating alignment across every aspect of a financial life. When investments, trust management, estate planning, banking relationships, and long-term goals work together, families can spend less time worrying about complexity and more time focusing on what matters most.

For many people, the greatest benefit of comprehensive planning is not simply financial. It is the confidence that comes from knowing decisions are being made with intention, coordination, and a clear view of the future.

Wealth is rarely built in a single moment, and its impact is rarely measured solely by account balances. The most enduring plans are those that help families navigate change, support future generations and preserve the values that matter most. That is the difference between managing assets and stewarding a legacy.

Alice Hsu is a Senior Vice President and Private Wealth Advisor serving the Orange County market.

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THE STANDARD OF LIVING WAS NEVER ON THE TAX RETURN

By **Paul Nelson, Esq**



A business owner arrives with a tax return showing \$410,000 of income and a spousal support request built on a number considerably larger. The return is accurate. The accountant did nothing wrong. The gap has nothing to do with fraud, and everything to do with how the family actually lived.

Family Code section 4320 lists the circumstances a court considers in setting spousal support. Among them are the extent to which each party's earning capacity is sufficient to maintain the standard of living established during the marriage, and the needs of each party based on that standard. Ability to pay appears separately, alongside earning capacity, assets, and obligations. The statute is a list of factors rather than a formula, but the marital standard of living is the benchmark much of the rest is measured against, and in a case built around a closely held business it is often the harder half of the work.

That standard was not built out of taxable income. It was built out of cash, and in these cases the cash came from the business. Which leads to the second step, and the one that consumes the forensic budget: determining how much cash was actually available to support the household.

Here the two disciplines part company. A tax return answers a question about taxation. It reports what is taxable after every lawful deduction has done its work. The cash available analysis asks something else. What did this household spend, and where did the money come from. Deductible and unavailable are not the same thing.

Depreciation is the cleanest illustration. The deduction lowers taxable income without moving a dollar out of the account. The money remained available. It paid the mortgage, the tuition, and the trips.

Perquisites follow the same logic and are often larger than the parties expect. The vehicle. The phone. The health premiums. The travel, the meals, and the club dues that appear in the general ledger under a more respectable name. None of it arrives as salary. All of it funded the marital lifestyle, because it covered costs the family would otherwise have paid out of pocket.

Retained earnings are harder. A pass-through entity reports income to its owner whether or not the money is distributed, and the owner who leaves cash in the company will argue, often correctly, that the business needs it. Working capital requirements, debt covenants, and a documented seasonal cycle are defensible reasons. A change in distribution practice during the year the petition is filed is a harder sell, particularly when the household spending never changed.

There is also the problem of counting the same dollars twice. The business is often valued by capitalizing its earnings, and those same earnings then become the measure of what the marriage could afford. The Court of Appeal has declined to adopt a bright-line rule against it. The valuation and the support analysis cannot be run in separate rooms by people who never speak.

What survives all of this is documentation. Board minutes reflecting why cash stayed in the company. A vehicle log. An expense policy that predates the marriage falling apart. Records created after the petition is filed are admissible, argued over, and worth considerably less.

The lifestyle left a record. It was just kept somewhere other than the return.

NELSON  KIRKMAN

Family Law Attorneys & Advisors

When the stakes are highest

NelsonKirkman.com



Financial Confidence Changes Lives

For more than 25 years, WISE has helped women and girls build the knowledge and confidence to make informed financial decisions.



WISE equips women and girls with the knowledge and confidence to build lasting financial security. For more than 25 years, our Orange County nonprofit has provided free financial education through workshops, webinars, podcasts and our signature Tearing Down the Pink Wall series. From young girls to university students and professionals, WISE helps women gain the skills they need to make informed financial decisions, all at no cost to participants.

Join us in expanding financial confidence for the next generation.



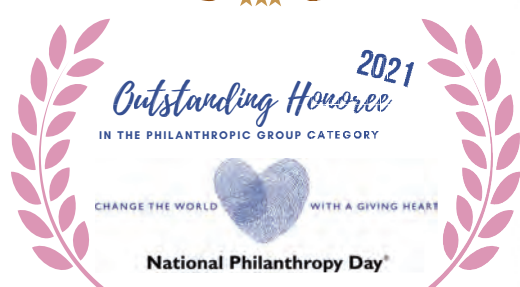
University Partnerships



Girl Scouts Financial Education



Girls Inc. Workshops



BY THE NUMBERS **WISE'S GROWING IMPACT**



32

**SCHOLARSHIPS
GRANTED
(TD)**



30

EVENTS



150+

**DEDICATED
VOLUNTEERS &
BOARD LEADERS**



5000

**VOLUNTEER
HOURS**



2000

**WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANTS**



100K

**WOMEN IN OUR
NETWORK
WORLDWIDE**

We invested in exceptional women long before it became a headline.



The advertising industry has always been in the business of understanding people.

Their motivations. Their behaviors. Their aspirations. The moments that inspire them to choose one brand over another.

But while consumers have evolved, agency leadership hasn't always kept pace.

Today, women influence the majority of purchasing decisions, yet female owned creative agencies represent just one percent of the advertising industry. For brands trying to connect authentically with today's audiences, that's more than a statistic. It's a reminder that different perspectives create stronger ideas.

At Reveille, we've spent more than 15 years proving that exceptional work doesn't require the infrastructure of a global holding company. It requires experienced people, collaborative leadership and the freedom to move at the speed modern brands demand.

That philosophy has attracted some of the industry's most accomplished strategists, creatives and client leaders. Many built award-winning careers at some of advertising's largest agencies before choosing Reveille for a different reason. To get closer to the work, closer to clients and closer to the decisions that matter.

The result is an agency built for partnership.

Every client works directly with experienced leaders. Strategy happens in real time. Creative isn't diluted through layers of approval. Decisions are made by the people doing the work, not by organizational charts.

As we've grown, we've intentionally built a leadership team that reflects a broader range of experiences and perspectives.

Today, women lead our agency, production, creative services, public relations, business development and creative direction alongside an

"Being part of the one percent may make us rare, but the quality of our thinking is what makes us valuable."

—Brenda Springer,
Founder and CEO

exceptional group of male leaders whose expertise spans strategy, creative, client partnerships and operations. Together, they share one belief. The best ideas are built collaboratively.

We create richer conversations, sharper thinking and work that connects more authentically with the people brands are trying to reach.

Across healthcare, hospitality, automotive, retail, purpose-driven and consumer brands, Reveille combines deep industry expertise with senior level leadership to solve complex business challenges and create work that doesn't just earn attention. It creates momentum.

Yes, we're one of the one percent.

But that's not why clients hire Reveille.

They hire us because experienced leaders stay close to the work. Because collaboration replaces bureaucracy. Because different perspectives produce better thinking. And because the strongest agencies aren't defined by their size. They're defined by the quality of their ideas and the people behind them.

The future of advertising won't belong to the biggest agencies.

It will belong to the ones built to understand people best.

That's Reveille.

reveille
reveilleinc.com



THIS IS WHAT 1% LOOKS LIKE.

THE ONE PERCENT ISN'T THE STORY. THE WORK IS.

Female owned creative agencies represent just 1% of the advertising industry.*

We're proud to be one of them.

Not because it's rare.

Because different perspectives create better thinking.
Better partnerships. **Better work.**

*According to calculations by the 4As,
the American Association of Advertising Agencies.

reveille 

reveilleinc.com



Meet the Judges:



Julia Arora - Executive Director, Strategic Services, City of Hope Orange County

Julia Arora is Executive Director of Strategic Services for City of Hope Orange County, bringing 15 years of experience in quantitative analysis to inform strategic healthcare decision-making. Since joining in 2018 as one of the earliest OC team members, she played a key role in developing the business case for the organization's expansion into the region. In her current role, Arora leads data analytics, market assessments, and business case development for new programs, advancing key growth initiatives aligned with City of Hope Orange County's strategic plan. Her work earned her the Greater Irvine Chamber's "40 Under 40" recognition in 2021. Previously, she worked in strategy at St. Joseph Health in Irvine and as a healthcare consultant with CannonDesign. She holds a bachelor's degree in Earth Systems from Stanford University.



Julie Beckley - Senior Vice President, Southern California Sales Manager, Columbia Bank

Julie Beckley is Senior Vice President, Southern California Sales Manager for Commercial Banking at Columbia Bank. In this role, she leads business development efforts across Southern California, working with companies ranging from emerging middle market businesses to larger middle market/corporate banking clients with revenues from approximately \$5 million to several billion dollars. Beckley partners closely with business owners, CFOs, management teams, and professional advisors to understand their strategic and financial objectives and connect them with Columbia Bank's comprehensive commercial banking capabilities. She works across the broader Columbia platform to deliver tailored credit, treasury management, deposit, and specialty banking solutions that support client's growth and long-term success. With over 35 years of banking experience, Beckley has held leadership, relationship management, and business development roles spanning corporate banking, middle market banking, specialty lending, and strategic business development. She has spent more than 25 years serving the Southern California business community and is recognized for her extensive network, relationship-focused approach, and commitment to helping clients achieve their business goals.



Katherine Collins - Treasury Management Officer, PNC Bank

Katherine Collins is a treasury management officer for PNC Bank's Orange County and Inland Empire market. Collins consults for and manages a middle market and corporate banking portfolio, develops treasury proposals for current and prospective clients, conducts an annual assessment of client treasury needs and works with internal partners on client deposit strategies. Collins helps companies drive efficiency in their business by leveraging technology to address challenges faced in corporate treasury. She works with clients to understand their businesses at a micro level to identify ways to optimize working capital and mitigate risk in an ever-changing treasury landscape. Collins has nearly two decades of experience with a diversified background in retail banking, sales and operations across segments including commercial banking, business banking, life sciences, property management, retail, and auto finance. Collins leads PNC's local Women in Business program including engagement and support for women financial decision makers. Collins enjoys connecting with women-led businesses and accelerating women's financial equality as a Certified Women's Business Advocate. Collins is a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles where she received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance and a minor in management. She resides locally with her husband and dog.



Christine Sanchez Dittmer - Chief Philanthropy Officer, Orange County United Way

Christine Dittmer is Chief Philanthropy Officer at Orange County United Way, where she leads The OC Way campaign, a transformational effort to strengthen and modernize Orange County's 211 system of care. In this role, she oversees major and principal gifts strategy and works with local philanthropists and business leaders to raise funds to advance innovative solutions that help Orange County residents access housing, food, healthcare, financial stability, and other essential services through a more connected system of care. With more than 30 years of experience in philanthropy and nonprofit leadership, Dittmer has held senior fundraising roles with nationally recognized organizations including the American Heart Association, Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, and Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute. During her tenure with the American Heart Association, she served as National Chair of the Individual Giving Task Force and helped lead the creation of a national major gifts roadmap for the organization. Throughout her career, she has built a reputation for creating high-performing fundraising strategies, cultivating transformational donor relationships, and helping mission-driven organizations achieve ambitious growth and impact. Dittmer holds bachelor's degrees in Communications and American Studies from California State University, Fullerton. A longtime Orange County resident, she lives in Huntington Beach with her husband Ted and enjoys boating, traveling, reading, and spending time with family and friends.



Natalie Dundas - Partner, Rutan & Tucker LLP

Natalie Dundas supports private and public companies in a wide array of industries with a focus on mergers and acquisitions, including auction processes and international carve-out transactions, private equity, corporate governance and other general corporate matters. She also represents public companies in periodic reporting review and compliance matters as well as in registered public offerings and private placements of equity and debt. Additionally, she represents foreign private issuers in listings on U.S. stock exchanges and U.S. securities matters.



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!



Alice Hsu - Senior Vice President, Private Wealth Advisor, U.S. Bank

Alice Hsu is a Private Wealth Advisor and Senior Vice President at U.S. Bank Private Wealth Management, where she provides comprehensive wealth management strategies tailored to high-net-worth clients. Her expertise spans investment management, private banking, trust and estate services, and holistic financial planning. Hsu began her career in private banking and investments in 2002 and previously held roles at HSBC Private Bank and Bank of America Private Bank in San Francisco. She has extensive experience advising corporate executives, business owners—particularly in the technology sector—and real estate investors on both personal and business financial matters. She holds an MBA from Babson College's F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business and a B.S. from the University of San Francisco. Hsu is also an active community member and nonprofit volunteer, supporting organizations focused on youth and animal welfare.



Meet the Judges:



Margita Labhard - Senior Director of Philanthropic Strategy, Orange County Community Foundation

Margita Labhard is a forward-thinking, strategic leader with over 20 years of experience in organizational growth, business development, digital transformation and philanthropy. Her achievements have spanned developing market strategies, developing new products and services, launching new business models and technologies, enhancing business value and services, diversifying revenue streams, increasing profitability, and improving internal business systems and operations for Fortune 500 businesses and non-profits. As Senior Director of Philanthropic Strategy, Labhard partners with individuals, families, corporations, nonprofits, and the professional advisor community to craft strategies for amplified charitable giving in Orange County. She leads a development team who provide guidance on current and planned giving options, handling of illiquid assets such as real estate and private business holdings, and support the establishment of charitable funds for enduring philanthropic impact. Labhard earned an MBA in Marketing and a Bachelor of Arts. She is a certified Foresight Specialist from the Institute for the Future and a certified Lean Six Sigma White Belt.



Kristen McCarthy - Assurance Market Managing Principal, Southern California, BDO USA, P.C.

Kristen McCarthy has more than 37 years of experience in public and private accounting. Prior to joining BDO, she worked at a Big Four accounting firm and in private industry with Hughes Electronics, a Fortune 50 company. She serves public, privately held, and nonprofit organizations across the technology, consumer products, manufacturing and distribution, and real estate industries. McCarthy has deep experience advising publicly traded companies through all stages of the business lifecycle, from initial public offerings to Sarbanes-Oxley Section 404 engagements. She has extensive knowledge of SEC reporting and compliance requirements, including Securities Act of 1933 and Securities Exchange Act of 1934 filings. Her SEC experience also includes initial and secondary offerings, private investment in public equity (PIPE) transactions, debt offerings, M&A transactions, and work with non-traded SEC registrants. As the leader of BDO's Southern California Assurance Practice, McCarthy is responsible for developing and executing strategies that deliver meaningful value to clients. She is a committed and engaged leader who is passionate about building high-performing teams and developing best-in-class talent across the firm. McCarthy's leadership roles at BDO include co-chairing the Women's Initiative and BDO Flex, as well as serving as a mentor within BDO's Leadership Institute. She is also active in the Southern California community and supports a number of philanthropic organizations, including CASA of Orange County, United Way of Orange County, and Christ Life Ministries in Zambia. A proud USC alum, McCarthy enjoys staying involved with the Orange County USC Alumni Chapter.



Jeimy Ortiz - Commercial Banking Relationship Manager, PNC Bank

Jeimy Ortiz is a seasoned Relationship Manager with over 25 years of experience in financial services, known for her strategic relationship management, community focus, and client-first approach. She recently joined PNC Bank as a Senior Relationship Manager III, continuing her commitment to delivering personalized financial solutions that align with her clients' long-term business goals. Before joining PNC, Ortiz served as a Senior Relationship Manager at Bank of America, where she spent four years helping business clients grow and thrive. Prior to that, she built a distinguished 20-year career at Wells Fargo Bank, beginning as a Teller while attending college and rising through the ranks to Vice President, Senior Business Relationship Manager in the Commercial Banking space, supporting businesses with revenues from \$5MM to \$50MM. Her experience also includes managing multiple retail branches, building high-performing teams, and advising clients across lending, depository, and treasury management services. Ortiz is passionate about understanding the full financial picture of each client, managing, monitoring, and educating business owners to make sound financial decisions while assembling the right team of partners to support their growth. Her approach centers on developing long-term, values-aligned relationships that foster stability and innovation. Deeply committed to community service, Ortiz serves on two nonprofit boards: she has been a board member of the RevComm Foundation for three years, and currently serves as Secretary of the Phenix Gateway organization. She is also a dedicated volunteer with The Diaper Bank of Inland Empire and her son's tennis team at John W. North High School. She has also volunteered with Promise Scholars, speaking to youth about financial literacy and the importance of early financial planning. Ortiz earned her Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts from California State University, Riverside, and pursued additional financial studies at the UCLA Extension Center to enhance her financial acumen. She lives in Riverside, California, with her husband and their son, and dog, Henry. Outside of work, she enjoys propagating plants, baking, traveling, and spending quality time with her family.



Melissa Pollard - Senior Vice President, Fifth Third Bank

Melissa Pollard is a Senior Vice President and Senior Relationship Manager for Fifth Third Bank's commercial banking practice in Orange County. She brings nearly four decades of experience working with middle market \$100MM+ revenue companies. Pollard has been with the Bank for 28 years (including 20 years at Comerica and the last 8 years at Fifth Third), where she has built a strong track record in both new business development and client relationship management. She began her banking career with Bank of America, where she spent 10 years. Pollard earned her BS and BA degrees from the University of Richmond in Virginia. An east coast native, she has called Aliso Viejo home for the past 28 years, where she lives with her husband of 36 years and their 100-pound doberman pinscher. They have two grown children, and outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, and other outdoor activities. Pollard is deeply involved in the Orange County business and nonprofit community. She serves as a longstanding board director for the Association for Corporate Growth Orange County and has been the exclusive banking sponsor of its Women in Leadership initiative since inception. She also serves on the Associates Board of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County and is a member of the Women of Greatness Committee for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Orange Coast. In addition, Pollard is an active member of Orange County United Way's Women United, Financial Executives International, Center for Business Growth, Executive Connections, and ProVisors.



Richard Reisman - Publisher & Chief Executive Officer, 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.



Brenda Rose - Executive Director, Business Banking Market Manager, OC, JPMorgan Chase

Brenda Rose leads the OC Market for Chase's Business Banking Team. Her team of 70 bankers offers financial solutions to over 7,500 Small Businesses, including treasury management solutions, access to capital and full-service financial guidance. Rose's 40 year career in banking included Commercial Real Estate Lending, Large Corporate Banking, Wealth Management, and 20+ years helping Small Businesses. Rose serves on the Board of the Orange County Market Leadership Team and promotes Women in Business in several initiatives throughout the year. Rose grew up in Los Angeles and earned her BS in Business Administration from CSU Northridge and her MBA from USC, both on full academic scholarships. She also has a graduate degree from Pacific Coast Banking School. She lives in Oceanside with her husband and has four grown kids. Rose loves fitness, photography, scuba diving and has travelled to 50+ countries.

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Ajenda Public Relations, Orange

Jennifer Morris, Founder

Jennifer Morris, Founder and CEO of Ajenda Public Relations, launched her creative PR and marketing agency at 29, leveraging over a decade of hands-on experience in the restaurant industry. Over the past 16 years, she has transformed Ajenda from a sole proprietorship in Orange County into a thriving, full-service agency with a national presence. Today, Ajenda represents around 30 prestigious clients, including Michelin-starred restaurants, multi-unit franchises, corporate hotel chains, boutique distilleries, and coffee roasters.



Aldrich, Brea

Tanya Valle, Partner

Tanya Valle, Partner at Aldrich CPAs + Advisors LLP, brings more than 20 years of experience advising construction, real estate, and high-net-worth clients on complex tax matters. She is part of a top 75 U.S. accounting firm that serves thousands of businesses and individuals across the Western United States and continues to expand its integrated tax, accounting, and advisory services. Since joining Aldrich in 2021, Valle has been instrumental in growing the firm's presence in Southern California, particularly within the construction and real estate sectors. She holds a Master of Science in Taxation, is a CPA and CCIFP, and is active in the SUASC, AICPA, and CalCPA.



Alta Loma Enterprises / Cardenas Three, Rancho Cucamonga

Nefertiti Long, Chief Operating Officer

Nefertiti Long is the Chief Operating Officer of Alta Loma Enterprises, a private real estate investment company in Rancho Cucamonga California. She has over 25 years' experience in business with a focus on the areas of Accounting and Finance. Her experience is across many industries including food, real estate, and technology. Prior to joining Alta Loma Enterprises, she was the Vice President of Finance of Cardenas Markets a midsize grocery chain serving the Inland Empire with its corporate office in Ontario California. Before obtaining executive level, she held various positions in accounting and finance throughout her career including Controller, Assistant Controller, Accounting Manager, Senior Accountant Staff Accountant, and Financial Analyst. Business Affiliations include membership in FEI and Cal CPA. Long has a passion for giving back and being involved in her community. To that end she serves on several boards in leadership roles, including in her role as is President of Alliance of Black Women Accountants.



Amborella Organics, Laguna Beach

Taylor Clarke, Co-founder & CEO

Taylor Clarke is the Co-founder of Amborella Organics. Founded in 2016 alongside her husband, Amborella Organics markets gourmet lollipops with certified biodegradable sticks embedded with non-GMO herb and flower seeds that can be planted after the candy is enjoyed. Under Clarke's leadership, Amborella Organics has partnered with major retailers including Urban Outfitters, Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Terrain, Nordstrom, Target, Erewhon, and Uncommon Goods. The brand's distinctive concept has also attracted collaborations with globally recognized names including Marc Jacobs, L'Oréal, Tommy Hilfiger, Armani, and Yves Saint Laurent.



America On Track, Santa Ana

Claire Braeburn, Co-Founder & Executive Director

Claire Braeburn is a transformative public health and community leader whose work has helped shape healthier, more equitable communities across Orange County for more than three decades. As Co-Founder and Executive Director of America On Track (AOT), she has led the Santa Ana-based nonprofit's growth into a respected regional organization serving more than 44,000 unduplicated residents annually through youth leadership, public health, and community engagement initiatives. Since 1995, under Braeburn's leadership, AOT has advanced more than 200 smoke-free, tobacco and vape prevention policies, as well as nutrition-related policies across Orange County. Among the most notable is Buena Park's Smoke-Free City and Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing Ordinance, recognized as one of the most comprehensive policies in Southern California and significantly expanding protections for residents from secondhand smoke exposure. Recognized as a leading voice in community-centered public health policy, Braeburn is distinguished by her collaborative leadership approach. Through culturally responsive outreach and long-standing partnerships, she empowers residents, youth, and families to build advocacy skills, strengthen civic engagement, and drive lasting policy and systems change across Orange County communities.



America On Track, Santa Ana

Terry Thompson, Co-founder & President

Terry Thompson is the Co-founder & President of America On Track (AOT), a nonprofit launched in 1995 to address social inequities and health disparities for children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds throughout Orange County. Under her visionary leadership, AOT has grown into a results-driven countywide organization serving more than 44,000 individuals annually through evidence-based programs focused on leadership development, mentoring, tobacco and drug use prevention, fitness and nutrition education, and support for children of incarcerated parents. With a strong background in business and the arts, Thompson has built innovative, collaborative programs that create lasting community impact. Having grown up facing many of the same challenges experienced by AOT's clients, she brings deep understanding, empathy, and personal insight to her role. Thompson is the architect of AOT's unique youth development programs, including Brighter Futures for Children of Prisoners, a one-of-a-kind, family-centered initiative designed to disrupt intergenerational incarceration. For 31 years, her exceptional leadership and tireless commitment have profoundly shaped the lives of hundreds of thousands of people throughout Orange County.



American Lending Center Holdings Inc., Irvine

Stella Zhang, Chief Operating Officer

Stella Zhang is the Chief Operating Officer of American Lending Center Holdings Inc. (ALC),

a nationally recognized non-bank lending institution dedicated to supporting small businesses and underserved communities across the United States, and a Partner at investment firm Sunstone Management. Under her leadership, ALC has experienced substantial growth and earned repeated recognition on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies and the Financial Times' Fastest-Growing Companies in the Americas list. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Zhang is deeply committed to philanthropy and community engagement through the Stella and John Foundation, which supports entrepreneurship, innovation, and educational initiatives across universities and local communities throughout Southern California.



American Red Cross of Southern California, Santa Ana

Debbie Leahy, Regional Disaster Officer

As the Regional Disaster Officer, Debbie Leahy oversees disaster preparedness, response and recovery teams, programs, and services for the American Red Cross Southern California Region which includes Orange, San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial Counties. Under Leahy's leadership, local teams provide preparedness education and resources to the community. Through the Home Fire Campaign alone, more than 1,200 smoke alarms were installed in the last fiscal year, making more than 500 Orange County homes safer. Leahy's leadership also extends to disaster response efforts with teams responding to 130 disasters like fires, floods, and other emergencies, assisting more than 194 Orange County families in the last fiscal year. Those impacted by disasters received food, shelter, relief supplies, emotional comfort, health services, financial assistance, and other support in their great time of need.



Angels Baseball, Anaheim

Molly Jolly, President

On April 6, 2026, Molly Jolly became the ninth President of Angels Baseball and the first woman named to the position in franchise history. In her role, she oversees the day-to-day operations of the Club, including strategic direction, marketing, communications, administration, facility management, revenue, and overall business strategy. Additionally, she has overseen the May 1st launch of Angels Broadcast Television, the new television home of Angels Baseball. 2026 marks her 26th season with the Angels organization, bringing more than two decades of executive leadership across finance, operations, and strategic growth. Her career includes a three-year tenure with The Walt Disney Company, where she served as Director of Finance for both the Angels and the Anaheim Ducks. In just her third season with the club, she became the highest-ranking woman in the organization. As Senior Vice President, Finance and Administration, Jolly oversaw all financial operations and office administration, including legal, risk management, human resources, and information services, while also directing financial operations at Angel Stadium for major non-baseball events such as Supercross and Monster Jam.



AO, Orange

Ruba Awad-Moran, Partner

Ruba Awad-Moran, LEED AP, is a Partner at AO, Orange County's largest architecture firm, where she leads the firm's Interiors practice. With more than two decades of dedicated practice in interior design and architecture, Awad-Moran is recognized for her commitment to excellence, precision, and delivering design solutions that support AO's continued growth as a nationally recognized Top 50 architecture firm. Since joining AO in 2011, she has led and contributed across a wide range of project types across the firm's restaurant, retail, office, multifamily, and mixed-use studios. In 2021, she established AO's Interiors studio, where she now leads a team focused on the ideation, development, and execution of design-forward interior environments and spaces. Today, Awad-Moran is a core leader within AO's 335-person, 17-studio practice, supporting the firm's continued growth and international presence. Known for her ability to foster collaboration and guide projects from concept through completion, she consistently delivers spaces that are thoughtful, cohesive, and built to last.



Apriem Advisors, Irvine

Rhonda Ducote, CEO & Partner

Rhonda Ducote, AIF®, is CEO and Partner of Apriem Advisors, an Orange County based wealth management firm providing comprehensive financial planning and investment management to individuals and families navigating complex life transitions. With more than 30 years of experience, she has been a driving force behind the firm's strategy, culture, and sustained growth. Since joining Apriem in 2000 and becoming CEO in 2016, Ducote has helped scale the firm from approximately \$10 million in assets under management to over \$1.4 billion today. Under her leadership, Apriem has achieved more than 20 percent annualized AUM growth over the past year and nearly 14 percent over five years, alongside revenue growth exceeding 13 percent and a client retention rate above 99 percent. Apriem's growth is fueled almost entirely by client referrals, reflecting its deeply relationship driven model. Ducote also founded the Women of Wisdom initiative, advancing financial literacy and empowerment for women while reinforcing the firm's commitment to thoughtful, long term wealth management.



Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs, Santa Ana

Shiree Colton, Supervising Office Manager

Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs (AOCDS) is one of California's leading law enforcement associations, representing thousands of active and retired deputy sheriffs and peace officers while supporting advocacy, member services, and charitable outreach throughout Orange County and across the state. Since joining AOCDS in February 1994, Shiree Colton has proudly served in several leadership support roles, including Secretary, Executive Project Manager, Executive Assistant, and Office Manager. Over the past three decades, she has played an integral role in supporting AOCDS leadership, coordinating major organizational events, and advancing initiatives that honor and support the law enforcement community. Colton oversees all AOCDS events, including the annual Member



Championing women

JPMorganChase remains focused on supporting the success of women, allies and women-owned businesses. We continue to invest in initiatives that create a stronger economy for all.

We're proud to celebrate the strength the remarkable individuals who are shaping a brighter future of our community. Their impact helps keep our region moving forward.

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JPMorganChase

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Appreciation Angels Game, Christmas Party, and Retirement Celebration, while working closely with the AOCDS President and Executive Director on board operations and strategic initiatives. Deeply rooted in a family tradition of public service, she is married to a retired Orange County Sheriff Deputy and is the proud mother of a firefighter for the City of Orange. Known for her dedication, compassion, and professionalism, Colton remains deeply committed to serving AOCDS members and the broader community.

ATeam Strategies, Newport Beach

Alexandra Taylor, President & Founder

Alexandra Taylor is a nationally recognized PR strategist and advisor operating at the intersection of media, brand development, and government relations. Known for her elite network, fearless communication style, and ability to shape real time narratives, Taylor has become one of OC's most influential rising voices in modern communications. As founder of her firm, she has built strategic partnerships, visibility, and brand positioning for disruptive brands including Happy Dad, Atrius, Burkhart Bros, and Lounge Group, while also advising prominent public figures and civic leaders such as OCDA Todd Spitzer, Mayor Joe Stapleton, Orange County Firefighters 3631, NBFD, and Fox News personality Chef Andrew Gruel. Her work and commentary has been featured on Fox, Daily Wire, Breitbart, and Sean Kelly's Digital Social Hour. Taylor's approach blends public relations with influencer strategy, social media, business development, and cultural positioning. She is co-founder of CIVITAS PRIMA, an initiative focused on empowering next-gen American leaders while supporting entrepreneurship and civic engagement efforts nationwide.



Balt, Irvine

Solenne Chardigny, Director, Global Communications

Solenne Chardigny serves as Global Director of Communications & Public Affairs at Balt, a global leader in neurovascular medical technologies specializing in devices used in the treatment of stroke and aneurysms. Founded in 1977, Balt has grown into a French-American medtech company with more than 1,000 employees across 14 international sites and approximately €320 million in 2025 revenue. Working closely across Balt's Irvine and Paris hubs, Chardigny leads the company's global communications, reputation management, and government & public affairs strategy, helping strengthen Balt's visibility and positioning within the neurovascular and broader medtech industry. She oversees corporate and internal communications, stakeholder engagement, media relations, institutional partnerships, and advocacy initiatives across the U.S., Europe, and other international markets. Prior to joining Balt, Chardigny held leadership roles within the French Ministry of Economics and Finance, the French National Assembly (i.e. the French Congress), and the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety (ANSES), bringing deep expertise in public affairs, healthcare policy, and strategic communications to the evolving global healthcare landscape.



BBSI, Santa Ana

Kim Cain, Human Resources Consultant

Kim Cain is an accomplished HR Consultant with BBSI, a leading business management solutions and human resources consulting company that partners with organizations to strengthen operations, leadership, compliance, and workplace culture. Through her work supporting businesses across Orange County, Cain has become a trusted advisor known for helping organizations build stronger teams, improve leadership effectiveness, and create healthier, more accountable workplace environments. A proud Army combat veteran who served from 1992–1996 as a Supply Specialist and Armorer, Cain brings discipline, integrity, resilience, and servant leadership into every aspect of her professional career. She later earned her HR Certificate from Saddleback College in 2015 and has continued dedicating herself to helping businesses and leaders grow successfully. Cain's impact extends far beyond traditional HR consulting. She is widely respected for her hands-on leadership approach, professional mentorship, and ability to guide organizations through complex personnel and operational challenges with honesty and compassion. She continually encourages professional development and leadership growth among her clients, helping create long-term organizational success. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Cain is actively involved in charitable organizations including the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, CHOC Children's Hospital, Orangewood Foundation, Olive Crest, Dream Animal Rescue, and Special Olympics, further reflecting her deep commitment to service and community leadership.



Bear Flag Fish Company, Newport Beach

Erika Palm Carson, Co-founder

Erika Palm Carson is a restaurateur, entrepreneur, and co-founder of Bear Flag Fish Co. — a Southern California coastal seafood brand rooted in fresh local fish, healthy cuisine, and ocean lifestyle culture. Alongside her husband, Thomas Carson, Erika helped build the company from the ground up with a vision centered around quality seafood, community, and modern coastal dining. Founded in 2007, Bear Flag Fish Co. has grown into six successful multimillion-dollar restaurant locations with annual sales exceeding \$20 million. Carson remains actively involved in the day-to-day operations across all locations, overseeing a team of more than 300 employees and continuing to grow this local company. Born and raised in Newport Beach, Carson is also a mother of two daughters, wellness advocate, and community supporter passionate about youth programs, mental health awareness, fitness, travel, and healthy living. Her lifestyle reflects a balance of entrepreneurship, family, coastal living, and personal growth, with interests including tennis, golf, design, travel, and the ocean.



Beyond Blindness, Santa Ana

Angie Rowe, President & CEO

As President & CEO of Beyond Blindness, Angie Rowe has led a transformative period of growth for the Orange County nonprofit on a mission to empower children with visual impairments and other disabilities to achieve their fullest potential. Under her leadership, the organization has more than doubled revenue from \$2.2 million to over \$5.6 million, expanded staff from 28 to more than 50 employees and increased the number of children and families served annually from 200 to more than 1,500. Rowe has guided Beyond Blindness's evolution into



a comprehensive family resource hub anchored by its lifelong Journey of Care® model, which integrates early intervention, education, therapy, and family support services. She spearheaded a first-of-its-kind partnership with Orange County Head Start to expand inclusive early education opportunities for children of all abilities and has strengthened the organization's long-term sustainability through strategic partnerships with foundations, corporations, and public agencies. With more than 30 years of nonprofit leadership experience, Rowe is widely recognized for her strategic vision, operational discipline and people-first leadership style.

Beyond Fifteen Communications Inc., Irvine

Lauren Ellermeyer, Co-founder & President

Lauren Ellermeyer is the Co-founder and President of Beyond Fifteen Communications, a full-service PR and marketing agency that has built a reputation for going above and beyond typical industry standards to deliver an unprecedented level of media and market attention for its clientele. Ellermeyer brings an innovative business style, which has helped grow Beyond Fifteen from startup to nationally acclaimed powerhouse. The agency now has team members spanning the U.S. and serves business-to-business and business-to-consumer brands across healthcare, technology, consumer package goods, energy, education, and more.



Big Brothers Big Sisters Orange County & the Inland Empire, Santa Ana

Tracy Carmichael, Chief Operating Officer

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire creates and supports mentoring relationships through community- and school-based programs that help youth reach their full potential. Under Tracy Carmichael's leadership, BBBS OC & IE has strengthened its long-term strategic vision by balancing data-driven decision-making with compassionate leadership, positioning the organization for sustainable growth and greater community impact. Despite sector headwinds, the agency has consistently grown mentorship matches by 5% or more year over year, serving 4,153 youth across Orange County and the Inland Empire in its most recent fiscal year. BBBS OC & IE has also accelerated volunteer enrollment through a Volunteer Journey Accelerator Portal, enabling volunteers to complete onboarding 63% faster. The organization continues to expand access to mentorship through cross-sector partnerships with schools, community organizations and civic leaders, while growing innovative programs such as Sports Buddies and Big Careers. Most recently, BBBS OC & IE introduced and scaled a staff-led mentoring model with the Orange County Department of Education to support students with the highest levels of need.



Blank Rome LLP, Irvine

Sharon Klein, Partner

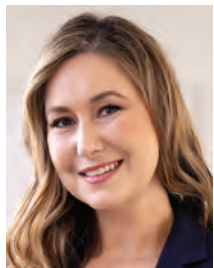
Sharon Klein is widely recognized as a leading voice in data privacy, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence law. At Blank Rome LLP, she serves as Vice Chair of Artificial Intelligence, while also co-chairing the firm's Privacy, Security & Data Protection Practice, managing partner of the Orange County office, and sitting on the firm's executive committee. Klein has played a central role in expanding Blank Rome's national privacy and cybersecurity practice to more than 40 attorneys serving healthcare, life sciences, and technology organizations nationwide. With four decades of experience, including 12 years as associate general counsel at Siemens Medical Solutions USA, Klein advises clients on cybersecurity risk, incident response, data governance, and emerging AI regulation. Her work spans significant breach response matters, complex technology transactions, and enterprise wide privacy initiatives critical to patient safety and business continuity. Klein also contributes to national healthcare cybersecurity initiatives in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and serves on the board of Girl Scouts of Orange County, supporting STEM education and leadership development for the next generation of women.



Blue Sands Wealth, Irvine

Letitia Berbaum, Founder & Wealth Advisor

Letitia Berbaum is the Founder and driving force behind Blue Sands Wealth. Berbaum has carved out a distinctive niche in wealth management by centering her firm's services around the clients who need it most: women navigating financial independence, families planning for their future, and business owners developing thoughtful exit strategies. Blue Sands Wealth recently expanded, opening a second office in Sun Valley, Idaho. This year, Blue Sands Wealth proudly served as a sponsor for Working Wardrobes' inaugural Power Within Luncheon—an organization that empowers individuals to reclaim their confidence and careers. Berbaum's expertise and perspective have been shared on stage at the RIA Edge Conference in Los Angeles, and through conferences with Portfolio Summits and the Family Office Club. Additionally, Berbaum is a founding member of the Women Rising Leadership Academy through the Brea Chamber.



BoardRoom magazine, Laguna Beach

Heather Arias de Cordoba, Co-publisher & Editor-in-Chief

Heather Arias de Cordoba is Co-publisher and Editor-In-Chief of BoardRoom magazine, the leading print and multimedia publication serving the private club industry worldwide and the official publication of Distinguished Clubs and Distinguished Golf Destinations. For nearly 28 years, she has helped shape global industry conversations through award-winning publication design, leadership-focused journalism, executive storytelling, podcasts, digital media, and thought leadership covering governance, hospitality, technology, workforce culture, wellness, member experience, and the evolving future of private clubs. BoardRoom magazine has become recognized not simply as a publication, but as THE trusted educational and strategic resource relied upon by club leaders, boards and executives. Arias de Cordoba has helped drive conversations surrounding collaborative governance, changing member demographics, leadership culture, technology innovation, and the human side of hospitality. Her ability to combine business insight with emotional intelligence and meaningful storytelling has made her a respected and influential voice throughout the global private club industry.



Boardvance, Santa Ana

Dita Shemke, Founder & CEO

Dita Shemke is the visionary Founder and CEO of Boardvance, a social impact enterprise

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2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

born in Orange County and designed to close one of the most critical gaps in corporate leadership today: the one-to-five-year period before a qualified female executive secures her first corporate board seat. With a career rooted in finance, governance, and leadership, Shemke's trajectory has consistently centered on supporting others, especially women, in achieving economic independence and generational influence. She has long been a behind-the-scenes force: advising owners of privately held businesses, building symbiotic business ecosystems, and championing the representation of women in positions of power. However, her experience chairing the Orange County campaign for 50/50 Women on Boards sparked the idea for Boardvance. She witnessed firsthand how many women lacked access to the networks and supportive community needed to help them make the final leap into board service. In response, Shemke piloted the first version of what would become Boardvance during the COVID-19 pandemic. From those learnings, she built a comprehensive ecosystem—officially launched in December 2024—that combines small-cohort mastermind-style learning, mentorship, events, and corporate partnerships to cultivate board-ready women. Boardvance graduated its first cohort of qualified board-ready female executives who successfully completed the Navigator Mastermind program in December 2025.



BoozDNA Technology, Irvine

Hima Nippuleti, President & CEO

Hima Nippuleti is the Founder and CEO of BoozDNA Technology, a women-owned IT consulting firm headquartered in Irvine, California. BoozDNA delivers high-impact, data-driven solutions across enterprise modernization, cloud transformation, and digital strategy, supporting mission-critical initiatives for California state agencies—including the Department of General Services, Department of Consumer Affairs, and the Department of Justice—as well as Fortune 500 organizations. Under Nippuleti's leadership, BoozDNA has achieved sustained growth, establishing itself as a trusted partner known for agility, execution excellence, and strategic innovation. The firm has been recognized with an SBA award for business growth and named a nominee for the BBB Torch Award for Ethics, underscoring its commitment to integrity and operational excellence. BoozDNA has also received multiple awards from Chambers of Commerce for its meaningful contributions to the community. With a high-performing team and a forward-looking vision, Nippuleti continues to scale BoozDNA's impact, driving transformative outcomes and advancing inclusive growth within the technology sector.



Bryson Financial, Newport Beach

Tiffany Cerefice, Sales Director

Bryson Financial is one of the largest independently owned insurance firms in the country, delivering integrated solutions across Employee Benefits, Property & Casualty, Wealth Management, Life Insurance, and specialty risk practices. Bryson is headquartered in Long Beach with a recent expansion in Newport Beach. Bryson has experienced significant growth through strategic hiring, cross-selling initiatives, and a relationship-driven focus with the firm's commitment to the Bryson WOW and long-term enterprise value. Tiffany Cerefice serves as Sales Director at Bryson, where she leads producer development, business expansion efforts, and cross-department collaboration. Cerefice played a leading role in the launch of Bryson's new Newport Beach office as well as the company's new Long Beach headquarters, helping drive operational coordination, culture-building, branding, and business development surrounding both expansions. She is also recognized as one of the firm's top revenue earners outside of a traditional producer role, helping generate substantial business growth through strategic partnerships, cross-selling initiatives, recruiting, and sales enablement leadership. Cerefice also spearheads Bryson's Growth Forum, creating initiatives centered around producer development, company culture, and scalable long-term growth.



C.W. Driver Companies, Anaheim

Jennifer Vasquez, Vice President, Business Development & Corporate Communications

Jennifer Vasquez serves as Vice President of Business Development and Corporate Communications at C.W. Driver Companies, a leading general contractor serving several industries. She brings over 20 years of experience as a business development and marketing professional, overseeing strategic growth for a company with an average annual revenue of \$610 million. As a key member of the executive leadership team, she guides the firm's development across all five offices and affiliated entities, including Driver SPG and Good & Roberts, LLC. Vasquez leads the development of yearly marketing and communication plans, corporate and regional marketing budgets, and integrated campaigns spanning proposals, presentations, print collateral, digital platforms, social media, public relations, events, and community outreach. Her ability to generate creative ideas while executing strategically has strengthened the company's competitive positioning throughout California. Most importantly, Vasquez is passionate about building an unbeatable company culture by serving as both an advocate and mentor for her teams while supporting the well-being of C.W. Driver Companies' 375 employees.



C3 Risk & Insurance, San Diego

Marife Molina, EVP of Strategic Revenue

Marife Molina's most significant business accomplishments reflect her ability to drive measurable growth while building a high-performing, people-focused sales culture. When C3 faced a revenue shortage, she developed and launched an internal sales competition during Q3 and Q4 of 2024 that energized the organization, increased accountability, and directly contributed to record-breaking company performance over the following three consecutive quarters. In addition to driving revenue results, Molina created and implemented C3's Green Producer Academy, a development program focused on training and mentoring emerging producers, many of whom entered the insurance industry as a second career without traditional sales experience. Through structured coaching, mentorship, and hands-on development, she has helped cultivate future top performers while strengthening the company's long-term talent pipeline. Molina also oversees producer recruitment and has modernized C3's sales culture.



C3 Risk & Insurance, Costa Mesa

Kelly Rulon, Partner & Practice Leader of Retail and Apparel

Kelly Rulon's most significant business accomplishments reflect her competitive drive, leadership, and ability to deliver measurable results while helping shape the future of C3. In 2024, she earned C3's prestigious Glengarry Award, recognizing the highest-producing salesperson in the company. In 2025, Rulon was named Partner at C3 Risk & Insurance Services, recognizing not only her sales success, but also her leadership, influence, and long-term impact on the organization. As Practice Leader of Retail and Apparel, Rulon brings a client-focused perspective to the company's leadership team and plays an important role in driving strategic growth across the organization.



California Pizza Kitchen, Costa Mesa

Dawn Keller, Chief Marketing Officer

Dawn Keller, Chief Marketing Officer at California Pizza Kitchen (CPK), is a dynamic and forward-thinking leader with nearly 30 years of diverse marketing experience. Since joining CPK in March 2024, Keller has wasted no time making an indelible impact. She quickly brought her infectious energy, strategic vision, and her mission to create "emotional FOMO" to the brand, propelling it to new heights in record time. Upon joining the CPK team, Keller was tasked with rejuvenating the beloved global brand and assembling a world-class team to drive significant growth in traffic, sales, and customer lifetime value through brand and digital marketing, as well as culinary innovation. Within two years, Keller has led standout campaigns and initiatives, including a viral Mac & Cheese mishap campaign and the 40th anniversary celebration, that are uniquely CPK and deliberately out-of-the-box, setting the brand apart. She has strategically tapped into cultural trends like nostalgia and spotlighted what people love most about CPK, its fresh, innovative cuisine and California-cool vibe, to reestablish the brand at the center of culture and top of mind for consumers.



Casanova/McCann, Costa Mesa

Ingrid Otero-Smart, President & CEO

Ingrid Otero-Smart has more than 40 years' experience in advertising, the past 30 right here in Orange County. She joined Casanova/McCann, one of the premiere advertising agencies focusing on the U.S. Hispanic market, in 2008 and six years ago acquired the company from Interpublic Group. Today, Casanova is certified as a minority and woman-owned business, employs 70 people (up from 42 when the divestiture occurred) and works with clients such as Nestle USA, Chevrolet, Chick-fil-A, Pernod Ricard, Raley's, and many others. Under her leadership, Casanova has been named the most awarded Hispanic Agency in Cannes three times, named one of the OCBJ Best Places to Work three times, and named Best of Show at the Hispanic Strategic Excellence Awards three times.



CBRE, Irvine

Val Achtemeier, Vice Chair

Val Achtemeier is a Vice Chairman with CBRE Capital Markets' Debt & Structured Finance group and a senior member of the firm's National Partners platform. Based in Irvine, she works with institutional and private owners nationwide, advising on complex financing strategies across a broad range of commercial real estate assets, with a particular focus on industrial and logistics properties. Her focus is on industrial and logistics assets as well as data centers, hotel, mixed use, retail and other commercial uses. CBRE is the world's largest commercial real estate brokerage and investment services firm, and its National Partners platform has closed more than \$246 billion in transactions over the past 15 years, ranking No. 1 in industrial market share. Over her 35-plus-year career, Achtemeier has personally led more than \$70 billion in debt placements, consistently ranking among CBRE's top global producers. Despite ongoing capital markets volatility, Achtemeier continues to lead high-volume transactions by structuring creative financing solutions and maintaining deep relationships with domestic and global lenders. Widely recognized as a trusted advisor, she pairs disciplined underwriting with strategic insight to help clients navigate uncertainty, preserve value, and position portfolios for long-term growth.



Chapman University, Orange

Helen Norris, Retired Chief Information Officer

Helen Norris is the former Chief Information Officer and Vice President for Information Technology at Chapman University, where she had responsibility for leading the university's information technology strategy and services and overseeing the University Library until she retired in 2025. Norris joined Chapman in 2014 after holding technology leadership roles at California State University, Sacramento, and the University of California, Berkeley. Norris serves on the Advisory Board of the California Cradle-to-Career Data System. She is a board member for the Society for Information Management and STEM Advantage and a former board member of EDUCAUSE and the National Endowment for Financial Education. She is a member of the Executive Council of the American Cancer Society, Orange County. Since retirement, Norris has leaned into philanthropic work, particularly in support of cancer patients, volunteering as a driver and informal recruiter for the Road to Recovery program of the ACS, providing free transportation to treatment for cancer patients. Originally from Ireland, Norris earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, and a Master's Degree from Webster University, St. Louis.



Child Creativity Lab, Santa Ana

Tracey Hill, CEO

Tracey Hill is the Chief Executive Officer of Child Creativity Lab, a Santa Ana-based nonprofit dedicated to providing hands-on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education to children. With 10 years of experience as a marketing executive in the entertainment industry, Hill brings deep expertise in brand strategy, audience engagement, and corporate partnerships to her leadership role. Since becoming CEO in 2020, Hill has led Child Creativity Lab through a period of exceptional growth. The organization has tripled in size across its





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operating budget, expanded from three to nine full-time staff members, and increased its reach from 5,000 to over 25,000 children served annually. This growth has strengthened its position as a leading provider of innovative, hands-on learning experiences. Under her leadership, the organization has also developed strategic partnerships with companies such as Edwards Lifesciences, Southern California Edison, and Genesis Motor America, creating co-branded STEAM kits for classrooms.

Chups Mom2Mom Meals, Anaheim

Yatri Shukla, Executive Director of Social Impact and Empowerment

Yatri Shukla (EMBA, MScFSN, teaching credential) is Executive Director of Social Impact and Empowerment at Chups Mom2Mom. Shukla is also an Adjunct Professor at Chapman University and was recognized by the Government of India for hosting India's Republic Day events at Chapman University in 2026. ASAN and The Shah Family recognized her as a Volunteer of the Year finalist for 2025. Chups Mom2Mom is unique in the restaurant industry by empowering moms and women. At Chups Mom2Mom every dish is a heartfelt creation by a Local Mom - rooted in tradition, powered by passion, and cooked with love. Our mission is simple yet powerful: To share the warmth of authentic Indian home-cooked food with the world. Chups Mom2Mom was recognized as a 2026 OCBJ Excellence in Entrepreneurship Award Nominee. Nominated for Disney's Teacher of the Year Award, received the OC Educator of the Year Award in 2010, and honored with Aparna Hande Legacy Service Award. Founder/Officer of Women's Empowerment Retreats since 2017. Academic Decathlon Coach of the Year 2003. Received 2026 Woman of the Year Award from Congressional Representative Lou Correa.



City of Hope Orange County, Irvine

Michelle Meyer, Associate Chief Nursing Officer

City of Hope is one of the largest and most advanced cancer treatment and research organizations in the United States. In December of 2025, City of Hope opened Orange County's only cancer specialty hospital, advancing a national model for cancer research and treatment. The hospital on City of Hope's 72-acre academic research campus in Irvine brings to the region more cancer-focused expertise, breakthrough acute and outpatient care, novel clinical trials, and groundbreaking technology. Michelle Meyer, M.S.N., M.B.A., R.N., C.C.R.N., Associate Chief Nursing Officer, City of Hope Orange County, leads nursing operations across City of Hope's Irvine campus. With more than two decades of frontline nursing experience, Meyer plays a pivotal role in bringing lifesaving therapies closer to patients, including helping launch autologous stem cell transplants in Orange County and scaling crucial infusion services to meet rising community needs. Known for her innovative mindset and strong operational leadership, Meyer integrates clinical expertise with strategic vision to achieve high-impact service-line growth, enhance patient outcomes, and empower nursing teams to excel.



Coastal Kids Pediatrics, Newport Beach

Dr. Sarah Judd, MD

Dr. Sarah Judd M.D. FAAP, is board certified in pediatrics and a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Dr. Judd graduated summa cum laude, earning her bachelor's degree in biology at Georgia State University. She completed college at 18 years old and was accepted early admission to the Medical College of Georgia the same year, making her the youngest student in her class. She then earned her medical degree and completed her residency in pediatrics at Medical College of Georgia and Children's Medical center in Augusta, GA. Dr. Judd exemplifies excellence in pediatric care through her unwavering commitment to her patients and their families. In addition to her role at Coastal Kids in Newport Beach, she dedicates her time to monthly weekend rotations at Hoag Irvine and Hoag Newport campuses, further extending her impact within the Orange County community. She was recently honored with a Provider Recognition Award for Outstanding Communication and Excellence in De-Escalation of a High-Risk Patient Concern, an achievement that speaks volumes about her professionalism, compassion, and ability to navigate complex and sensitive situations with care and confidence. Beyond her clinical expertise, Dr. Judd is deeply respected by her peers and appreciated by the families she serves. Her ability to connect, communicate, and lead with empathy makes her a truly inspiring physician and a deserving candidate for this recognition.



College of the Canyons, Santa Clarita

Monica Shukla-Belmontes, Dean of Instruction, School of Business and Dean, School of Applied Technologies

Monica Shukla-Belmontes is Dean of the School of Business and Dean of the School of Applied Technologies at College of the Canyons. The School of Business consists of nine departments with a variety of degrees and certificates. These include: Business, Computer Applications Web Technology, Culinary Arts, Economics, Hotel & Restaurant Management, Law Pathway, Paralegal, Real Estate, and Wine Studies. The School of Applied Technologies includes Aerospace, Automotive, and Advanced Manufacturing. She served previously as Interim Dean of UMass Global's School of Business and Professional Studies. Shukla-Belmontes also oversaw the Competency Based Education bachelor's and master's degree programs at UMass that include STEM subjects allowing several thousands of adult learners to continue their higher education online at their own pace. Shukla-Belmontes is also an adjunct professor of Mathematics at Chapman University. She received a 2022 Distinguished Education Award hosted by the Orange County Chamber of Commerce. She received a recognition from Congressman Lou Correa as an Orange County Woman of the Year Award. She is an Orange County Girl Scouts Gold Award winner and mentors young females interested in STEM careers. She influences Orange County a great deal through her community service and charity donations.



Community Health Initiative of Orange County, Santa Ana

Georgina Maldonado, Executive Director

Led by Executive Director Georgina Maldonado, Community Health Initiative of Orange County (CHIOC) is a nonprofit organization focused on connecting children and families to affordable healthcare insurance and available social services programs. CHIOC operates with a team of approximately 14 staff members and delivers services countywide through 34 enrollment sites

across 10 cities in Orange County. The organization supports more than 5,500 individuals annually through health coverage enrollment, retention, and care navigation services. Over the past several years, CHIOC has experienced sustained organizational growth, increasing its operating budget by more than \$1 million while expanding service delivery and community partnerships. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CHIOC rapidly transitioned to remote and hybrid operations, allowing the organization to continue supporting vulnerable communities without service disruption. A recent milestone includes the launch of CHIOC's first revenue-generating social enterprise, a nonprofit health insurance broker agency that builds on the organization's enrollment expertise and supports long-term financial sustainability. Through data-driven strategy, culturally responsive outreach, and cross-sector collaboration, CHIOC has become a trusted healthcare access provider and community partner across Orange County.



Community Legal Aid SoCal, Santa Ana

Kate Marr, Executive Director

Kate Marr has served as Executive Director of Community Legal Aid SoCal (CLA SoCal) since 2017, during which the organization has experienced continuous growth. She led CLA SoCal through a major rebrand and a restructuring process to create specialized substantive legal units. From this process, a pro bono program and case management program were established to provide more extensive, holistic services to clients. As California legal aid organizations faced potential federal funding cuts, the need to educate elected officials became critical. Marr and CLA SoCal took the lead in planning the first major event hosted by California legal aid organizations to collectively educate lawmakers at a congressional forum on Capitol Hill. Marr continues to work on a signature project, JustOC, a legal services coordinated entry system conceived in collaboration with other legal aid organizations in Orange County. This coordinated entry system will give partners the capacity to embed county-wide intake and triage within CLA SoCal's established system and enable them to better address inequities in access to legal services for low-income communities in Orange County.



Complex Appellate Litigation Group, Newport Beach

Mary-Christine (M.C.) Sungaila, Partner

M.C. Sungaila is a distinguished appellate litigator, thought leader, and educator operating at the frontiers of the law. A veteran big law leader, she now helms the Complex Appellate Litigation Group's Orange County office, taking on high-impact appellate cases. Sungaila has briefed or argued more than 170 appeals on a range of issues while handling countless pro bono human rights cases and dedicating herself to community service. Beyond her practice, she is an emergent thought leader in the growing field of space law, serving as a delegate to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space; participating as a private sector advisor to the U.S. State Department in Commercial Space Roundtables and UN expert groups; and creating a flagship Space Law & Policy course at Loyola Law School. Sungaila balances her practice and thought leadership with her award-winning podcast, The Portia Project®, which platforms accomplished female judges, lawyers, and community leaders.



Concordia University Irvine, Irvine

Francene LaPoint, Chief Financial Officer

Francene LaPoint brings over 25 years of distinguished experience leading complex finance and accounting organizations across highly regulated environments. She began her career earning her Certified Public Accountant license in 1998 while at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, where she built a rigorous technical foundation across multiple industries that continues to guide her leadership today. In December 2024, LaPoint joined Concordia University Irvine as its new Chief Financial Officer, bringing with her deep expertise in financial stewardship, governance, and strategic planning. In this role, she is entrusted with guiding the university's financial strategy as it prepares to surpass a \$100 million operating budget while continuing to expand its mission across Orange County and beyond. Most recently prior to Concordia, LaPoint served as Senior Vice President and Chief Accounting Officer at Citizens Business Bank where she oversaw all aspects of accounting and financial reporting for a highly regulated financial institution. Her responsibilities included preparation of financial documents for the governing board, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other regulatory entities, as well as leading the implementation of new accounting standards, strengthening internal accounting controls, and developing enterprise-wide accounting policies and procedures.



Construction Experts, Inc., Oceanside

Lisa Thibodeaux, President & CEO

Lisa Thibodeaux is a determined and passionate leader in the construction industry, which is an industry that is fast becoming a woman's place in this world. She has accepted leadership roles, including President, in her industry association, NAWIC, the National Association of Women in Construction, in Orange County. She has facilitated events to educate young people about the future in construction and the benefits of learning and growing as a construction specialist, from the people in the field to those in the office. Thibodeaux's business provides valuable education to individuals wanting to increase their knowledge level and skills to be effective as employees and leaders in the industry. She has grown her business's reach to become a national organization with students in California, Kentucky, Washington State, and Virginia.



CooperDouglas, Costa Mesa

Lily Mirhashemi & Rolla Weed, Managing Partners

CooperDouglas is a minority and women-founded executive search firm specializing in accounting and finance recruitment with roots in Southern California. With over 25 years of combined expertise, Lily Mirhashemi and Rolla Weed deliver high-touch, relationship-driven talent placement across all levels building exceptional finance and accounting teams that drive organizational success.



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Corcapa 1031 Advisors, Costa Mesa

Christina Nielson, President & Founder

Christina Nielson is President and Founder of Corcapa 1031 Advisors and its affiliated firm, 1031 DST Solution, a financial advisory firm specializing exclusively in 1031 exchanges, tax mitigation strategies, and alternative real estate investments. Based in Costa Mesa with offices in New York City, Nielson serves investors nationwide. Since 2011, Nielson has grown the firm into one of Orange County's most recognized boutique advisory practices in the alternative investment space. Over her 22-year career, she has guided investors in 35 states through more than 1,000 transactions closely approaching \$1 billion in gross assets under advisory. Recent milestones include a \$17 million exchange involving 14 investments, a \$35 million multi-generational family exchange, and a complex 1033 exchange into a Class A multifamily property, all completed since fall 2025. Nielson earned an MBA in International Business and Technology from EDHEC/Theseus University in Nice, France, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from San Diego State University. She holds FINRA Series 24, 7 and 63 securities registrations.



Court Appointed Special Advocates of Orange County (CASA OC), Orange

Regan Dean Phillips, CEO

Regan Dean Phillips is the Chief Executive Officer of Court Appointed Special Advocates of Orange County, a nonprofit dedicated to serving children and youth in the foster care system. Phillips began her journey with CASA in 2001 as an intern with CASA-NYC while attending Columbia University. She later worked in Orange County as a minor's counsel attorney, where she frequently partnered with CASA volunteers advocating for children in court. Since being named CEO of CASA OC in 2017, Phillips has led a period of significant organizational growth, increasing annual revenue from \$2.9 million to \$7.7 million and expanding the organization's reach from serving approximately 700 children each year to over 1,300. Under her leadership, CASA OC now swears in 60% more volunteers annually, reflecting her strategic vision and deep commitment to child advocacy. Phillips has also guided the organization to recognition for workplace excellence and inclusive practices from organizations including The Orange County Register, Orange County Business Journal, and the Human Rights Campaign. She is widely respected not only for her leadership and results, but for the humility, compassion, and determination she brings to ensuring every child has both a voice in the courtroom and a caring adult by their side.



Crain Consulting Inc., Orange

Talitha Crain, CEO

Crain Consulting Inc. is a woman-owned environmental consulting firm based in Southern California, specializing in complex regulatory compliance under CEQA/NEPA, hazardous materials management, and sustainable redevelopment. Founded by Talitha Crain, a former state regulator turned entrepreneur, the firm has quickly become a trusted partner to public agencies and private developers navigating California's most demanding environmental frameworks. Since its inception, Crain Consulting has achieved remarkable growth, expanding its client base across multiple school districts, municipalities, and large-scale infrastructure projects while maintaining a reputation for precision, integrity, and political acumen. The company's expertise in environmental permitting, construction response strategies, and material reuse programs continues to set new standards for efficiency and accountability. What began as a one-woman operation has evolved into a high-impact consulting team known for bridging regulatory rigor with practical solutions, delivering projects that protect both community well-being and the natural environment.



Cynergy Professional Systems, Laguna Hills

Cynthia Mason, President

Cynergy Professional Systems, LLC is a Laguna Hills, California-based small business specializing in mission-critical federal information technology and communication solutions. Founded in 2009 by President Cynthia Mason, Cynergy brings decades of combined federal contracting expertise, delivering systems integration, engineering, cybersecurity, healthcare IT, and broadband communication services to U.S. Government agencies nationwide and internationally. The company holds multiple socioeconomic certifications—including SBA 8(a), SDVOSB, and EDWOSB—and maintains rigorous ISO 9001:2015 and AS9100D quality management certifications, underscoring its commitment to excellence. Cynergy's client roster spans federal agencies including the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of State, and the FAA. The company continues to be acknowledged and awarded with best-in-class designations from its partners and customers, such as a Motorola Partner of the Year and Northrop Grumman's World Class Team Award. With partnerships spanning over 2,000 manufacturers Cynergy continues to grow as a trusted federal technology partner.



Designers Resource Collection, Costa Mesa

Pamela Kellogg, Principal & CEO

Pamela Kellogg is the owner of Designers Resource Collection (DRC), the largest to-the-trade interior design showroom on the West Coast. For more than 35 years, she has led the company with a clear vision: to create an elevated, service-driven resource that evolves alongside the needs of the design industry. Under her leadership, DRC has grown into a best-in-class highest end showroom representing over 250 lines across upholstery, case goods, rugs, lighting, and accessories. More than a sourcing destination, DRC is a strategic partner to designers—offering a seamless, start-to-finish experience from product discovery and client presentations to ordering, tracking, and claims resolution. Kellogg has consistently stayed ahead of industry shifts, championing innovation in both operations, product offerings, and client experience. Her forward-thinking approach has positioned DRC at the forefront of how designers work today—blending high-touch service with operational sophistication. Known for her decisiveness, resilience, and deep industry expertise, Kellogg has built not only a thriving business, but a lasting platform that continues to support and elevate the design community.

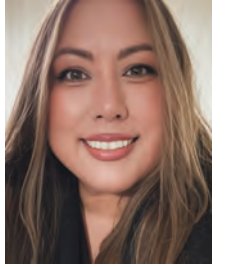


Discount Tire and Service Centers, Anaheim

Donna Clark, Executive Assistant to the CEO

Discount Tire & Service Centers (DTSC) is a privately held, family-owned California automotive service and tire retailer serving customers for over 50 years. The company is headquartered

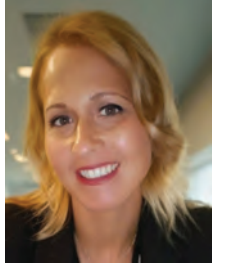
in Anaheim, California. The company operates 41 retail tire and automotive service centers throughout Southern California and is growing steadily each year. DTSC recently opened a new location in Bakersfield, CA, as it continues to grow new markets. The company participates in charitable and community service initiatives, and a portion of their profits go to charitable organizations throughout California. DTSC employs approximately 300 employees. An affiliate of DTSC is Tire Network Group, Inc (TNG), which is a tire wholesaler with three warehouses located in Fontana, Anaheim and North Hollywood. TNG was established in 2009 and has established itself as a prominent family-owned business in the tire distribution business. TNG employs approximately 50 employees and services the southern border of California up to the Fresno area.



Discount Tire and Service Centers, Anaheim

Tansya Murillo, Human Resources Manager

Discount Tire & Service Centers (DTSC) is a privately held, family-owned California automotive service and tire retailer serving customers for over 50 years. The company is headquartered in Anaheim, California. The company operates 41 retail tire and automotive service centers throughout Southern California and is growing steadily each year. DTSC recently opened a new location in Bakersfield, CA, as it continues to grow new markets. The company participates in charitable and community service initiatives, and a portion of their profits go to charitable organizations throughout California. DTSC employs approximately 300 employees. An affiliate of DTSC is Tire Network Group, Inc (TNG), which is a tire wholesaler with three warehouses located in Fontana, Anaheim, and North Hollywood. TNG was established in 2009 and has established itself as a prominent family-owned business in the tire distribution business. TNG employs approximately 50 employees and services the southern border of California up to the Fresno area.



e360, Irvine

Laura Peters, Vice President, Strategic Client Relations

Laura Peters has dedicated over 27 years to creating championship experiences in enterprise technology. Her journey has spanned the evolution of data centers to cloud transformation, and empowering her clients with AI, always with one unchanging mission: turning client partnerships into lifetime success stories. At e360, she specializes in architecting comprehensive solutions across cloud infrastructure, AI, cybersecurity, and DevOps, with expertise in healthcare technology innovation. Her philosophy is simple: elite excellence isn't just a goal, it's a standard. Whether helping clients modernize their infrastructure or guiding enterprises through digital transformation, she believes in building partnerships on trust, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to success. Ask her clients what sets her apart, and they'll tell you it's her passion for making them the center of the universe. It's about anticipating challenges before they become problems and delivering solutions that drive real business impact. Because, in technology, as in life, the greatest achievements come from combining hard work with heart.



e360, Irvine

Karla Delacruz, Sr. Client Account Executive - Strategic Accounts

Since joining e360 in May 2004, Karla Delacruz has acquired extensive experience across nearly all facets of the organization. She has played a key role in evolving business processes to enhance client service while maintaining a leading position at the forefront of the rapidly changing technological landscape. Delacruz consistently leads new initiatives and drives change initiatives. Her passion and dedication are evident in all her endeavors, supported by her expertise and insightful knowledge. Delacruz's comprehensive understanding of client needs and industry trends has rapidly positioned her as one of e360's top sales executives. Her ability to cultivate strong relationships, align technological solutions with business challenges, and deliver meaningful results has established her as a vital leader in advancing e360's channel business. In her personal time, Delacruz enjoys outdoor activities with her husband and children, sharing a passion for sports. The family is avid supporters of Michigan State, and Karla and her children often cheer from the rink sidelines during her husband's adult hockey league games.



Earp Creative, Newport Beach

Kim Earp, Founder

Earp Creative is a Newport Beach based boutique design agency led by founder and lead designer Kim Earp. The agency partners with businesses and organizations across a wide range of industries to deliver strategic graphic design and website design that clarifies messaging, elevates brand presence, and helps drive revenue through high performing design. Known for a personalized, hands-on process, Earp Creative guides clients from concept to completion with clear communication, reliable execution, and polished results. In recent years, Earp Creative has expanded through ongoing Creative Care partnerships, providing consistent support for website updates, rebrands, and strategic marketing materials. The agency creates and refines high impact assets such as presentations, RFP and proposal design, print collateral, and lead magnets that strengthen brand consistency and position offerings with clarity. With a focus on elevated design standards and thoughtful strategy, Earp Creative helps clients show up as the leader in their space with graphics and websites that command attention, build trust quickly, and communicate value at a glance.



ECM Management, Santa Ana

Emily Mandrup, Founder at ECM Management, LLC

Emily Mandrup has established herself as a respected leader in Southern California commercial real estate through more than 25 years of experience in land development, entitlements, and construction management. Throughout her career, she has overseen the successful execution of more than 60 ground-up development projects totaling approximately 23 million square feet. In late 2020, Mandrup founded ECM Management, a boutique fee development and construction management consulting firm that represents owners and developers through complex entitlement, CEQA, land development, and construction



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Land Use and Entitlement / Litigation and Trial / Real Estate

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

execution. ECM does not simply advise from the sidelines; the firm steps in, organizes the chaos, identifies the critical path, and drives projects forward. Mandrup has also distinguished herself as an influential industry leader and mentor. She serves in leadership roles with NAIOP SoCal, including Chair of the Mentorship Committee and member of the organization's Board of Directors, where she helps guide and develop the next generation of commercial real estate professionals. Mandrup is also deeply committed to community impact and nonprofit leadership with the NLYM Tustin Chapter and KidWorks in Santa Ana.

Eden Financial, Aliso Viejo

Nycole Freer, Certified Financial Planner

Nycole Freer is the Founder and CEO of Eden Financial, an independent financial planning and investment advisory firm based in Orange County, California, serving clients nationwide. Founded in 2023, Eden Financial was built from the ground up with a mission to provide clear, ethical, and values-driven financial guidance through comprehensive planning and personalized implementation. Under Freer's leadership, the firm has grown organically to more than \$20 million in assets under management while serving over 60 client households. A CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional and Behavioral Financial Advisor (BFA™), Freer specializes in investment management, retirement planning, tax-aware strategies, estate planning coordination, and financial education for professionals, entrepreneurs, women, and young families. With more than a decade of industry experience, she is recognized for her relationship-centered approach and commitment to making financial planning accessible and empowering. Freer is also the author of the children's financial literacy book "Haisley's Birthday Money" and has been featured in publications including CNBC, Fortune, and the Orange County Business Journal.



Edwards Lifesciences, Irvine

YJ Oh, General Manager

With more than 25 years of commercial leadership across the medical technology and biologic pharmaceutical sectors, YJ Oh serves as General Manager of the Global Surgical business at Edwards Lifesciences, the leading global structural heart innovation company. Guided by a passion to improve the lives of patients with structural heart disease, she leads a global organization advancing breakthrough surgical technologies backed by world-class clinical evidence and strong partnerships with physicians and healthcare stakeholders. In 2025, the Surgical business achieved 5% revenue growth, surpassing \$1 billion, and helped impact more than 250,000 patients worldwide. In 2026, under her leadership, the business is launching two new technologies—two first-and-only surgical valves indicated for use in the pulmonic and tricuspid positions—an important milestone in the treatment of complex heart valve disease. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Oh is deeply engaged in the Orange County community. She serves on the boards of OneOC and OCTANE, advises the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association of Orange County, and volunteers with local organizations alongside her family, making service an integral part of their lives.



Enterprise Bank & Trust, Cerritos

Melissa Dowler, Vice President West Coast Retail Market Manager

Melissa Dowler is a distinguished leader whose influence extends far beyond her title. With over 20 years of experience in the banking industry, Dowler has built a highly successful career grounded in excellence, trust, and relationship-driven leadership. As the Vice President of Retail Banking for the California market at Enterprise Bank & Trust, she oversees, coaches, and leads branch employees throughout Southern California and is widely recognized as a woman of influence and inspiration. Dowler exemplifies exceptional leadership through her unwavering work ethic, integrity, and accountability. She leads by example, holding herself and others to high standards while consistently encouraging and motivating her teams to grow both professionally and personally. She is deeply invested in building strong, lasting relationships with her teams, her clients, and her community partners; and is known for being her team's strongest advocate and most dependable leader. A defining pillar of Dowler's leadership is her commitment to diversity and inclusion. She fosters inclusive environments where individuals from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. As board Secretary of the Women's Business Resource Group, Dowler actively champions mentorship, professional development, and advancement opportunities for women, while promoting diverse perspectives and equitable leadership practices across the organization.



enVveno Medical Corporation, Irvine

Jennifer Bright, CFO

enVveno Medical (NASDAQ:NVNO) is an Irvine, California-based, clinical-stage medical device Company focused on the advancement of innovative bioprosthetic (tissue-based) solutions to improve the standard of care for the treatment of deep venous disease. enVveno is currently developing the enVVe System, which includes a first-in-class non-surgical replacement venous valve being developed for the treatment of severe deep Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI). The enVVe valve is designed to act as one-way valve, to help assist in propelling blood up the leg, and back to the heart and lungs. In April 2026, enVveno announced that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) awarded the Company the first-ever IDE approval to proceed with a U.S. pivotal study of a non-surgical replacement venous valve. The Transcatheter Venous Valve Endoprosthesis (TAVVE®) pivotal study will evaluate enVveno's minimally invasive enVVe® System for patients with severe deep Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI).



ePost Global, Cypress

Kelly Martinez, Co-founder & Co-president

Kelly Martinez is Co-president and Co-founder of ePost Global, a US-based international shipping provider processing approximately 23 million parcels annually across more than 200 countries and territories. The company employs 160 people and supports ecommerce brands and logistics partners managing the complexity of cross-border delivery. With more than 35 years in logistics, Martinez has built her career on solving the operational challenges that make global shipping unpredictable. In 2003, she co-founded Express Postal Options, growing the business through a disciplined focus on performance, accountability, and customer

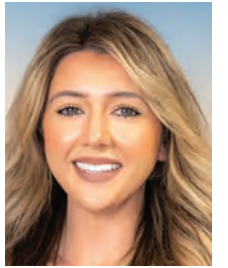


outcomes. Following its acquisition by RR Donnelley, she continued to help scale the logistics division within a Fortune 500 environment. In 2020, Martinez partnered with investors to acquire and rebrand the business as ePost Global. Since then, she has led the company through sustained growth, expanded its global carrier network, strengthened partnerships, and reinforced its role as a trusted partner for brands scaling internationally.

Essential Trust Financial, Newport Beach

Samantha Dalby, Financial Advisor / CEO

Samantha Dalby is the Founder and CEO of Essential Trust Financial, a Newport Beach-based financial planning firm dedicated to helping high-income professionals, business owners, and families protect, grow, and preserve their wealth. As a Certified Financial Fiduciary with over 13 years of professional experience, she specializes in advanced life insurance strategies, tax-efficient financial planning, customized wealth strategies, and legacy planning support. Her mission is deeply personal. After losing her father at age eight, Dalby experienced firsthand the financial instability that can follow the loss of a family provider without proper planning. Her family later suffered significant losses through fraud, reinforcing her commitment to becoming the trusted advisor her family never had. Today, Essential Trust Financial serves affluent professionals in industries such as technology, medicine, and law, as well as female entrepreneurs and families navigating major life transitions. Dalby is recognized for building a client-centered firm rooted in transparency, education, and long-term financial empowerment.



EverBank, Irvine

Lindsay Lawrence, EVP, Group Head of Deposit Services

Lindsay Lawrence serves as the Executive Vice President and Group Head—Deposit Services, as well as overseeing World Markets. Prior to joining EverBank in 2023, Lawrence served as the Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer at First Foundation Bank from June 2015 to December 2022, where she was accountable for the retail bank, direct bank, and commercial deposit groups, deposit operations divisions, business intelligence, and the digital delivery, product, treasury management, and payment channels. From January 2023 to August 2023, Lawrence was a bank consultant at Lawrence Financial Consulting and, earlier in her career, also held leadership roles with Umpqua Bank, and its predecessor Sterling Savings Bank, Opus Bank, Sunwest Bank, Vineyard Bank, and Commercial Capital Bank. Lawrence serves as a member of the boards of directors of Clearinghouse CDFI, Pacific Coast Banking School, Consumer Bankers Association, and the Mater Dei High School Monarch Foundation. Lawrence earned a Bachelor of Science in Communications from Northwestern University, and a Master of Business Administration from University of California, Irvine, both with Honors. She also is a graduate of Pacific Coast Banking School.



Everett Dorey LLP, Irvine

Samantha Dorey, Partner & Co-Founder

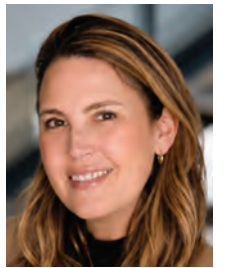
Samantha Dorey is a Founding Partner of Everett Dorey LLP, a full-service civil litigation firm representing multinational corporations, public agencies, and private clients across a broad spectrum of disputes. She focuses her practice on complex civil litigation, including catastrophic injury, public entity defense, employment law, mass torts, and environmental matters. In addition to her litigation work, Dorey advises clients on risk management strategies and preventative protocols. As Co-founder of one of California's leading litigation firms, Dorey is frequently retained as trial counsel in high-stakes, complex cases. She has built and leads a team of highly skilled litigators, with a strong commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive firm culture and advancing women in the legal profession. Beyond her practice, Dorey is an active contributor to the legal community. She has authored numerous articles, serves on the boards of the Public Law Center and the Orange County Lavender Bar Association, and has taught as an adjunct professor at Chapman University.



EY, Irvine

Mary Garrett, EY Orange County Office Managing Partner

Ernst & Young LLP (EY) is one of the world's largest professional services organizations, employing hundreds of thousands of professionals globally and nearly 700 in its Orange County office alone. Mary Garrett, born and raised in OC, leads the firm's Orange County office. She is responsible for driving growth, strengthening client relationships, and advancing EY's collaborative, people-focused culture. Under her leadership, the practice continues to expand its capabilities in key sectors, including life sciences and high-growth companies, while reinforcing its position as one of the region's largest accounting and consulting firms. A 26-year EY veteran, Garrett has spent her entire career with the firm, advising public, private and private equity-backed companies on IPOs, mergers and acquisitions, and international expansion. An audit partner specializing in health and wellness and life sciences, she is recognized for her ability to guide organizations through complex transactions while fostering innovation and long-term value creation.



Farmhouse Friends, Trabuco Canyon

Danielle Judd, Founder & CEO

Danielle Judd is the CEO and Founder of Farmhouse Friends, a Southern California nonprofit organization that connects rescued farm animals with children facing cancer through innovative emotional support programs. What began as a small rescue operation has grown into a rapidly expanding nonprofit serving major pediatric hospitals including CHOC Children's, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, MemorialCare Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach, and Loma Linda University Children's Health. Under Judd's leadership, Farmhouse Friends created the Smile Box program, delivering thoughtfully curated care packages featuring animal pen-pal connections to children undergoing treatment. The organization now ships Smile Boxes to families across the United States and continues to experience significant growth in both hospital partnerships and national outreach. Judd is recognized for her ability to build meaningful community partnerships with corporations, healthcare providers, and donors while creating programs that bring comfort, connection, and distraction to children during treatment. Her work has helped position Farmhouse Friends as a unique and impactful organization within both the nonprofit and pediatric cancer support communities.



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2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

FashionNica LLC, Irvine

Nicole Yusay, Founder & Managing Member

Nicole Yusay is the Founder of FashionNica, a rapidly growing luxury resale company specializing in authenticated pre-loved designer fashion and accessories. What began in 2020 as a two-person operation has since expanded into a team of more than 20 employees, reflecting the company's remarkable growth and strong community-driven foundation. Starting as a six-figure business, FashionNica has grown into an eight-figure company through strategic digital expansion, live selling, curated luxury experiences, and a loyal nationwide client base. The brand has also built a social media community of over one million followers across platforms. Under Yusay's leadership, FashionNica has become known not only for luxury resale, but also for its commitment to sustainability, mentorship, and community impact. The company actively hires and mentors interns, collaborates with fellow small businesses through activations and pop-ups, and promotes intentional fashion by encouraging consumers to shop pre-loved luxury. Yusay is also a featured speaker on business panels and podcasts, where she shares her entrepreneurial journey while empowering women, emerging founders, and the next generation of business leaders.



FBFK Law, Irvine

Ekaterina Ferguson, CMO

Ekaterina Ferguson is Chief Marketing Officer of FBFK Law, an entrepreneurial, full-service business law firm founded in 2001 with more than 100 full-time team members and offices across Texas and California. She oversees brand strategy, business development, communications, recruiting support, and digital marketing, helping position the firm for continued expansion. Under her leadership, FBFK has built a more integrated marketing function that works closely with firm leadership and practice groups. She has guided the modernization of the firm's market presence through updated materials, stronger digital positioning, and more intentional client-facing communications. Her work has supported FBFK's visibility in key markets, including Southern California, and helped create a more differentiated brand in a competitive legal environment. She has also emphasized culture alongside growth by advancing initiatives focused on mentorship, wellness, and leadership development. Ferguson's leadership combines strategic discipline with a people-first mindset, helping marketing serve as both a business driver and a reflection of the firm's values.



Female Fluence, Newport Coast

Pearl Mashour, Women Empowerment Coach/Educator/Podcast Host/Author/Speaker

Pearl Mashour is the Founder of Female Fluence, a growing women's empowerment platform and podcast dedicated to helping women reclaim their voice, confidence, and identity through coaching, speaking, education, and authentic conversation. Built as a founder-led brand, Female Fluence has grown into an expanding media and community platform that includes podcast interviews, empowerment workshops, online communities, a women's book club, virtual summits, and transformational resources designed to support women navigating life transitions and midlife reinvention. As host of the Female Fluence Podcast, Mashour has interviewed influential authors, wellness experts, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders while building an engaged community centered on empowerment, authenticity, and personal growth. She also wrote the children's book *Just As I Am: Two Worlds, One Journey* with her daughter, inspiring conversations around identity, belonging, and cultural pride. Her work and leadership have been featured in *Global Woman Magazine*, *Simply Woman Magazine*, *Bold Journey*, and *CanvasRebel*. She was also recognized as a 2025 Marquis Who's Who Honored Listee for her contributions to women's empowerment, education, and community impact.



FemiHealth, Orange

Analee Almeida-Gómez, Operations Director & Co-Founder

Analee Almeida-Gómez is the Founder of FemiHealth, a women's health and wellness company dedicated to empowering women through education, prevention, and a holistic approach to care. Recognizing a gap in accessible, patient-centered healthcare, she established FemiHealth to provide comprehensive services that go beyond traditional treatment models—focusing on education, lifestyle, and long-term well-being. Under her leadership, FemiHealth has grown from a startup concept into an emerging clinic serving a growing community of patients, with a strong emphasis on personalized care and trust. Almeida-Gómez has been instrumental in shaping the company's mission to address women's health with compassion and innovation, integrating modern medical practices with a broader wellness perspective. Her work reflects a commitment to improving healthcare experiences for women by creating a supportive environment where patients feel informed, heard, and empowered to take control of their health. Through FemiHealth, Almeida-Gómez continues to drive meaningful impact in her community while building a scalable model for holistic women's care.



First 5 Orange County, Santa Ana

Lisa Burke, Vice President of Learning and Community Engagement

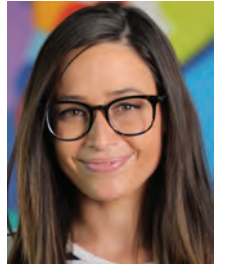
Lisa Burke leads First 5 OC's Learning and Community Engagement work, overseeing efforts that connect data, policy, communications, and community voice to improve outcomes for young children and their families. Her work focuses on using data to guide decision-making, identify gaps and inequities, and elevate the experiences of families. By listening closely to communities and sharing clear, grounded stories about what families need and what solutions are working, Burke helps ensure First 5 OC's strategies are both effective and rooted in lived experience. First 5 OC is a public agency dedicated to ensuring every child has the strongest possible start in life, focusing on early health, early learning, family and community engagement, and data and systems efficiency. Celebrating almost 30 years of impact, First 5 OC has served millions of local children and families as a trusted convener, collaborator, and champion for equity and impact. Recent funding accomplishments include \$11.8 million invested in prenatal-to-three programs, \$6.2 million to early learning and community engagement, and \$1.8 million for capacity building, benefiting approximately 48,900 OC caregivers, and 39,500 children in the past year alone.



Foster Love, Brea

Gianna Mulkay, Executive Director

Foster Love is a national nonprofit headquartered in Brea that provides critical resources, academic support, emergency assistance, and healing experiences to children, teens, and young adults impacted by foster care. As Executive Director, Gianna Mulkay has helped guide the organization from a small grassroots effort into a 50-plus-person team serving over 160,000 youth annually across the country. Adopted from foster care herself, Mulkay brings lived experience, strategic vision, and deep compassion to every part of her leadership. Under her guidance, Foster Love has reached its one-millionth child served, maintained a debt-free operating model, and directed 90% of all funds received toward the organization's special programs. She has helped develop nationally-recognized initiatives that restore dignity, improve academic outcomes, prevent homelessness, reunite siblings, and mobilize thousands of volunteers around the country. Mulkay is admired for her ability to quickly identify the evolving gaps in the child welfare system and build practical, human-centered solutions that help young people feel safe, valued, and supported.



Found Rental Company, Fullerton

Jeni Maus, Co-founder & CEO

Jeni Maus is the Co-founder and CEO of Found Rental Company (formerly Found Vintage Rentals), a full-service event furnishings company she built from the ground up in 2010 with her husband Joel. What began as a serendipitous moment—a wedding planner spotting antique furniture in Joel's photography studio and asking to rent it—evolved into one of the most recognized event rental companies in the country. Maus identified a market gap that no one else was filling: truly curated, vintage and custom-built furnishings for weddings and corporate events. Today, Found operates across multiple California markets, Nashville, and Colorado, employs more than 200 people, owns its transportation fleet, and generates over \$25 million in annual revenue. With an average order size of \$15,000—compared to an industry average of \$1,500 to \$2,500—Found's design-forward inventory and white-glove service have redefined what event rental can be. The company just celebrated its 15th anniversary.



Fuscoe Engineering, Inc., Irvine

Jill Littley, President & CFO

Jill Littley is the President and CFO of Fuscoe Engineering, Inc., an award-winning, 100% employee-owned civil engineering firm specializing in land development and municipal projects. Established in 1992, Fuscoe has more than 200 employees across six offices. In her role as President and CFO, Littley leads Fuscoe's business strategy and long-term growth initiatives while ensuring the firm's financial strength and operating efficiency. Through close collaboration with Fuscoe's CEO, board of directors, and business leaders, she drives strategic planning to support enhanced shareholder value and position the company for expansion. This has included the successful acquisition and integration of two firms in the past year, allowing Fuscoe to broaden its geographic reach and strengthen its service offerings. Littley also led the firm's transition to becoming a 100% employee-owned company, reinforcing Fuscoe's commitment to long-term value creation and employee engagement. Beyond her role at Fuscoe, Littley serves on the Board of Advisors for the CFO Executive Summit and is a board member of LSA, an environmental consulting firm, and Hendy, an interior architecture and design firm.



FUSION OF IDEAS, Rancho Santa Margarita

Deborah Barlow Taylor, CEO

Deborah Barlow-Taylor, CEO of FUSION OF IDEAS, is a dynamic leader who built her career through 19 years of relentless, hands-on work. From sales and marketing to finance and operations, she stepped in wherever needed—gaining a deep understanding of what makes a business thrive. What started as a single kiosk at the Shops of Mission Viejo has grown into a 22,000 sq. ft. headquarters in Rancho Santa Margarita, serving major brands with innovative technology and branding solutions. Taylor's leadership blends grit with heart. She has cultivated a people-first culture that's both high-performing and genuinely fun, with employee turnover far below industry norms. Equally important are Taylor's charitable contributions and passion for service. She is deeply committed to giving back—supporting community initiatives, fostering service opportunities, and weaving purpose into both her personal life and company culture. Through perseverance, authenticity, and a drive to make a difference, Taylor continues to build not just a successful company, but a meaningful legacy.



Genetix Biotherapeutics, Costa Mesa

Nancy Chien, West Senior Director of Business Development

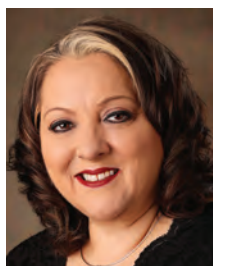
Nancy Chien, MBA, is Senior Director for the West Region at Genetix Biotherapeutics, where she leads partnerships with treatment centers, hospitals, and care teams to help expand access to gene therapies for patients with rare genetic diseases in hemoglobinopathies. Her work focuses on supporting patients and families living with sickle cell disease by connecting them to innovative and potentially life-changing treatment options across California and the West Coast. With more than 15 years of experience in biotechnology, gene therapy, genetic diagnostics, and medical devices, Chien has helped grow and support gene therapy programs at Genetix Bio and Spark Therapeutics. She is known for her leadership in business development, provider partnerships, and patient access initiatives that help bring new therapies into real-world care. Chien is bilingual in English and Chinese and earned her Executive MBA from the USC Marshall School of Business.



Girls Inc. of Orange County, Santa Ana

Lucy Santana, Chief Executive Officer

Lucy Santana serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Girls Inc. of Orange County, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering girls to be strong, smart, and bold through research-based programming. Since becoming CEO in 2001, Santana has led significant organizational growth, expanding the nonprofit's reach from approximately 1,500 girls served annually to more than 9,200 today, positioning it as a leading affiliate within the national Girls Inc. network. Under her leadership, Girls





The Heart Behind Great Businesses

At CommerceWest Bank, we've learned that every successful business has two stories. There's the one measured in growth, revenue, and milestones.

Then there's the story behind the numbers. The people, relationships, difficult decisions, and unwavering commitment that transformed an idea, opportunity, or legacy into something meaningful.

In this year's **Women in Business** edition, we celebrate the women writing both stories.

A True Business Partnership
Over the years, we've worked alongside many California businesses. One lesson remains consistent: the strongest organizations understand that exceptional financial performance and exceptional people are not competing priorities. One makes the other possible.

That's true in business. And it's equally true in banking.

Some organizations focus almost exclusively on the numbers. Others understand those numbers are the result of engaged employees, trusted relationships, loyal clients, thoughtful leadership, and people inspired to contribute their best.

The women we celebrate understand that instinctively.

Bank on the Difference
CommerceWest Bank has always believed banking should be approached the same way.

Nearly 25 years ago, we pioneered a commercial banking model that challenged the traditional approach. While many financial institutions begin with a loan request, collateral, or balance sheet, we begin with a conversation. We seek to understand how the business creates value, where leadership wants to take it, and who will help get it there.

"Financial statements tell us where a business has been. The people behind those numbers tell us where it's capable of going."
— Ivo Tjan, Chairman & CEO

That understanding allows us to properly structure debt, support growth, improve cash flow, and drive profitability. Our responsibility doesn't end when financing is approved. That's where the partnership begins.

The Human Advantage in an AI World
Artificial intelligence is reshaping business, creating efficiencies and faster access to information. But as technology becomes more sophisticated, the human side of business becomes an even greater competitive advantage.

Major business decisions still require judgment, perspective, trust, and partners willing to ask challenging questions. Many women we serve understand that sustainable success comes from balancing financial discipline with relationships, innovation with thoughtful leadership, and performance with a commitment to people.

CommerceWest Bank shares that philosophy. We invest in leading digital banking technology, but believe technology should strengthen relationships, not replace them.

Technology helps businesses operate efficiently. Relationships help businesses make better decisions. The future belongs to organizations that combine both.

Shaping Orange County's Future
We celebrate the Women in Business honorees creating jobs, developing people, strengthening workplaces, and making Orange County stronger.

For nearly 25 years, CommerceWest Bank has believed businesses deserve more than a transactional banking relationship. They deserve a partner who understands their financials, goals, and the people behind them.

While this issue celebrates the remarkable women shaping Orange County's future, our commitment extends to every business that believes lasting success is built on more than numbers.

Because every business deserves a bank that sees more than a balance sheet.

Every business deserves the opportunity to "Bank on the Difference."

THE HEART
BEHIND GREAT *Businesses*

Celebrating the women who lead with purpose, build with resilience, and inspire those around them every day.

We're honored to be their banking partner.



RELATIONSHIP FIRST

We begin with a conversation - taking time to understand your business, your goals, and the people behind your success.



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

From growth planning to debt structure and cash flow strategies, we provide insight that helps business make smarter financial decisions.



INNOVATION + PURPOSE

Best-in-class digital banking tools designed to simplify banking, improve efficiency, and give you more time to focus on growing your business.



"CommerceWest Bank will create a complete banking experience for each client, catering to businesses and their specific banking needs, while accommodating our clients and providing them high-quality, low-stress, and personally tailored banking and financial services."

(866) 521-CWBK | INFO@CWBK.COM | WWW.CWBK.COM

Member FDIC

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Inc. delivers year-round programs focused on STEM education, mental health, leadership development, and college and career readiness for girls from kindergarten through college. Santana has also strengthened the organization's financial sustainability by cultivating long-term partnerships with major corporations including Boeing, PIMCO, Disney, and Ingram Micro. A first-generation college graduate, Santana co-created Project Accelerate, a nationally recognized workforce development initiative supported by Pivotal Ventures. Her leadership continues to drive strategic growth that expands access to opportunities for girls and families across Orange County.

Giroux Glass Inc, Los Angeles

Karina Stoltz, President

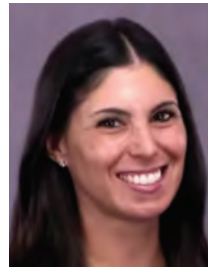
As an accomplished finance executive, Karina Stoltz has demonstrated a history of success for over 25 years transforming companies into profitable enterprises in the manufacturing and construction industries by engaging in strategic and tactical solutions aimed to address their most challenging roadblocks to success. Giroux Glass, Inc. is a nationally recognized leader in the commercial, retail, and luxury sectors for delivering high-quality performance, exceeding client expectations and defying engineering challenges to complete the industry's most demanding glazing projects for eighty years in Southern and Northern California, Nevada and Arizona. Since 2017, the Company has been 100% employee owned and has grown to more than \$80 million in annual revenues. Since joining the Company in May 2024 as its Chief Financial Officer, Stoltz shepherded the Company through a period of successive losses to its highest profitable year in its 80-year history, and since January 2026, she now serves as its President.



Golden State Foods / Families Forward, Irvine

Kate Starr, Group Vice President, Communications / Board Member

As Group Vice President, Communications at Golden State Foods (GSF), a leading diversified supplier to the foodservice and retail industries, Kate Starr leads strategic internal and external communications initiatives supporting global operations, corporate priorities, and the GSF Foundation. Beyond her professional role, Starr is deeply committed to community service and preventing family homelessness through her Board leadership with Families Forward, an Irvine-based nonprofit dedicated to preventing and ending family homelessness. A volunteer since 2020 and Board member since 2023, Starr serves as the Chair of Families Forward's Fund Development Committee and has held leadership roles on its Gala Committee, serving as Chair in 2024 and Co-Chair in 2025.



Good Life Property Management, Irvine

Natalia Mangold, Chief Operations Officer

Good Life Property Management is a Southern California residential property management company specializing in single-family homes, condos, and small apartment buildings. Founded in 2013 by Steve Welty, a licensed California real estate broker, the company was built with a mission to make rental property ownership easy. Over the following decade, Good Life Property Management scaled to manage more than 1,200 residential units and expanded into Orange County, cementing its position as Southern California's most trusted property management firms. The company has earned the confidence of over 1,000 Southern California homeowners and boasts more than 1,800 client reviews. Notable differentiators include a six-month money-back guarantee, competitive management fees, and specialized services for military families. Guided by core values of team first, problem-solving, and raising the bar, Good Life Property Management remains committed to its purpose: to create opportunity, enjoyment, and impact.



Greenberg Traurig, LLP, Irvine

Susan Heller, Co-Managing Shareholder

Greenberg Traurig is a global, multidisciplinary law firm with 3,100 attorneys in 51 locations. Susan Heller is Co-Managing Shareholder of the Orange County office, Co-Chair of the firm's Global Trademark & Brand Management Group, and Senior Advisor to the firm's Women's Initiative. When the stakes are high and critical brands are at risk, Fortune 500 companies, world champion athletes, high-net-worth individuals, A-list celebrities, and highly visible pre-IPO companies turn to Heller for her strategic thought leadership and counsel, honed by her three decades of experience. At the forefront of global strategic management and monetization of big name brands, she is known for developing cutting-edge branding strategies, most notably in "bet-the-brand," high stakes trademark cases. Heller is consistently recognized by numerous publications as having one of the preeminent and most innovative international trademark practices in the country. Heller was repeatedly listed in Band 1 of Chambers Intellectual Property Guide, named an outstanding IP Practitioner in the elite WIPR Leaders Guide, and recognized as one of the Top IP Lawyers for 16 years by Los Angeles Daily Journal.



Harcourts Blue Water, Newport Beach

Kathy Clark, Realtor

Kathy Clark is a long-time Orange County resident with a passion and career that has been centered on the Southern California Real Estate Industry. First as a homeowner, then investor, both experiences lead her to explore the home lending opportunities. With over 13 years in the mortgage industry Clark understands the real estate cycles and has adapted to the changing real estate and lending environments. Brenna partnered with Kathy after coming back from college and realizing that all those years of the two of them driving around and selecting their favorite homes and neighborhoods could be brought to great use.



Harcourts Blue Water, Newport Beach

Brenna Van Hoogenstyn, Realtor

After growing up surrounded by family members who built and ran their businesses with a strong focus on customer service and client relationships, Brenna Van Hoogenstyn developed a deep appreciation for connecting with people. This passion led her to a career in hospitality before transitioning into residential real estate, where she continued



building meaningful relationships. With a natural ability to relate to and understand people, she leveraged her skills and experience to ensure her clients retain as much of their hard-earned finances as possible while achieving their real estate goals.

Haskell & White LLP, Irvine

Eleanor Schultz, Chief Financial Officer

Eleanor Schultz is the Chief Financial Officer of Haskell & White LLP, an independently owned public accounting firm serving middle-market and growth-oriented companies with complex and highly technical accounting, audit, and tax needs. The firm has experienced sustained revenue growth and has expanded to more than 120 professionals, with offices in Irvine and San Diego and team members serving clients across the United States. As CFO, Schultz oversees accounting, finance, human resources, recruiting, and firm administration. She plays an integral role in the firm's strategic planning and collaborates closely with the partners to scale operations while preserving the culture that defines the organization. With more than 25 years of cross-functional leadership experience, Schultz has implemented financial controls, operational processes, and reporting structures that improved efficiency, supported profitability, and positioned the firm to manage growth effectively. Her leadership aligns financial strategy with operational decision-making, ensuring the firm can continue investing in people, technology, and client service while maintaining long-term stability.



Haskell & White LLP, Irvine

Diane Wittenberg, Partner

Diane Wittenberg, a partner of Haskell & White, one of Southern California's largest independently owned public accounting firms, brings over 40 years of public accounting experience to her clients and the expertise to help them navigate a complex economic and regulatory environment. Providing value beyond meeting compliance requirements is a focus for each of her clients. Her leadership is integral to many vital initiatives for the Firm, such as mentoring and training programs for young professionals pursuing a Certified Public Accountant license. She serves as a board member for the Association for Corporate Growth (ACG) Orange County chapter, and the Audit Committee chair for the Discovery Cube Orange County.



Hendy, Newport Beach

Susan Dwyer, Co-CEO & Managing Principal

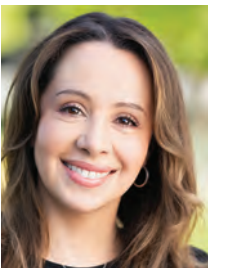
Co-CEO, Managing Principal, and 22-year Hendy veteran, Susan Dwyer is a NCARB-certified architect, bringing more than 27 years of industry experience to her leadership role. In January 2023, Dwyer stepped into the role of Co-CEO, spearheading the firm's financial performance and long-term growth during its transition to an employee-owned (ESOP) structure. As the leader of Hendy's Corporate Studio, Dwyer guides the design and delivery of dynamic, high-performing work environments that support evolving ways of working. Dwyer has left a lasting impact across the communities she has served, with a portfolio defined by wellness-focused design, integrated technology solutions, innovative open-office concepts, and highly collaborative workplace environments. Her work reflects a balance of forward-thinking design and human-centered strategy. As a leader, she draws on a deep understanding of local business contexts while maintaining a strong respect for each project's brand identity, history, and client service, ensuring every design is both relevant and enduring.



Hendy, Newport Beach

Carolina Weidler, Co-CEO & Managing Principal

Carolina Weidler, Co-CEO and Managing Principal at Hendy, is an accomplished architect, Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, and LEED Accredited Professional with over 25 years of global experience shaping high-performance environments. In January 2023, she became Co-CEO, leading Hendy's transition to an employee-owned (ESOP) structure and driving the firm's ownership culture. Her portfolio includes complex, process-driven projects for clients such as Anduril Industries, Gulfstream Aerospace, Toyota Racing Development, and Behr Paint Company. As leader of Hendy's Science and Technology Studio, Weidler specializes in designing efficient, adaptable environments that align space with process. Her approach is rooted in a deep understanding of operational flow, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and evolving industry demands, resulting in solutions that drive both performance and innovation. Throughout her career, Weidler has delivered transformative projects spanning industries from confectionery production to advanced aerospace assembly. Her ability to translate complex systems into purposeful, high-functioning spaces sets her apart as a strategic design leader. Weidler holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia, and a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt from Villanova University.



Hoag, Newport Beach

Teresa Conk, Senior Vice President & Chief Clinical Institutes Officer

Teresa Conk is Senior Vice President and Chief Clinical Institutes Officer at Hoag. In this role, she is responsible for leading the strategy and operations of each of Hoag's clinical institutes: Women's Health Institute, Hoag Family Cancer Institute, Jeffrey M. Carlton Heart & Vascular Institute, Pickup Family Neurosciences Institute, the Digestive Health Institute, and the Hoag Spine Institute. Conk has more than 25 years of leadership experience in healthcare. She has worked extensively in the areas of strategy, planning, physician integration, mergers & acquisitions, business development, and hospital operations. Prior to joining Hoag, Conk served as Chief Strategy Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor at UCI Health, having responsibility for strategy and integration across the clinical enterprise and the School of Medicine. She has also served in senior leadership roles at Children's Hospital of Orange County and St. Joseph Hospital, both in Orange.



Hoag Hospital Foundation, Newport Beach

Caroline A. Pereira, MBA, President

Caroline A. Pereira is President of the Hoag Hospital Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Hoag Health System. She joined Hoag in 2024 at a pivotal moment in the organization's growth and has since led the Foundation through a strategic expansion and transformational fundraising. Under her leadership, the Foundation has secured visionary gifts, most recently



Building Businesses, Bettering Futures: EverBank is Investing in the Women Driving Orange County's Economy

Orange County is home to a thriving business ecosystem where entrepreneurs, established companies, and family-owned businesses continue to drive innovation and economic growth. Women play a significant role in leading economic advancement in the region.

Behind every successful business is a network of trusted relationships. For many business owners, that includes a financial institution that understands their goals and can provide the expertise and financial solutions needed to support growth over time.

At EverBank, supporting women in business means delivering personalized banking solutions backed by experienced local bankers and the convenience of a leading digital platform. Whether helping an entrepreneur launch a new venture, supporting a growing company, or working with families planning for the future, the bank is committed to building long-term relationships that help clients achieve their financial goals with confidence.

"Every successful business begins with someone willing to invest in an idea," said Lindsay Lawrence, Executive Vice President and Group Head of Deposit Services at EverBank. "Women across Orange County are building companies, creating jobs, and strengthening their communities every day. At EverBank, we understand that they need a trusted financial institution who can help turn ambition into long term success."

EverBank's commitment to helping people build strong financial futures extends beyond the clients it serves. Through EverBank Builds, the bank's community impact program, EverBank invests in financial education, community development, and associate volunteerism to help strengthen local communities.

Earlier this year, EverBank teamed up with Girl Scouts of Orange County to host a financial literacy day at its Irvine corporate office, where local Girl Scouts participated in hands-on sessions focused on practical lessons on budgeting, saving, fraud awareness, and everyday money management. Participants also earned a custom EverBank Builds Financial Literacy patch designed to reinforce the lessons they learned and encourage lifelong financial confidence.



Lindsay Lawrence

The program reflects a broader belief that financial education should begin early. By introducing young people to practical money management skills and connecting them with professionals who use those skills every day, EverBank hopes to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs, business owners, and community leaders across Orange County.

Inside EverBank, women play an equally important role in driving the bank's success. They manage financial centers, advise consumer and commercial clients, oversee operations and technology, and serve in leadership roles across the organization. Their contributions help deliver the exceptional client experience that defines EverBank.

As Orange County's business community continues to grow, EverBank remains committed to supporting the people and businesses shaping its future. By investing in women at every stage of their financial journey, from students learning foundational financial skills to entrepreneurs building successful businesses, the bank is proud to be deepening its roots in Orange County.

Leading with purpose.
Banking on possibility.



Lindsay Lawrence
EVP, Group Head of
Deposits



Stephanie Buckley
SVP, National Commercial
Banking Manager



Tracy Miller
SVP, Head of Commercial
and Specialty Deposits



Christine Martin
SVP, Head of Treasury
Management

Progress in every industry is driven by bold thinking, resilience, and the courage to lead differently. At EverBank, we're proud to spotlight four exceptional women whose leadership is shaping our organization and the communities we serve.

Visit your local Orange
County financial center today,
or find a location near you at everbank.com/locations

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

in support of the expanding Sun Family Campus in Irvine through the Boldly Hoag campaign. She has also strengthened the Foundation's team and capabilities to support Hoag's privademic model. This model combines the clinical rigor and innovation of an academic medical center with the comprehensive care and efficiency of a private healthcare system. Her leadership is instrumental in raising the critical philanthropy that enables Hoag to enhance care for patients and families across the region. Her commitment to healthcare is deeply personal—her family's experience with cancer and epilepsy continues to inspire her mission-driven work. With more than 20 years of fundraising leadership in academic healthcare, Pereira previously held key roles at UCI Health and the University of Toronto. She earned an MBA from the University of Southern California and holds a BA in psychology from the University of Waterloo.



Hope Builders, Santa Ana

Shawna Smith, CEO & Executive Director

Shawna Smith is Executive Director of Hope Builders, a workforce development organization that prepares opportunity youth for careers in healthcare, construction, and child development. Founded in 1995, Hope Builders has served more than 7,500 young adults and annually supports 200 participants through industry-aligned training, career coaching, and employer partnerships. Having spent nearly three decades with the organization, including 17 years as its executive leader, Smith has guided Hope Builders' evolution into a data-driven, outcomes-focused workforce enterprise recognized for innovative workforce solutions and strong employer alignment. Under her leadership, the organization expanded its reach beyond Orange County into Los Angeles County and the Inland Empire while strengthening partnerships with major employers and workforce systems. Smith also launched Hope Builders Career Connections (HBCC), a social enterprise staffing agency that creates direct talent pipelines between employers, program graduates, and other job-ready young adults served through broader workforce and community partnerships. HBCC places approximately 240 young adults into employment annually and engages more than 40 employers to align training with workforce needs and create direct pathways to employment.



Hub for Integration, Reentry & Employment (HIRE), Orange

Meghan Medlin, Chief Executive Officer & Founder

Meghan Medlin is the Founder and CEO of Hub for Integration, Reentry & Employment (HIRE), an Orange County-based nonprofit dedicated to workforce development, mentorship, and support services for justice involved youth and adults. Founded in 2020 during the pandemic, HIRE has rapidly grown into Orange County's only organization solely focused on employment-centered reentry services without age or conviction restrictions. Under Medlin's leadership, the organization has expanded to a team of more than a dozen staff and consultants, over 100 volunteers, and annual revenue growth from approximately \$100,000 to more than \$1 million in just a few years. HIRE now serves over 1,000 individuals annually through employment readiness, mentorship, case management, and community partnerships. Medlin is also leading the development of Orange County's first Workforce Reentry Training Facility, expected to open in 2028, which will provide vocational training, retail workforce opportunities, and supportive services under one roof. A recognized community leader, Medlin has received honors from the OC Business Journal, LA Times, and JPMorgan Chase for her impact-driven leadership.



Idea Hall, Costa Mesa

Sara Sloan, Chief Operating Officer

As Chief Operating Officer, Sara Sloan helps lead one of Orange County's most respected integrated communications agencies with equal parts strategy, empathy, and purpose. Since joining the agency more than nine years ago, Sloan has played a pivotal role in shaping Idea Hall's growth, culture, and client success, recently earning a promotion to COO in recognition of her leadership and impact. A seasoned communications strategist, Sloan has led high-impact integrated campaigns for globally recognized brands, nonprofit organizations, and community initiatives, including Be Well OC, Think Together, Goodwill OC, and Procter & Gamble initiatives such as Oprah's "The Life You Want Tour," along with brands including Oral-B, Dreft, and Luvs. Her expertise spans public relations, branding, social media and influencer marketing, experiential, and crisis communications. Known for her thoughtful leadership style and people-first mindset, Sloan is deeply committed to mentorship, innovation, excellence, and being a trusted partner and collaborator for our teams and our clients. Her leadership continues to help shape Idea Hall's reputation as a value-based agency focused on innovation, creativity, and community impact.



Iffel International, Anaheim Hills

Hema Dey, CEO & Fractional Chief AI Officer

Hema Dey is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Iffel International Inc., a California-based marketing and AI consulting firm headquartered in Orange County. Founded in 2006 and later expanded into the U.S., the company serves clients across industries including law, healthcare, manufacturing, and technology, helping organizations implement AI-driven marketing systems and scalable sales pipelines. Under Dey's leadership, Iffel International has achieved sustained international growth, supporting businesses across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. She is the creator of the proprietary SEO2Sales™ methodology, a data-driven framework that connects search visibility directly to measurable revenue outcomes. With more than three decades of global business experience spanning over 35 countries, Dey has built a reputation for integrating behavioral science, technology, and marketing strategy. In 2025, she was recognized by Forbes as one of the Top 5 AI Leaders bringing Artificial Intelligence to everyone, underscoring her influence in advancing ethical, human-centered AI adoption in marketing.



Illumination Health + Home, Santa Ana

Dr. Pooja Bhalla, Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Pooja Bhalla is the Chief Executive Officer of Illumination Health + Home, a nonprofit organization advancing integrated healthcare and housing solutions to disrupt the cycle of homelessness. Under her leadership, Illumination has become a recognized and innovative

leader in healthcare and housing services for people experiencing homelessness. In FY2024–25, Illumination served 6,826 individuals, including 3,639 in Orange County, and helped 1,719 individuals secure stable housing. As part of her vision to broaden integrated housing solutions, Dr. Bhalla is spearheading the development of the Richard Lehn Intergenerational Campus in Santa Ana, scheduled to open in summer 2026. This first-of-its-kind intergenerational community will provide affordable housing for seniors and young families with embedded services. She also led the development of the country's first recuperative care facility dedicated to children of families experiencing homelessness. Opened in October 2024 in Santa Ana, the facility represents an emerging model for community-based healthcare. Dr. Bhalla joined Illumination in 2017 as Chief Operating Officer and advanced through executive leadership roles before being appointed CEO in 2023.



Ingram Micro, Irvine

Jennifer Anaya, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing

Jennifer Anaya is Senior Vice President, Global Marketing, at Ingram Micro. As the industry leader's Chief Marketing Officer, she leads the company's brand strategy and direction and drives growth through an enhanced customer experience and digital marketing. Among her many strategic growth contributions, Anaya led the transformation, geographic expansion, and now digitization of the longest-standing IT partner community – Trust X Alliance – into a high-growth cohort of trusted experts spanning several countries. Under Anaya's leadership, her team developed the company's first digital marketing engine, which powers a personalized customer experience and enriched marketing services within the company's digital experience distribution platform, Ingram Micro Xvantage™. Pulling from her entrepreneurial spirit, Anaya founded and continues to lead the B2B tech leader's large global in-house agency, Agency Ingram Micro (AIM), which specializes in channel marketing and consistently earns industry praise and was recognized as the global ACE In-House Agency of the Year by ANA Business Marketing two years in a row. She also continues to oversee Ingram Micro's global partner community, Trust X Alliance, as well as the company's channel PR and AR efforts. With 23 years at Ingram Micro and nearly three decades of technology industry experience, Anaya is a proven and innovative IT channel leader and change agent.



Ingram Micro, Irvine

Sabine Howest, Senior Vice President, Platform Services and Support

Sabine Howest is Senior Vice President of Platform Services and Support at Ingram Micro, where she is helping reshape how a \$50-plus billion global technology company operates in the digital era. With operations spanning more than 50 countries and tens of thousands of associates, Ingram Micro is rapidly evolving into a platform-driven business powered by its Xvantage digital experience platform. Howest leads Ingram Micro's global platform services, overseeing service and support teams that are essential to how customers and vendors engage, transact, and grow on and off the platform. Known for connecting strategy to execution, she previously led digital operations for Xvantage, playing a critical role in its product development, adoption, and scale as a cornerstone of the company's transformation. Since joining the company in 2009, Howest has held leadership roles out of Europe and the U.S., and was among the first executives tapped to drive Xvantage globally. A multilingual leader recognized by CRN's Power 100, she is widely respected for her inclusive leadership and impact on the future of the IT channel.



Innovate Realty, Irvine

Suzanne Seini, CEO & Founder

Suzanne Seini is the Founder and CEO of Innovate Realty, a fast-growing Southern California real estate brokerage recognized for its modern, client-first approach to residential real estate. Under her leadership, the firm has built a reputation for combining high-touch service with forward-thinking marketing, strategic advisory, and deep local market expertise across luxury, residential, and investment properties. As housing affordability, shifting buyer behavior, and economic uncertainty continue to reshape the market, Seini has positioned Innovate Realty as a trusted resource for both seasoned homeowners and first-time buyers navigating today's increasingly complex real estate environment. She has become known for her ability to identify emerging market trends, mentor high-performing agents, and build a collaborative company culture rooted in transparency and long-term relationships. In addition to overseeing the firm's continued growth, Seini frequently contributes insight on Southern California housing trends, renovation strategy, multigenerational homebuying, and the evolving expectations of today's homebuyers and sellers.



Innovative Light Designs, LLC, Orange

Nancy Castenholz, Chief Operations Officer

Innovative Light Designs is a Permanent Outdoor Landscape Lighting business with national recognition achieving First Place Awards. It actually began in 2001 as a holiday decorating service. As its client list grew and our completed projects surpassed 4,000, they added outdoor landscape lighting. They have grown to be a premiere outdoor landscape lighting company alongside their seasonal lighting for all holidays and events. Although they offer basic safety lighting, their brand captures the elegance and ambiance of a property creating a "Wow" effect which brings out the beauty and magic of any property, both residential and commercial.



Innovative Liquidators, Inc., Whittier

Olga Lozano, CEO

Olga Lozano is the President and CEO of Innovative Liquidators, Inc., a logistics and asset recovery company that supports major retailers, manufacturers, and distribution partners across multiple states. With more than 27 years of entrepreneurial experience, Lozano has built a respected company known for reliability, operational expertise, and the ability to successfully manage complex, high-volume logistics and product recovery programs. Through hands on leadership and a strong understanding of supply chain operations, Lozano has grown Innovative





What High-Performing Businesses Get Right About Data, Risk, and Growth

A version of this article first appeared on eidebailly.com/oc-biz

Economic uncertainty, regulatory change, cyber threats, and evolving technology are reshaping the business landscape. While disruption is unavoidable, how you respond can define your future.

The organizations that thrive aren't simply reacting to change — they're using it as an opportunity to become stronger, more resilient, and better positioned for growth.

Increase Visibility to Optimize Performance

By bringing together financial, operational, and technology insights, leaders can gain real-time visibility into what's happening across the organization. Better information leads to faster decisions, improved efficiency, and stronger performance.

Case in Point: A construction client needed to modernize time entry without adding extra costs. With the help of a custom time-entry interface that integrated with their current Salesforce environment, they were able to get critical labor cost visibility without extra licensing fees.



Protect What You've Built

Many organizations view security, risk management, and compliance as simply defenses against threats. However, effective protection also means proactively building systems and processes that minimize risks, adapt to change, empower people, and support growth. Risk management requires continuous readiness in the form of:

- **Risk assessments:** Evaluate exposure across financial, operational, and cybersecurity dimensions. Model downturn scenarios.
- **Compliance agility:** Monitor regulatory shifts that can significantly impact cost structures or reporting requirements.
- **System modernization:** Legacy platforms slow decision-making and force manual workarounds, making it difficult to scale operations or realize value from AI.

Prosper Into the Future

Prospering isn't about predicting the future. It's about building a business model that stands up to multiple scenarios. **Think about:**

- **Strategic investments:** Look for smart acquisitions, technology upgrades, or new market entries that position you ahead of competitors.
- **Revenue diversification:** Explore new products, services, or customer segments to broaden your income streams.
- **Future-focused finance:** Enable your finance team to lead, not just report.

Eide Bailly brings together accounting, advisory, technology, tax, and industry expertise to help you improve performance, strengthen resilience, and create lasting value. No matter where your organization is today, we can help you move forward with confidence.

eidebailly.com



Make a habit of sustained success.

Eide Bailly helps businesses work smarter — financially, operationally, and strategically.

eidebailly.com



2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Liquidators into a trusted partner for organizations requiring efficient reverse logistics, transportation coordination, and responsible asset recovery solutions. Her company has supported major national organizations, including leading retailers and manufacturers such as Costco, Lowe's, Best Buy, Sears and Bosch, etc., helping facilitate product flow, manage large scale appliance liquidation programs, and support recycling initiatives that reduce environmental impact. Lozano's work contributes to keeping usable products in circulation while helping divert significant volumes of appliances and materials from landfills through responsible recycling and recovery practices. By supporting sustainable product lifecycle management, her company plays an important role in helping clients meet operational goals while also improving environmental outcomes.

Inplant Sales LLP, Westminster

Angie Denning, CFO

Angie Denning is a CPA and fractional CFO with more than 20 years of experience helping companies ranging from startup ventures to organizations with \$100 million in annual revenue strengthen their financial performance and build scalable finance functions. She brings hands-on leadership across accounting and operations, with a track record of improving margins, optimizing cash flow, and elevating the quality and discipline of financial reporting. Denning is known for creating finance infrastructures that support growth, from refining close processes and internal controls to developing practical forecasting, budgeting, and performance management tools. She combines deep technical accounting expertise with an operational mindset, understanding that strong financial results depend on alignment between accurate reporting and efficient execution. She has early experience supporting the family business (Inplant Sales) and shaped a practical, service-oriented approach to finance, reflecting a commitment to turning her parents' investment in her college education into meaningful, long-term value. As a trusted advisor, she partners closely with executives to translate financial data into action, helping organizations scale with confidence, accountability, and stronger financial foundations. Through a Huntington Beach faith-based charity, she supports efforts that provide essential services—including food assistance, housing support, and other community resources—helping neighbors address immediate needs while building a foundation for long-term stability.



Insperty, Irvine

Monica Alfisi, PCC, Private Capital Consultant

Monica Alfisi, PCC, is a seasoned business strategist and Certified Business Performance Advisor at Insperty, a leading provider of workforce optimization and HR solutions supporting more than 100,000 businesses nationwide. With over 20 years of experience, Alfisi partners with middle-market and high-growth companies to drive double-digit revenue expansion, margin improvement, and scalable infrastructure, aligning workforce strategy with enterprise value creation. Alfisi has extensive experience working alongside private equity firms and their portfolio companies, where she plays a critical role in pre-close HR due diligence and LOI evaluations. She assesses organizational risk, talent gaps, compliance exposure, and scalability to help investors make informed decisions and accelerate post-acquisition integration and performance. Prior to Insperty, Alfisi spent more than a decade advising dental and medical platforms, supporting multi-site growth, operational restructuring, and successful exits. Her work has consistently improved retention, productivity, and EBITDA performance across organizations. In addition to her client work, Alfisi serves on the advisory board of Venture Forward Capital, a venture capital firm supporting serially successful founders in Applied AI. In this role, she mentors founders on HR infrastructure, operational readiness, and investor focused growth strategies, helping early stage companies build scalable, high performing organizations.



Irvine Art & Music, Irvine

Gloria Chang, CEO

Gloria Chang is the CEO of Irvine Art & Music, a family-owned business founded by Howard Chang and Jennifer Wang, now celebrating its 25th year serving the Orange County community. Originally established as a music education center, the company has grown to support a diverse population including students, professionals, hobbyists, and a wide range of organizations such as public schools, private schools, charter schools, homeschools, and nonprofit institutions. The retail division of the business was later developed by Joseph Chang, further expanding its impact and reach. As a second-generation leader, Chang is driving the company into its next phase of evolution, focused on building consistent and sustainable growth while maintaining deep community roots. Her leadership emphasizes educational support, meaningful outcomes, and long-term value for both individuals and organizations served. In addition to leading the business, Chang is also a practicing nurse practitioner, uniquely bridging healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship. This dual perspective informs her leadership approach, grounded in service, resilience, and community impact. Chang has prioritized cultivating a positive and supportive work culture, creating a safe and empowering environment for musicians and educators. As a female entrepreneur and minority business leader, she continues to expand community partnerships and position Irvine Art & Music as a sustainable and evolving model in arts education.



Island Dermatology, Newport Beach

Dr. Leila Ettefagh, CEO

Dr. Leila Ettefagh founded Island Dermatology which is a patient-centered medical and surgical dermatology practice providing comprehensive skin care with a strong emphasis on early skin cancer detection and treatment. Since co-founding the practice, Dr. Leila Ettefagh and Dr. Navid Nami, her husband, are board-certified dermatologists and Orange County natives who launched Island Dermatology shortly after getting married. They have intentionally built a warm environment to better serve the diverse skin care needs of their community. Their philosophy goes beyond treatment: they prioritize patient education taking time to explain diagnoses, review options, and translate the latest therapies and procedures into clear, actionable plans. Dr. Ettefagh earned a B.S. in Biological Sciences with Distinction from Stanford University and her M.D. from the University of California, San Francisco, and is recognized for meticulous, compassionate care that helps patients feel comfortable, understood, and empowered.



Jamboree Housing Corporation, Irvine

Natalie Reider, Chief Impact Officer

Jamboree Housing Corporation is one of California's leading nonprofit affordable housing developers, with more than 110 communities statewide, and over 10,000 homes serving 25,000-plus residents. As Chief Impact Officer, Natalie Reider oversees Community Impact, Asset Management, and Philanthropy, aligning operational performance with long-term financial sustainability and mission-driven outcomes. Since joining Jamboree in 2015, Reider has helped drive the organization's growth and statewide impact by expanding resident services, strengthening strategic partnerships, and integrating data-driven approaches that improve housing stability and resident well-being. Previously serving as Senior Vice President of Community Operations, Reider led cross-functional teams overseeing property performance, resident services, and community development initiatives. She pioneered innovative programs such as Community Collaboratives, advanced resident outcome measurement systems, and helped secure millions in philanthropic support for affordable housing, mental health, and education initiatives.



JMAC Lending, Costa Mesa

Christina Pham, President & Founder

Christina Pham is the President and Founder of JMAC Lending, a wholesale and correspondent mortgage lender she established in 1997 in Santa Ana, California. A first-generation Vietnamese immigrant, Pham launched JMAC with a mission to provide underserved borrowers—particularly within the immigrant community—access to high-quality, trustworthy lending. What began as a small, community-focused operation has grown into a nationally recognized wholesale lending platform with 160 to 170 employees and approximately \$2.4 billion in annual loan production. When the 2008 financial crisis bankrupted JMAC's parent company, Pham made the defining decision to rebuild as a fully independent, self-funded firm—and emerged stronger. Today, JMAC serves brokers and borrowers across the country, specializing in Non-QM, jumbo, government, DSCR, and conforming loan products. Revenue has grown from \$17 million to over \$30 million in just two years, with a target of \$3.5 to \$4.5 billion in annual production by 2027. Pham is also a 2025 HousingWire Women of Influence honoree.



JoJo Romeo and Associates, Newport Beach

JoJo Romeo, Luxury Real Estate Specialist

Meet JoJo Romeo: the high-octane force redefining luxury real estate with Pacific Sotheby's International Realty. Operating across an elite global network spanning 81 countries, Romeo doesn't just list Orange County's most exclusive estates—she transforms them. Since 2011, her visionary drive has fueled nearly \$1 billion in career sales, securing her spot among Pacific Sotheby's Top 50 Producers in 2025 and Q1 2026. What's her secret weapon? The proprietary "JoJo Transformations" methodology. Utilizing her background as a designer and project manager, she strategically renovates and stages properties before they hit the market, shattering neighborhood price records and maximizing client ROI. Her work ethic and pursuit of excellence has earned her a four-time Orange County Business Journal Women in Business nomination, features in USA Today, and three consecutive Real Trends Top Producer titles. From local icons to prominent international high-net-worth buyers, global elites trust Romeo to navigate OC's most coveted neighborhoods. Ready to experience real estate elevated to an art form? You need not look any further!



JPMorgan Advisors, Newport Beach

Maureen Flanagan, Managing Director

Maureen Flanagan is a Managing Director and Wealth Partner at J.P. Morgan Wealth Management and co-founder of FGF Partners. With more than 40 years of experience in wealth management and portfolio strategy, she advises individuals and families on integrated financial planning, investing and wealth preservation. Her clients include business owners, executives, professionals and women navigating major life transitions such as divorce, widowhood, and inheritance. Flanagan is known for combining technical investment expertise with a highly personalized, fiduciary-based approach centered on long-term relationships and financial education. She is a CFA® Charterholder and holds the Certified Divorce Financial Analyst® (CDFA®) and Accredited Investment Fiduciary® (AIF®) designations. Flanagan earned her B.S. in Business Administration with an emphasis in Finance from the University of Southern California and her M.B.A. from California State University at Long Beach. Eager to give back to her community, Flanagan serves on the board of directors of SPIN (Serving People in Need) and the Newport Bay Conservancy. She also leads kayak tours on the back bay as a naturalist with the Newport Bay Conservancy.



Juice It Up!, Irvine

Amanda Adkins, Director of Franchise Operations

Amanda Adkins serves as the Director of Franchise Operations at Juice It Up!, where she leads field operations and franchise support for one of the nation's leading smoothie, raw juice, and superfruit bowl chains. Since joining the brand in 2021, Adkins has played a key role in strengthening operational systems, enhancing franchisee support and driving sustained sales momentum across the system. With more than 20 years of experience in the beverage and better-for-you restaurant space, Adkins worked her way through nearly every level of operations before stepping into executive leadership. Her hands-on background gives her a unique ability to connect with franchise partners and field teams while helping drive scalable growth. Under Adkins's operational leadership, Juice It Up! has continued to evolve its menu platforms, improve store-level efficiencies and build a stronger support infrastructure to sustain long-term franchise success.



Kahana Feld, LLP, Irvine

Rina Hunter, COO

When Rina Hunter joined Kahana Feld, the firm was a 50-person organization with approximately 25 attorneys. In less than two years, under her operational leadership, the firm has grown into a National Law Journal 500 law firm with more than 160 attorneys and over 350 total employees. During this period, the firm has experienced significant growth and



ILLUMINATION Health + Home: Where Women Lead the Work of Ending Homelessness

At Illumination Health + Home, women aren't a talking point — they're the infrastructure. Nurses, case managers, housing navigators, and executives show up daily for people rebuilding their lives after homelessness, medical crisis, or both. In fact, **65% of Illumination's workforce are women** — from frontline care teams to leadership.

The need is acute. Women experiencing homelessness face compounding risks: domestic violence, medical vulnerability, and the burden of holding a family together with no safety net — a reality for the 70% of adults in Illumination's Children and Families Program who are women, most of them single mothers. Illumination meets that need through recuperative care, housing navigation, and trauma-informed support that moves people from crisis to stability.

Leading that work is **CEO Dr. Pooja Bhalla, DNP**, whose clinical background shapes an organization built to treat homelessness as a health crisis, not a housing problem alone. Under her leadership, Illumination has grown into one of Orange County's largest providers of recuperative care and family emergency housing — a model where clinical care and housing stability work together, not in sequence. That leadership extends to governance: **eight women currently serve on Illumination's board**, shaping strategy alongside Bhalla and the executive team.

Monica Pleasant, VP of People & Culture, builds the internal systems that let a 350-person workforce — many on the front lines of a client's hardest days — do that work sustainably. Retention isn't an HR line item to her; it's what turns a workforce into a care system — people serving people.

Caron Berkley, VP of Marketing and Communications, translates that work into the story Orange County sees — making the case that ending

homelessness isn't simply compassionate charity, but public health infrastructure with measurable results: reduced hospitalizations, fewer repeat crisis interventions, lower long-term community costs.

When Cynthia lost her partner, she was eight months pregnant with a one-year-old — and within days, without stable housing. She worked delivery gigs with her newborn strapped to her, slept in her car when shelters filled, and kept going for her girls. A single call connected her to Illumination Health + Home. For nearly 11 months, Illumination gave her family a safe place to live, trauma-informed care, and a team that helped her rebuild — housing navigation, furniture, and rental subsidy. Today, nearly four years later, Cynthia and her daughters are thriving in that same home. She's pursuing a career as a Licensed Vocational Nurse.

"Illumination didn't just give us housing," she says. "They gave us our future."

That thread — women supporting women through the hardest transitions of their lives — runs through every level of Illumination, from the boardroom to the bedside.

Join us. Illumination's Women's Philanthropy Luncheon returns Friday, October 9, 2026, for an afternoon of connection and impact.

Learn more at illuminationhealthhome.org.



The logo for Illumination Health + Home features a stylized yellow sunburst icon to the left of the text "ILLUMINATION" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below "ILLUMINATION" is the text "HEALTH + HOME" in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.

Women's
PHILANTHROPY LUNCHEON

Friday, October 9, 2026

THE WATERFRONT BEACH RESORT, HUNTINGTON BEACH

Celebrating 10 Years of Family Emergency Homes

For ten years, our Children and Families Program has provided more than shelter—they've offered safety, healing, and hope. This luncheon celebrates that impact, honoring the generosity of our donors and supporters and recognizing the women in our programs, our frontline staff, and our community.

Learn more

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

expanded its geographic footprint through the opening of six new offices, deepening its presence in key markets nationwide. Before joining Kahana Feld, Hunter held senior leadership roles at several prominent law firms. Notably, she served as a Director of Administration and global leader at Latham & Watkins. Before joining Latham, Hunter was a Litigation Associate at Skadden and served on the Associates Committee. Hunter specializes in delivering strategic, innovative solutions that align with business goals while addressing complex organizational challenges. She has spent most of her career operationalizing transformational change, launching new departments and offices for global firms to break into new markets or strengthen their presence in existing ones.



Kantata, Irvine

Gina Hartigan, Chief People Officer

Gina Hartigan is the Chief People Officer at Kantata, a leading provider of software solutions for professional services organizations. She joined the company (then Mavenlink) six years ago, leading the people function through the M&A of Mavenlink and Kimble (in 2021). She guided the integration of these two distinct cultures into a single, aligned, and high-performing organization. At Kantata, she has achieved an employee average tenure of 5.1 years—double the tech industry standard, which is 2.5 years. A defining example of her leadership is the creation of a global R&D innovation hub in India. Partnering with the CTO, Hartigan helped secure board alignment and led the people strategy to build the capability from concept to 40 employees in under a year. This expansion increased innovation capacity and contributed directly to the company's product roadmap. Through her leadership, Hartigan has proven that culture is not a support function but a strategic driver of growth, performance, and resilience. She has built a streamlined, high-impact People organization that enables Kantata to scale globally, innovate faster, and deliver sustained business results. Prior to Kantata, Hartigan previously held HR leadership positions with several Fortune 100 corporations.



Kei Concepts, Huntington Beach

Ivy Ha, Founder & Co-CEO

Kei Concepts is an Orange County based hospitality group celebrated for crafting culturally rooted, design forward dining experiences, generating over \$100 million in annual revenue across approximately 15 locations and eight distinct brands, including SÚP Noodle Bar, VOX Kitchen, NEP Café, INI Ristorante, ROL Hand Roll Bar, KIN Izakaya, GEM Dining, and KEI Coffee House. As Co-CEO, Ivy Ha has been the architect of the company's evolution since co-founding it in 2014, transforming a single restaurant vision into one of the region's most dynamic culinary forces. Leading a workforce of more than 1,000 employees, Ha oversees growth strategy, brand identity, and the robust operational systems that serve as the foundation for scalable excellence. Her leadership philosophy centers on building brands with purpose, viewing food as a bridge between cultures and restaurants as platforms for storytelling while maintaining a steadfast commitment to an employee first culture. Recognized in 2026 with the Orange County Business Journal Excellence in Entrepreneurship Awards, Ha continues to champion emerging talent, women in leadership, and operational innovation across the hospitality industry.



Kid's Bash OC, Lake Forest

Shana Zeitoun, Owner

Kid's Bash OC was created to help families and business expand their impact through spectacular events. What started as a dream has turned into a thriving SoCal business with connections across all industries. The business grew 198% from year one to year two and 175% from year two to year three. Shana Zeitoun is a single mom of two kids and was able to achieve this growth all while going through a separation. She is just getting started and has huge vision to create a fully-automate party planning tech tool that will revolutionize the event planning industry. She is a force to be reckoned with and brings heart, wisdom, and inspiration to everyone she touches.



King's Seafood Company LLC, Costa Mesa

Kelly Ellerman, President & Chief Operating Officer

Kelly Ellerman is President and Chief Operating Officer of King's Seafood Company, a Costa Mesa-based restaurant group operating 23 locations across five states with more than 1,000 employees. A 26-year veteran of the company, Ellerman has been instrumental in building the operational and cultural foundation that has enabled its long-term success. She began her career with King's in 2000 as a human resources manager, rising through the organization to Chief People Officer, where she led enterprise-wide strategy across talent, training, benefits, and employee experience. In that role, she developed scalable systems that strengthened retention, leadership consistency, and operational performance across the company's multi-state footprint. Now as President and COO, Ellerman oversees day-to-day operations with a focus on execution, alignment, and strategic clarity. Her leadership is defined by a disciplined, people-first approach that balances operational rigor with the creative vision that drives the brand—positioning King's Seafood Company for its next phase of growth and evolution.



Klatch Coffee, Rancho Cucamonga

Heather Perry, CEO

Heather Perry is CEO of Klatch Coffee and a lifelong leader in specialty coffee, having grown up in the family business founded by her parents, Mike and Cindy Perry. She began working in Klatch Coffee cafés at a young age and built her expertise through competition, education, and industry leadership, becoming the first woman to win the U.S. Barista Championship and the first person to earn the title twice, later placing second in the World Barista Championship. Perry has trained coffee professionals and previously served as President of the Specialty Coffee Association, helping shape global industry standards and education. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Business Administration and Management, General from California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, and now leads Klatch Coffee's growth across a growing number of café locations, wholesale, e-commerce, and training while continuing Klatch



Coffee's commitment to quality, sustainability, and innovation in coffee.

Kreditor Bolduc Risbrough LLP, Costa Mesa

Lynne Bolduc, Partner

Lynne Bolduc has successfully represented both private and public companies in closing complex transactions across multiple industries. She specializes in crafting creative financing solutions for companies wanting to raise money, go public, sell, or acquire other companies. Bolduc's achievements include landmark securities transactions; expert witness services in cases with high-profile public figures; and impactful speaking engagements, advocacy, and publications, reflecting her unwavering dedication to her profession. Bolduc serves as a Director on the Board of the National Investment Banking Association, a non-profit advocacy group for corporate finance; is involved with several organizations promoting women on Boards of Directors; and founded The Women's Business Development Initiative in 2009 which continues to provide business opportunities to women today, reflecting her support of her professional community.



KTM Agency, Newport Beach

Carrie Freitas, Founder & CEO

Carrie Freitas has established a reputation as the region's go-to consumer public relations pro, with more than 30 years of experience working with major brands including Nintendo, Pepsi, Ford, Pizza Hut, Quaker Oats, Target, Nestle, and more. After earning her stripes at multinational firms such as Edelman and Golin, she launched her own consultancy and is credited with introducing the application of PR to O.C.'s luxury real estate market in 2000. She is the founder of KTM Agency and continues to be a driving force for the full-service marketing, PR, and creative agency that last year secured more than 815 media placements across top-tier publications and prime-time TV and generated 1.9-plus billion impressions for its clients. Freitas is also a powerful community advocate who leads workshops on branding and marketing for nonprofits and serves as vice president of the OC Press Club to support a thriving local news ecosystem.



Liberty Dental Plan, Tustin

Maja Karabeg, VP, Chief Accounting Officer

Founded in 2002 as a small OC startup, Liberty has grown into a national leader in dental insurance, with \$1.5 billion in annual revenue and 920 employees. Originally built by a small founding team—where the nominee was employee number 9—the organization has expanded its footprint significantly and now serves as both a direct contractor with multiple state governments and a subcontractor to numerous health plans. Its sustained growth, operational scale, and strong presence in the government dental insurance market reflect a track record of strategic execution and industry impact. Maja Karabeg joined the company as a Lead Accountant and was quickly recognized for strong financial leadership, being promoted to interim CFO within one year and to full-time CFO the following year. Over a 15-year tenure as Corporate CFO, she played a critical role in scaling the organization, strengthening financial infrastructure, and supporting its expansion into a national enterprise. Prior to the company's acquisition by a PE firm, Karabeg assumed the role of Corporate VP and Chief Accounting officer. Karabeg continues to provide strategic financial leadership as CFO for all subsidiaries within organization.



Lifelong Learning Administration Corp., Irvine

Guita Sharifi, Chief Financial Officer

Guita Sharifi, Ph.D., MBA, is an accomplished Chief Financial Officer with over 20 years of executive leadership experience across the nonprofit healthcare and education sectors. She currently serves as CFO of Lifelong Learning Administration Corporation, a national organization supporting the Learn4Life network of public and private schools, where she oversees financial operations, strategic planning, and performance optimization for more than 100 school sites, serving over 67,000 students and managing revenues exceeding \$500 million. Dr. Sharifi is a licensed IRS Enrolled Agent and holds a doctorate in Organizational Leadership. She is widely recognized for her impact as a financial leader, including receiving the Orange County Business Journal's CFO of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award (2024) and previously winning the nonprofit CFO of the Year distinction (2019). Her professional influence extends nationally through speaking engagements, publications, and leadership roles in organizations such as the CFO Leadership Council as Cochair and Cofounder of OC chapter. A Forbes-featured executive, Dr. Sharifi is known for her strategic financial stewardship, commitment to community impact, Human rights advocacy and dedication to organizational excellence.



Lindora Southern California, Irvine

Eloiza Tecson, Chief Executive Officer

Eloiza Tecson is the CEO of Lindora Southern California (also known as LWI), the largest Lindora franchisee in the country, operating 30 clinic locations across Southern California. Under her leadership, LWI has grown into a premier metabolic health platform delivering nutrition, GLP-1, hormone, and wellness services to thousands of members annually. Tecson is also the Founder and CEO of E20 Training, an EMS (Electrical Muscle Stimulation) fitness and coaching company she built from the ground up. In 2025, she negotiated a landmark commercial partnership between E20 and Lindora, integrating EMS resistance training into the Lindora membership model across the franchisee network, a first of its kind in the brand's 50-year history. Beyond her businesses, Tecson serves as Board Chair of Girls on the Run Orange County, bringing the same operational discipline and people-first leadership to the nonprofit sector.



Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, Costa Mesa

Susan Hori, Land Use Partner & Orange County Office Administrative Partner

Manatt is a multidisciplinary, integrated national professional services firm known for quality and an extraordinary commitment to clients. Manatt Land Use Partner and Orange County Office Administrative Partner, Susan Hori, is a go-to trusted advisor for her clients for a wide range of sophisticated and highly complex land use development



Providence Congratulates Laura Ramos

ON HER WOMEN
IN BUSINESS
AWARD NOMINATION

Laura Ramos

Chief Executive,
Providence St. Jude Medical Center



Congratulations, Laura, on your 2026 Women in Business Award nomination. Thank you for your remarkable leadership, dedication to excellence, and enduring commitment to Providence St. Jude Medical Center, its caregivers, and the community we serve.

[Providence.org](https://www.Providence.org)

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

projects and represents an array of developers and landowners on cutting-edge projects. Hori blends an understanding of the legal issues affecting the entitlement process with a strong understanding of her clients' business objectives and sensitivity to community concerns. She is adept at handling California's challenging California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance requirements and entitlement processes to obtain approvals for her clients.

Marcus & Millichap, Irvine

Sheila Alimadadian, Senior Director Investments

Sheila Alimadadian is a Senior Director Investments with Marcus & Millichap, based in the firm's Irvine office. She specializes in retail and net-leased investment properties, including grocery anchor shopping centers, and quick-service restaurant assets, leveraging the firm's national platform to advise private investors, developers and franchise operators. With more than 25 years of experience, Alimadadian has been directly involved in more than \$315 million in transactions and is consistently recognized among the firm's leading retail investment advisors. She has developed a strong niche working with retail investors, developers, and multi-unit operators and helping clients strategically acquire, reposition, optimize, and grow their portfolios. Over the past year, she has continued that momentum with more than \$72 million in transactions. A three-time Sales Recognition Award recipient, Alimadadian earned the firm's prestigious SIA designation in 2019, which recognizes sustained success through market expertise, client interactions, mentorship, and team contributions. She earned a bachelor's degree in economics from California State University, San Diego.



Marimix Company, Inc., Orange

Mari Fassett, Founder & CEO

Mari Fassett is the Founder & CEO of Marimix Company, Inc., a woman and minority-owned better-for-you snack brand based in Orange, California. Founded in 1993, Marimix officially relaunched its proprietary Crunch-Baked Snackmix line in 2023—a pivotal decision fueled by Fassett's survival of a ruptured brain aneurysm in 2017, which ignited a profound commitment to purposeful nutrition rooted in whole grains and prebiotic fiber. In just two years since commercial relaunch, Marimix has earned an extraordinary three consecutive Good Housekeeping Best Snack Awards—Cinnamon Churro (2024), Chocolatey Sea Salt (2025), and Hatch Chile Lime (2026)—plus the 2025 Condé Nast SELF Pantry Award for Best Snack Mix. The brand is now carried by Bristol Farms, Gelson's, Stater Brothers, Albertson's/Safeway, Hy-Vee, World Market, and Central Market, with Amazon and Walmart.com rounding out a robust national footprint. A fourth-generation Japanese American whose father was born at the Manzanar internment camp, Fassett leads with the grit, resilience, and quiet determination that defines her family's legacy.



Marriott International – Irvine Marriott, Irvine

Marina Dutton, General Manager

Marina Dutton is the General Manager of the Irvine Marriott and a respected leader within Orange County's hospitality and business communities. With more than 20 years of hospitality experience, Dutton is recognized for her collaborative leadership style, operational expertise, and commitment to building strong teams and inclusive workplace cultures. Since leading the Irvine Marriott beginning in August 2024, she has continued to support the property's focus on guest experience, team development, and community engagement. Dutton believes businesses have a responsibility to positively impact the communities they serve and actively supports that mission through mentorship, community partnerships, and local involvement throughout Irvine. Under her leadership, the Irvine Marriott and its associates support organizations including Second Harvest Food Bank, Irvine Ranch Conservancy, and Children's Miracle Network. Widely respected for her integrity, authenticity, and ability to bring people together around shared goals, Dutton continues to make a meaningful impact through leadership, service, and the development of future talent within the hospitality industry and broader Orange County community.



Mary's Path, Santa Ana

Jill Dominguez, President & CEO

Jill Dominguez is President and Chief Executive Officer of Mary's Path, a Santa Ana-based nonprofit that provides residential, mental health, homeless prevention, and aftercare services for pregnant and parenting youth in foster care. Since becoming CEO in 2020, she has led a period of significant growth, tripling the organization's operating budget and expanding its capacity to serve more teen moms and babies with trauma-informed care and long-term support. A lifelong Orange County resident, Dominguez has built a career centered on increasing opportunities and advancing practical solutions for underrepresented communities across Southern California. Under her leadership, Mary's Path has strengthened strategic partnerships, raised its public profile, and become a leading advocate for pregnant and parenting foster youth. Dominguez has been recognized by the California State Assembly, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and local civic leaders for her advocacy and impact. In 2025, she was named Woman of the Year for California's 72nd Assembly District.



Matthews™, Irvine

Katie Carpenter, Vice President of Finance

Matthews™ is a commercial real estate investment services and technology firm with more than 1,000 agents and employees across over 30 offices nationwide, specializing in investment sales, leasing, and debt and structured finance solutions across all major asset classes. Over the past decade, the firm has experienced rapid national expansion, surpassing \$84 billion in lifetime transaction volume while continuing to modernize brokerage operations through technology-driven innovation, national market expansion, and expanded service offerings. In 2025, Matthews™ marked its 10th anniversary, integrated a proprietary AI platform, completed \$18 billion in sales across 8,000 transactions, and achieved 40% compounded growth. Katie Carpenter serves as Vice President of Finance where she supports the financial operations behind the firm's national platform. Her responsibilities include payroll, commission management, budgeting, financial reporting, and enterprise-wide operational systems that help maintain consistency, transparency, and efficiency across the firm. Carpenter has contributed to the financial infrastructure that supports the company's continued growth,



helping strengthen the systems and processes needed for a rapidly scaling commercial real estate platform.

Maureen Anne Meehan Productions, LLC, Laguna Niguel

Maureen Anne Meehan, Attorney, Author and Movie Producer

Meet Maureen Anne Meehan, a multi-talented individual with a fascinating journey to share. From earning degrees in education to pursuing a career in law and eventually becoming a judge, Meehan's life took a dramatic turn when a tragic event inspired her to create a world of legal thrillers in the Mary MacIntosh series. Living in Southern California with her rescue kittens and occasionally visited by her four adult children and one grandchild, Meehan's literary works have garnered recognition and laurels, with one of her books featured in the prestigious New York Times Magazine and honored with the Eric Hoffer Award in Literature. "60 Dates in Six Months (with a Broken Neck)" was adapted to script and is now available for streaming on Apple TV and Amazon Prime Video. The screenplay has won many awards and film festivals including Cannes Arts, London, Berlin, Hollywood Film Festivals as well as Santa Barbara International Screenplay Award winner. This nonfiction memoir has two sequels, "Push You Away" and "Let Me Be."



MaxLinear, Inc., Carlsbad

Carolyn Beaver, Board Member

Over the past 20 years, Carolyn Beaver has served as an independent director and audit committee chair of five public companies, and continues to serve in those roles on the boards of MaxLinear, Inc., MediciNova, Inc., and Sonendo, Inc. MaxLinear recently reported revenue growth of 43% year-over-year for the first quarter with revenue of \$137.2 million for the quarter. MaxLinear currently has a market capitalization of approximately \$8 billion. Beaver began her career in public accounting at KPMG LLP and was promoted to partner after nine years in the Orange County office. She served KPMG for 24 years before moving to key roles in industry. She was Corporate Vice President, Controller, and Chief Accounting Officer of Beckman Coulter for six years prior to its acquisition by Danaher and remained for a year following the acquisition. She joined Sequenom, a life sciences company in San Diego, as Chief Accounting Officer in 2012, and was promoted to Chief Financial Officer in 2014, a position she held for over two years until the company was acquired.



Mechanics Bank, Irvine

Nicole Smith, Senior Vice President, Treasury Management Sales Manager

Mechanics Bank is a full-service bank with more than 160 branches across California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii. A pillar of financial strength since 1905, Mechanics Bank continues to earn its reputation as a trusted financial partner—delivering a wide range of offerings in consumer and business banking, commercial lending, cash management services, private banking, and comprehensive wealth management and trust services. Headquartered in Walnut Creek, Calif, Mechanics Bank is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mechanics Bancorp (NASDAQ: MCHB).



MemorialCare Medical Foundation, Fountain Valley

Betha Schnelle, Vice President, IPA Operations and Strategy

Elizabeth "Betha" Schnelle represents the very best of leadership in Orange County: strategic, principled, and deeply committed to making a meaningful difference. She is exceptionally deserving of recognition by the Orange County Business Journal's Women in Business Awards. Dedicated to improving healthcare delivery systems, Schnelle delivers a guiding leadership that inspires physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, ancillary, and administrative personnel. Schnelle's academic foundation reflects both intellectual rigor and a drive for excellence. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, followed by a Master of Public Health from UCLA. She later completed her MBA at the UC Irvine Paul Merage School of Business, graduating second in a highly accomplished cohort of working professionals, a clear indicator of her discipline and leadership potential.



MemorialCare Orange Coast Medical Center, Fountain Valley

Emily Randle, Chief Executive Officer

Emily Randle, recently appointed as Chief Executive Officer of MemorialCare Orange Coast Medical Center, oversees a large, multi-service campus and its ambulatory network serving Orange County. Randle has played a central role in the hospital's growth and modernization, leading significant capital investments and facility transformations, including the hospital skybridge construction; Emergency Department expansion; development of the Health and Wellness Pavilion; and relocation, expansion and automation of pharmacy services. Under her leadership, the sterile processing department was expanded and modernized to accommodate the increasingly busy Surgery Department. She also led implementation of advanced imaging technology and renovations in inpatient imaging, pathology and the Breast Center. Randle's leadership has helped foster a high-performing culture, contributing to clinical specialty awards from U.S. News & World Report and Healthgrades, as well as Best Place to Work recognition and Magnet designation, and being voted as the No. 1 hospital in Orange County by The Orange County Register readers for several years. In 2024, she was named to Becker's list of Top Chief Operating Officers, underscoring her operational excellence.



Merge Opportunities, Long Beach

Erin Earlywine, Executive Director

Merge Opportunities is a Southern California workforce development nonprofit connecting young adults facing barriers to employment with training, coaching, transportation support, and direct pathways into meaningful careers. Based in Long Beach and serving communities across Los Angeles and Orange County, Merge works with employer partners, education providers, foundations, and community organizations to help participants move from preparation to paid opportunity. The organization has continued to grow its regional footprint through



20 YEARS OF DRIVING DREAMS TOGETHER

Cristina Fernández and Gyla Bell have spent their entire careers advancing educational access and success for young people across Southern California and beyond.

Throughout a 20-year tenure at TGR Foundation, they have worked side by side, leading programming that helps students unlock their unlimited potential.



TGR Foundation was established in 1996 by Tiger Woods with a mission to empower students to pursue their passions through education. Headquartered in Irvine, CA, the Foundation is committed to providing science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) educational enrichment, college access and career readiness opportunities for students from under-resourced communities. In 2026, the Foundation is celebrating 30 years of driving dreams together.

As executive director of the flagship TGR Learning Lab Anaheim, Gyla Bell has supported programs driving impact for more than 200,000 students. Two of those students are Erica and Jessica Riviera, TGR Learning Lab alumni, who grew up within walking distance of the campus and discovered a world of opportunity on the other side of its doors.

The Learning Lab allowed them to explore their passion for solving math problems and grow an affinity for hands-on learning. They returned to the Lab year-after-year to take advantage of its programming throughout grade school and were later accepted into the Earl Woods Scholar Program.

Through ongoing support and resources, the twins graduated from Stanford University and currently lead successful careers as engineers while paying it forward to other students like them.

The Rivera twins' journey is a testament to the power of education and the impact of empowering young women to dream big, take risks and break

barriers. They are two of many student success stories from programs led by Bell and Fernandez.

Fernández serves as vice president of programs, leading college and career readiness programming, including the award-winning Earl Woods Scholar Program.

The Earl Woods Scholar Program, which primarily serves first generation college students, has supported more than 350 scholars with a 98% college graduation rate, far exceeding national standards. The program was honored as Scholarship Provider of the Year by the Scholarship Providers Association, reflecting its outcomes and Cristina's leadership.

In addition to the scholarship program, college preparation workshops and intensives at the TGR Learning Labs have cleared the path to higher education and made it accessible for thousands of students from under-resourced communities. In the past academic year alone, Cristina's leadership helped provide college and career readiness opportunities to more than 1,800 students.

Lifting as they climb, Bell and Fernández have modeled the possibilities of success for young women, while helping them achieve their own.

As natives of Orange County, they are committed to empowering more youth from Anaheim and beyond on their journeys through college, careers and life.

"One resource that made a huge difference for me was access to mentorship and hands-on STEM learning at the TGR Learning Lab. Having mentors who believed in my potential helped me see what was possible and gave me the confidence to pursue engineering."

- Erica Rivera



DRIVING DREAMS TOGETHER

Founded by **Tiger Woods** in 1996, **TGR Foundation** empowers students to discover their passions and unlock their unlimited potential. Since opening the first TGR Learning Lab in Anaheim in 2006, more than 217,000 young learners have been served through our educational programs in Orange County and beyond, receiving the opportunities, experiences and support needed to prepare for their futures and achieve their dreams.

Tiger's vision is to empower more students from under-resourced communities to pursue their passions through education. Learn more about how we are providing opportunities for the next generation to thrive in school and life.

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2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

expanded career readiness programming, hands-on training partnerships, employer engagement, and barrier-removal initiatives such as transportation support and mobile workforce access. Merge's programs support young adults pursuing careers in the skilled trades, green energy, construction, logistics, office services, and other high-demand industries. Recent accomplishments include expanded partnerships with major community and workforce organizations, increased employer-connected training opportunities, OSHA 30 credential achievements for participants, and new initiatives designed to serve an additional 100–150 young adults annually. Through its practical, employment-first model, Merge is helping convert untapped talent into job-ready candidates for industries that need them.

Militia Consulting, Irvine

Sonja Rei Strand-Engel, CEO, Co-Owner & Director of Marketing

Sonja Rei Strand is the CEO and co-owner of Militia Consulting, a boutique marketing and public relations agency based in Irvine that develops creative campaigns for destination, agriculture, floral, and wine brands. Founded during the pandemic, Militia has grown to a tight-knit team of fewer than ten and serves a roster that includes Visit Carlsbad, The Original Los Angeles Flower Market, Mellano & Company, Women Winemakers & Culinarians Foundation, Zaca Mesa Winery, and Piazza Wine. Strand brings more than a decade of marketing leadership and a hospitality background working with luxury hotel brands and destination management companies, an experience that shapes her client-first philosophy: ensuring every brand is the hero of its own story. Her creative concept, "Meet Me at The Flower Fields," anchored Visit Carlsbad's influencer campaign and earned a Poppy Award from Visit California, the state's highest recognition for destination marketing. In 2023, Smart Meetings magazine named her one of its Smart Women in Meetings: Entrepreneur honorees.



Miller Castings, Inc, Whittier

Jennifer Laird, CFO

Jennifer Laird serves as the CFO for Miller Castings, Inc., an investment casting foundry that manufactures high-quality castings for aerospace, military, and commercial markets. In her roles as CFO, she leads the organization's finance and risk management functions and is an active member of the Board of Directors. With extensive experience in high-growth private companies, Laird has successfully driven financial, governance, and technology transformations that strengthen operational infrastructure and position the organization for sustained growth. Laird has led process improvement efforts across the organization, while actively supporting safety initiatives and fostering a strong ESOP-driven culture. She is recognized as an operationally focused leader who is passionate about developing those around her and translating complex financial data into clear, actionable insights that empower decision-making at every level of the business. Her ability to balance disciplined financial oversight with forward-looking innovation has played a key role in strengthening organizational resilience and driving sustainable value creation for shareholders and employee-owners.



Miracles for Kids, Irvine

Autumn Strier, Co-founder & CEO of Miracles for Kids

Autumn Strier is the Co-founder and CEO of Miracles for Kids, a nonprofit dedicated to helping families with critically-ill children battle financial hardship, housing instability, hunger, and emotional distress so they can focus on their child's treatment and recovery. Since founding the organization in 2004, Strier has grown it from a small employee giving initiative into a multimillion-dollar nonprofit that has raised more than \$67 million and served thousands of families throughout California and beyond. Headquartered in Irvine, CA, the organization supports families in treatment at leading children's hospitals in California, Arizona, and Texas, with programs focused on both immediate and long-term stability services for those in crisis.



Mountain Mike's Pizza, Irvine

Carol DeNembo, Chief Marketing Officer

Carol DeNembo is the Chief Marketing Officer for Mountain Mike's Pizza, a leading family-style pizza chain for nearly 50 years, and home of the legendary crispy, curly pepperoni®, massive 20-inch Mountain-sized pizzas. When the brand was acquired in 2017, and operations moved from Northern California to Newport Beach, DeNembo was the first executive hire on Mountain Mike's impressive leadership team. Today, she leads systemwide marketing initiatives and oversees new franchise development strategy, providing vision and direction as Mountain Mike's expands throughout the country. DeNembo delivers impactful initiatives that fuel and sustain brand growth. She deploys a modern marketing approach that keeps the legacy chain atop the highly competitive pizza segment. A seasoned marketing powerhouse, DeNembo drives Mountain Mike's brand visibility and awareness through strategic partnerships for the brand, executing menu innovation campaigns, ensuring exponential nationwide growth, and launching charitable initiatives. As Mountain Mike's continues record-breaking sales, expands across the nation and earns recognition among leading industry accolades, she continues to push the boundaries of creativity and establish meaningful connections with diners, franchisees, and the Mountain Mike's team.



Murtaugh LLP, Irvine

Michelle Generaux, Managing Partner

Michelle Generaux is a Managing Partner of Murtaugh LLP, a boutique business and litigation firm based in Irvine, California. She is one of California's leading attorneys advising architecture and engineering firms on the transactions and transitions that define their futures, with a practice focused on mergers and acquisitions, private equity sales, strategic acquisitions, and internal ownership succession. Generaux has represented nationally recognized A/E firms in multi-state asset acquisitions, guided engineering companies through sales to publicly traded buyers, and structured the complex financing arrangements that make sophisticated transactions work. She also serves as outside general counsel to multiple design firms, advising on contract negotiation, multi-jurisdiction licensing, and regulatory compliance. A frequent speaker at AIA and ACEC events, she is a recognized voice on business succession and risk management for design professionals. After serving as Murtaugh LLP's sole Managing Partner for ten years, she now co-leads the firm, overseeing attorney development and strategic direction.



Musick, Peeler & Garrett LLP, Costa Mesa

Shireen Rogers, Partner

Shireen B. Rogers is a Partner in the firm's Orange County office and a member of the Business Litigation, Litigation, and Construction Practice Groups. Rogers focuses her practice on premises liability defense for prominent retail establishments, alongside a robust civil litigation practice. Her expertise includes defending corporations, trusts, and landlords in ADA accessibility actions, product liability claims, employment litigation, and personal injury matters within construction defect disputes. Beyond her practice, Rogers is a dedicated leader in the legal community. She has chaired the Orange County Bar Association's Insurance Law Section and demonstrated a deep commitment to public service through her participation in the Domestic Violence program with the Orange County District Attorney's office. Her exceptional courtroom advocacy, versatile legal acumen, and steadfast civic leadership make her an exemplary nominee.



Musick, Peeler & Garrett LLP, Costa Mesa

Natasha Wu, Partner

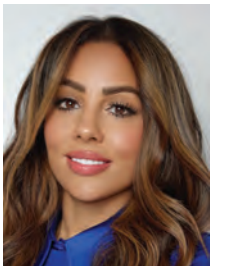
Musick Peeler Partner Natasha Wu is a formidable litigator and strategic advisor. Her versatile practice spans transportation, products liability, employment, and complex construction disputes, with a proven track record of representing Fortune 500 companies and automotive manufacturers. Wu also defends municipalities and educational institutions. Committed to professional excellence and advocacy, Wu was selected for the inaugural class of Diversity Fellows of the San Diego County Bar Association. Additionally, she served in the University of San Diego's Ninth Circuit Court Appellate Clinic, collaborating on a team that successfully secured a client's release from federal custody. Wu is conversational in Mandarin Chinese, enabling her to facilitate strong communication between Musick Peeler and its Chinese clients.



MVP Trial Lawyers, Irvine

Azi Manoussi, Partner

Azi Manoussi was raised by immigrant parents who worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for their three children. Watching their sacrifices taught her the value of hard work, integrity, and treating people with respect. Their example shaped the way she approaches both her personal life and her career—with honesty, accountability, and a commitment to helping others when they need support most. Before becoming an attorney, she earned her bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Ottawa and spent several years in business brokerage, where she negotiated and sold more than 1,000 businesses. She went on to earn her J.D., pass the California Bar, and later complete her LL.M. in Alternative Dispute Resolution at USC Gould School of Law. She began her legal career representing employers and insurance companies, which gave her valuable insight into how cases are evaluated and defended. Since becoming a partner at MVP Trial Lawyers in 2020, she has focused on representing employees and injured individuals throughout Southern California in workers' compensation, employment, sexual harassment, and personal injury matters.



My Mountain Mover, Orange

Amanda Desuacido, CEO

Amanda Desuacido is the Co-founder and CEO of My Mountain Mover (MMM), a healthcare virtual staffing company headquartered in Orange County. At just 22 years old, she led the start of MMM during the COVID-19 pandemic with a clear mission: to help overwhelmed physicians reduce administrative strain while creating meaningful careers for Filipino professionals. Today, that mission has grown into a real, measurable impact. MMM has supported more than 1,000 healthcare organizations across the U.S. and has grown to over 1,600 Virtual Assistants and 130 support staff. The company maintains an 89% client retention rate and an 81% VA retention rate, both well above industry standards, while helping clients reduce employment costs by up to 70%, saving \$35,000 or more annually per VA. Desuacido's leadership has earned national recognition, including the Silver Stevie® Award for Best Young Entrepreneur at the Stevie Awards for Women in Business and a spot on Modern Healthcare's prestigious 40 Under 40 list, reflecting the lasting impact she continues to build.



My Private Professor, Irvine

Sona Shah, Founder & CEO

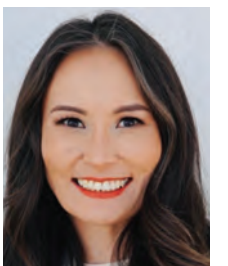
Sona Shah is the Founder and CEO of My Private Professor, an employer-sponsored tutoring marketplace designed to make personalized academic support more accessible for working families. Through My Private Professor, employers can offer employees and their family's access to vetted, independent tutors for one-on-one support, with the company managing everything from rollout and communications to scheduling, utilization tracking and concierge support. A former business litigation attorney, Shah founded My Private Professor after recognizing that education remained one of the clearest pathways to opportunity, even as access to quality academic support was often limited by circumstance. Since launching the company in 2007, she has grown her business into a purpose-driven education platform serving students, families, and employers while also expanding access for underserved communities through the My Private Professor Foundation. Beyond her company, Shah is deeply committed to supporting young people and families through her work with Orangewood Foundation and Illumination Health + Home, reflecting a long-standing belief that education, stability, and basic needs are deeply connected.



New Directions for Women, Costa Mesa

Heather Black-Coyne, Executive Director

Heather Black-Coyne, LMFT, CADC II, serves as Executive Director of New Directions for Women, a role in which she brings expertise, dedication, and a profound commitment to transforming the lives of women in relationship with addiction. Black-Coyne has worked in addiction treatment for over 16 years across multiple levels of care, populations, and administration. Her passion for gender-responsive treatment is a cornerstone of her work and she's dedicated the past eight years to the development and implementation of gender-specific



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Visit Newport Beach cultivates a multi-million dollar tourism industry that benefits all corners of the county. A top economic driver, discerning Newport Beach visitors spend more than a billion dollars in the region that keeps local businesses thriving, creates jobs, bolsters the economy and generates funds for public services that improves the quality of life for the community.

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

treatment approaches that recognize and address the needs and experiences of women. Black-Coyne's core belief of the power of storytelling is reflected in her approach to leadership. The power within relies on revealing the stories that promote beauty, ingenuity, boldness, curiosity, and healing. She is passionate about learning and co-constructing rich narratives that foster agency and community.

Newmark, Irvine

Julie Rios, SVP, Western Region Marketing & Business Development Capital Markets, Center of Excellence

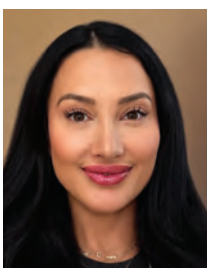
Julie Rios joined Newmark in 2016 and currently serves as Senior Vice President of Marketing and Business Development for the firm's Western Region and the Capital Markets Center of Excellence. Rios brings to her position a breadth of experience in marketing, business development, and strategy. Supporting nine offices and over 200 brokers, she focuses on providing strategic direction to pursuits and presentations and pioneering pre-and post-marketing efforts across the capital markets, landlord advisory, and tenant representation business lines. Based in Newmark's office in Orange County, California, Rios leads a seasoned team across all marketing functions, including communications, design, analytics, and project management. She has a strong reputation for strategic execution and talent development and has established herself as an innovative leader. Her marketing and business development initiatives have created profitable new business opportunities and unlock growth potential for the firm. Prior to Newmark, Rios spent 10 years as marketing director for CBRE Capital Markets, where she focused globally on strategic pursuits for office, retail, multihousing, industrial, and hotel properties. Under her leadership, CBRE Capital Markets secured more than \$3 billion in revenue, including sales and financing assignments, between 2013 and 2015.



NuBella Med Spa, Inc., Irvine

Brandy Casey, Founder

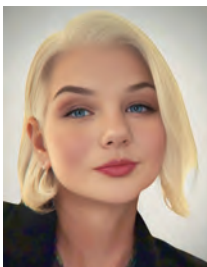
Brandy Casey is a Board-Certified Nurse Practitioner, who holds a Master of Science Degree in Nursing from California State University of Long Beach. Casey's experience as a registered nurse began with a focus on caring for cancer patients. After being employed by Hoag Hospital and Kaiser Permanente, she became certified in chemotherapy and treating patients in the Cardiac and Neuro Intensive Care units. Since 2009, Casey simultaneously worked as an aesthetic nurse and is passionate about making people look and feel their best while embracing their natural beauty. In 2018, Casey founded NuBella Med Spa with a core focus of providing a talent development platform to empower students, nurses, and nurse practitioners within a positive outcome and patient-centric environment. As a woman entrepreneur she has built her business from the ground up and currently has three locations, operating in two states- with plans to open several additional locations. Casey's goal for NuBella is to create a team of nurses that share her same core values and to support them as entrepreneurs.



OC C-Suite | CEO Collective, San Clemente

Anne Tammel, Founder

OC C-Suite founder Anne Tammel is a Fortune 100 strategy advisor and global strategist to leaders at Google, YouTube, PwC, Citi, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, and IBM. A Silicon Valley native, Tammel began her career bringing innovation to market at Cunningham Communication—the firm that positioned Steve Jobs and launched the Macintosh—then spent 27 years developing proprietary frameworks for leaders to position and scale peak-performing global organizations. Tammel brought the Redefining Leadership series and the "Uniting and Empowering Women in Business" movement to Orange County before expanding these initiatives on a global scale.



OC Growth Advisors, Mission Viejo

Marla Noel, President & CEO

Marla Noel works with business owners and employees to improve focus and processes for growth and greater profitability. She has run several successful organizations, including one she sold in 2015 for 15 times EBITDA. Noel served on multiple non-profit boards and two for-profit Boards. She is a chapter chair for WPO, Women Presidents' Organization, an international organization. She chairs a Score CEO forum. Noel runs a Podcast PerHer Perspective, a business podcast for business owners to learn about resources and good business practices. Noel's clients range from service industries to construction to online learning, in the \$2 million to \$50 million range. Her clients say she helps keep them focused on the business, versus working in the business. Her 14 years in Vistage and 11 years in WPO have trained her to be continuously looking for tools to help businesses run more efficiently. Noel is a CPA and an MBA and teaches at Chapman University and UCI.



Octane, Newport Beach

Janelle Brunette, COO

Janelle Brunette has been the cornerstone of Octane's success for the past 18 years. She was employee No. 3 and has moved into the COO role leading critical areas of Octane's business units. Brunette also leads Octane's Foundation for Innovation which provides high impact results to the OC community.



Office of Economic Development – City of Irvine, Irvine

Karin Koch, Director of Economic Development

Karin Koch is a seasoned impact leader serving as the first-ever Director of Economic Development for the City of Irvine, where she leads efforts to strengthen the region's innovation economy, accelerate high-growth industry development, and expand workforce and business support programs. Her career spans corporate, public, and nonprofit leadership, beginning with a successful entrepreneurial exit in the cosmetics industry before advancing into a Fortune 500 company, where she led Western Region sales and delivered record-setting performance across the network. She later transitioned into public service with the County of Orange, overseeing social services and regional economic and workforce development initiatives, including leadership of the U.S.

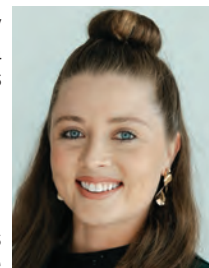


Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Orange County. She then served as Executive Director of University Lab Partners, a life sciences incubator supporting more than 68 deep-tech startups that collectively raised over \$500 million. In her current role, she has advanced milestones for Irvine, including securing \$1 million in federal funding for the Irvine Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and shaping the City's 2026–2028 Economic Development Blueprint.

Operations Edit, Garden Grove

Lacy Picklo, Owner

Lacy Picklo has built a reputation for transforming "chaos into calm" by implementing robust backend systems that help businesses scale. As a fractional chief operating officer through her consulting firm, she partners with business leaders to optimize workflows, streamline CRM systems, and build sustainable operational infrastructure. She previously served as chief operating officer for the Fred Sed Group at Keller Williams, helping grow the team's annual sales from \$99 million to \$167 million. An industry speaker and coach, Picklo regularly presents at events, including the CSUF Real Estate Association, and leads masterclasses on AI-powered branding, business operations, and financial literacy. She is also a two-time international best-selling author whose work focuses on business operations and leadership. Beyond her professional work, Picklo is committed to mentoring and community engagement. She serves as a community leader for Moms Rising Together, an outsourced COO for the Sunday Brunch Agency, and a mentor with Billion Dollar Masterminds, helping develop future business and real estate leaders. She also organizes networking events that foster collaboration, meaningful connections, and long-term success for entrepreneurs throughout the community.



Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa

Patricia Falzon, Executive Director, Orange Coast College Foundation

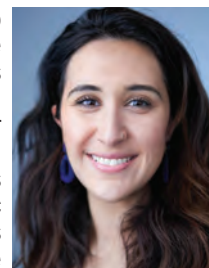
Patricia Falzon is Executive Director of the Orange Coast College Foundation, a nonprofit organization that stewards more than \$62 million in assets and supports one of California's leading community colleges. Since joining OCC in 2025, she has led a period of strong growth marked by record philanthropic investment, expanded scholarship support, and strengthened governance and operations. During this period, the Foundation increased total assets by 24.8 percent and raised more than \$12 million in annual contributions, reflecting strong donor confidence and engagement. She also revitalized institutional advancement operations by aligning fundraising strategies with college priorities, strengthening board engagement, and launching new initiatives to support student success. Falzon has brought a passion for community impact and more than two decades of experience advancing the goals of leading, mission-driven organizations in Orange County. In her prior roles at CSU Fullerton, UC Irvine; South Coast Repertory, The Wooden Floor, and the Orange County Museum of Art, she worked with community and business leaders to build philanthropic partnerships that expanded access to education, developed investments in research, and built new arts facilities, creating lasting impact in the community.



Orange County Grantmakers, Huntington Beach

Taryn Palumbo, Executive Director

Taryn Palumbo is the Executive Director of Orange County Grantmakers (OCG), a regional association of philanthropic funders working to improve outcomes for communities across Orange County. Since stepping into the role in 2018, she has led the organization's growth as a key convener of foundations, nonprofits, and public sector leaders, expanding its programming, membership engagement, and cross-sector partnerships. Under her leadership, OCG has expanded its reach and influence, strengthening member engagement and deepening its role as a regional connector across philanthropy, nonprofits, and the public sector. She has advanced large-scale convenings that bring leaders together to share insights, build relationships, and respond to Orange County's most pressing challenges. Palumbo has been instrumental in strengthening collaboration across sectors, with a focus on advancing equitable outcomes in areas such as food access, health, and economic opportunity. She is an active member of the OC Hunger Alliance, incoming Chair of OC Forum, and serves on the Board of the World Affairs Council, reflecting her deep commitment to advancing community-centered solutions across the region.



Orange County United Way, Irvine

Ann Truxaw Ramirez, Chief Strategy Officer

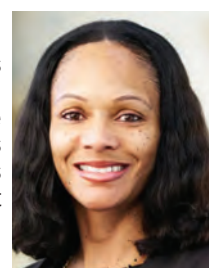
Ann Truxaw Ramirez, MPP, is Chief Strategy Officer at Orange County United Way, one of the region's largest nonprofit organizations, serving Orange County for more than a century through strategic community initiatives and cross-sector partnerships. The organization employs more than 150 staff and delivers dozens of programs that collectively reach hundreds of thousands of residents annually, with work spanning student success, financial security, homelessness solutions, and 211OC resource navigation services. With more than 30 years of nonprofit leadership experience, Ramirez oversees strategic planning, grants and contracts, evaluation, advocacy, and public policy. During her tenure, grant and contract revenue has grown from approximately \$1 million in 2016 to more than \$17 million in 2025, supporting the organization's ability to scale community-based solutions and partnerships. She works across government, philanthropy, healthcare, and business sectors to align efforts that strengthen regional systems of care and support. Ramirez is known for a collaborative, partnership-driven approach and a steady focus on advancing practical, sustainable solutions for community impact across Orange County.



Orangewood Foundation, Santa Ana

Dr. Tiffany Mitchell, Chief Program Officer

Founded in 1981, Orangewood Foundation is one of Orange County's leading nonprofit organizations, serving nearly 2,000 foster and underserved youth and young adults ages 16 to 24 each year. The organization provides a continuum of services, including basic needs support, housing, education, employment readiness, and wellness services. Orangewood's impact includes providing more than 12,700 hot meals annually, awarding over 270 scholarships, and helping more than 290 young adults secure stable housing each year. As Chief Program



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PAUL NELSON, ESQ.

Paul Nelson is the founder of **Nelson Kirkman Family Law Attorneys**, a premier California firm specializing in high-net-worth divorces. **Certified by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization in Family Law**, Paul brings extensive courtroom experience and a deep command of California family law to every case. His strategic approach and relentless advocacy have earned him a reputation for securing exceptional results for business owners, entrepreneurs, and high-earning professionals navigating complex divorce proceedings.

Recognized among the legal elite, Paul holds the prestigious **AV Preeminent rating from Martindale-Hubbell**, boasts **twenty five-star ratings on Avvo**, and has been consistently

honored by **Super Lawyers**.

A thought leader in the legal community, Paul's insights have been featured in **Forbes**, **Fortune**, and the **Orange County Business Journal**. He is also the author of the **Amazon best-selling book, *The Dissolution Solution***, which provides a strategic roadmap for high-asset divorces.

Paul is an active member of the **Orange County Bar Association**, the **State Bar of California**, and the **J. Reuben Clark Law Society**.

With a practice built on discretion, precision, and results, Paul ensures his clients emerge from their legal battles positioned for success—both personally and professionally.

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2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Officer, Dr. Tiffany Mitchell plays a key leadership role in advancing Orangewood's mission and strategic growth. Drawing on more than 20 years of nonprofit experience and executive leadership expertise, she oversees programs and partnerships that strengthen outcomes for vulnerable young people across the region. Dr. Mitchell holds a Doctorate in Applied Clinical Psychology and a Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy, bringing a unique blend of clinical insight, operational leadership, and systems collaboration to her work. She is recognized for advancing trauma responsive, youth centered approaches that translate vision into measurable community impact.

Outshine Public Relations, Newport Beach

Talia Samuels, Founder & President

Named one of the "Best PR Agencies in America" by Forbes, Outshine Public Relations specializes in restaurant, hospitality, and culinary public relations. Founded by Talia Samuels in 2015, she's represented an all-star roster, including James Beard Award-winning and Michelin-starred chefs, AAA Five Diamond-awarded properties, and new-to-market culinary brands. With deep roots in the hospitality industry, she has a passion for supporting hoteliers, restaurateurs, chefs, and food and beverage brands through her creative storytelling verticals. Recognized for her poise, tenacity, and integrity, Samuels is a force in her field. Her company, Outshine Public Relations, is a full-service agency providing public relations, social media management, photography, videography, and digital marketing.



Pacvue, Culver City

Diana Lansden, VP, Accounting

Diana Lansden is a strategic finance and accounting leader at Pacvue, an AI-Powered Commerce Media OS that supports more than 1,000 brands and businesses in managing over \$10 billion in annual ad spend across more than 100 global retailers. As Pacvue has scaled rapidly (including 47% ad spend growth), Lansden has helped build the finance infrastructure to support this growth: overseeing controllership, accounts receivable, and sales operations while driving improvements across contract management, revenue recognition, and quote-to-cash workflows. Prior to Pacvue, Lansden built a diverse career spanning public accounting, manufacturing, and high-growth technology companies, including serving as Controller at MeridianLink, a leading fintech company, during its public market debut. Her background spans audit, compliance, and operational finance—equipping her to lead teams through complex challenges with clarity and purpose. A CPA with deep expertise across accounting systems and financial reporting, she is known for her ability to turn operational complexity into lasting efficiency. Sixteen years ago, she and her husband relocated to Orange County, where she feels fortunate to build her career while raising her family.



Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation, Irvine

Danielle Fragalla, Chief Executive Officer

Danielle Fragalla, MSE, serves as Chief Executive Officer of the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation (PCRF), a nationally recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to funding groundbreaking pediatric cancer research, advancing equitable care, and supporting survivorship and mental health initiatives for children and families impacted by cancer. Under her leadership, PCRF has continued its strategic growth and national expansion, strengthening partnerships with leading institutions including Rady Children's Health and City of Hope, and other top pediatric oncology programs across the country. Fragalla leads a growing nonprofit organization with a national presence and has led efforts to modernize governance, expand philanthropic partnerships, and launch PCRF's "Powering Cures & Realizing Futures" campaign focused on accelerating research and improving long-term outcomes for children with cancer survivors. With more than 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience, she is recognized for building mission-driven growth strategies, cultivating transformative partnerships, and advancing innovative approaches to pediatric cancer care and research funding.



Performance Contracting, Inc. (PCI), Anaheim

Karina Eshilian, Sr. Business Development Specialist

Karina Eshilian is a Senior Business Development Specialist at Performance Contracting, Inc. (PCI), one of the nation's leading specialty contractors delivering interior and exterior systems, insulation, fireproofing, and related services across commercial and industrial markets. As part of a nationally recognized organization with thousands of employees and operations throughout the United States, Eshilian supports business development, strategic communications, and client engagement efforts across Southern California's highly competitive construction landscape. With more than 18 years at PCI, Eshilian has become a trusted relationship builder and strategic partner to leadership, operations, and clients. She has contributed to high-value pursuits through proposal strategy, client presentations, and industry engagement initiatives that strengthen long-term partnerships and elevate PCI's market presence. Eshilian was recently recognized as a 2026 Women of Influence honoree by the Los Angeles Business Journal for her leadership and impact within the construction industry. She remains actively involved in industry organizations and mentorship efforts supporting women and emerging professionals in construction.



Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties, Anaheim

Krista Hollinger, President & CEO

Krista Hollinger, MPH, is the President & CEO of Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties (PPOSBC), one of the largest Planned Parenthood affiliates in the nation. She assumed leadership during the most challenging time in the organization's history, guiding the organization through a sudden and devastating loss of revenue caused by federal policy changes beyond its control. Under Hollinger's leadership, PPOSBC continued providing nearly 200,000 medical visits annually across its nine health centers despite extraordinary operational, financial, and political challenges. With a calm, strategic, and mission-driven approach, Hollinger launched the organization's multi-year strategy focused on operational efficiency, diversifying funding streams, strengthening patient care, and positioning the organization for short-term survival and long-term impact. Hollinger is widely respected for her resilience, focus on innovation, and ability to inspire teams through periods of uncertainty and change while remaining deeply committed



to the Planned Parenthood mission of providing high-quality, compassionate care to all who need it.

Pollinator Protection Fund, Laguna Beach

Laura Ford, Managing Director

Laura Ford founded the grass roots non-profit Pollinator Protection Fund (www.pollinatorfund.org) in Spring of 2021. Since this time, Ford and her husband have created and project managed the creation of public Western Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator gardens in Southern California with gardens along the coast from Malibu to San Diego. The founding Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator garden is located in beautiful Heisler Park, Laguna Beach and includes uplifting educational signage in English and Spanish. All gardens include educational signage as part of the Pollinator Protection Fund's focus upon education and action. Since inception Pollinator Protection Fund has created essential pollinator gardens in communities in Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, Laguna Woods, San Diego, Malibu and more, while working in partnership with hotels, HOAs, and public stakeholders. Their latest garden at the Wallis Annenberg habitats in Malibu is the subject of a documentary by student Emmy winner and student BAFTA nominee Ruthie Weeks. The documentary titled Flourish documents the gardens creation at the time of the LA fires and the enduring nature of hope amid a changing landscape.



Power Pulse EMS Training, Costa Mesa

Devon Belanger, Owner & Founder

Devon Belanger is pioneering the field of bio-architecture, a discipline merging advanced biotechnology with physiological precision to redefine the human health span. As a U.S. Master Trainer and Examiner for Wiemspro, Belanger lead the national evolution of whole-body electromuscular stimulation. Her work focuses on the technical application of these systems to bypass traditional biological limitations, providing a data-driven path to metabolic health and muscular integrity that is reshaping the modern longevity landscape. Belanger has spent over three decades at the intersection of human performance and technology, blending military-grade discipline with high-level technical expertise to engineer results that were previously impossible through traditional means.



Premier Workspaces, Irvine

Amy Fuller, President

Premier Workspaces is one of the largest privately owned flexible workspace operators in the United States, with more than 85 locations nationwide, over 1.6 million square feet of office space, and a client base exceeding 16,000 professionals. Founded in 2002 and headquartered in Irvine, California, the company has grown steadily through organic expansion and strategic acquisitions, earning recognition as a leading provider of private offices, coworking, and virtual office solutions while maintaining long-term profitability and a strong national footprint. Amy Fuller is President of Premier Workspaces and a key driver behind the company's sustained growth and operational success. She joined the organization in 2009 and progressed through leadership roles including Regional Manager, Vice President of Sales, Senior Vice President of Sales & Marketing and now President, consistently delivering measurable gains in occupancy, revenue, and profitability across multiple markets. Known for her strategic leadership, Fuller has played a critical role in expanding the company's national presence, strengthening client relationships, and guiding teams through major industry shifts, including the post-pandemic transition to flexible work.



Pretend City Children's Museum, Irvine

Ellen Pais, Chief Executive Officer

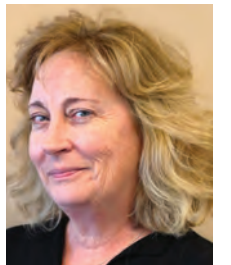
Ellen Pais is the Chief Executive Officer of Pretend City Children's Museum, a nonprofit early childhood education hub serving children ages 0-8 and their families through purposeful play, developmental resources, and community connection. Since stepping into leadership in 2021, Pais has guided the organization through a period of transformational growth and long-term strategic planning. Under her leadership, Pretend City rebounded to pre-pandemic attendance levels, expanded access initiatives for families, strengthened partnerships across Orange County, and secured approval from the City of Irvine for the museum's future permanent home at the Great Park. Pais also launched and advanced a multi-million-dollar capital campaign to support the museum's expansion and future sustainability. In 2025, Pais received the Women of Impact Award from Victoria Spartz for her leadership and advocacy benefiting children and families across the region. Pretend City Children's Museum was also recognized as Nonprofit of the Year by Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris. Today, Pretend City Children's Museum has served more than 2.6 million families and continues to lead innovative programs supporting early childhood development and family well-being.



Pro-Dex, Inc., Irvine

Alisha Charlton, Chief Financial Officer

Pro-Dex, Inc. (Nasdaq: PDEX) is a premier medical device engineering and manufacturing firm specializing in high-performance powered surgical instruments. Founded in 1978 and headquartered in Irvine, California, the company has evolved into a strategic partner for global healthcare leaders, delivering advanced solutions like autoclavable, battery-powered drivers, and shavers used in orthopedic and thoracic surgeries. With a dedicated workforce of approximately 181 employees, Pro-Dex has experienced significant recent expansion, increasing its headcount by over 22% in the last fiscal year to support surging demand. The company's growth trajectory is underscored by its \$74.6 million in trailing twelve-month revenue as of early 2026, representing a solid 16% year-over-year increase. Notable recent milestones include the February 2026 acquisition of Advanced Precision Machining, which vertically integrated a key supplier to enhance production capacity. Additionally, Pro-Dex secured a critical three-year contract extension through 2028 with its largest customer, solidifying a long-term revenue stream for its next-generation orthopedic handpieces.



Progeny Psychiatric Clinic, Irvine

Dr. Linda Trinh, DNP, COO

Dr. Linda Trinh, DNP, is an outstanding clinical leader at Progeny Psychiatric Clinic, a rapidly growing behavioral health organization that has expanded significantly since she joined in

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

2016. What began as a single clinic in Irvine has grown under her leadership into six clinic locations serving patients across Orange County and Los Angeles County, helping increase access to psychiatric care for underserved and diverse communities. Dr. Trinh provides comprehensive psychiatric care across the lifespan and is experienced in treating a wide range of mental health conditions. Fluent in Vietnamese, she is committed to culturally sensitive, patient-centered care. Her background as a Family Nurse Practitioner and healthcare operations leader gives her a unique ability to merge clinical excellence with sustainable business growth. She earned her Doctorate in Nursing Sciences from Chatham University and completed her Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner certification at Brandman University.



Project Hope Alliance, Costa Mesa

Jennifer Friend, Chief Executive Officer

Jennifer Friend, J.D. is a champion for kids and families experiencing homelessness and a visionary, strategic business leader. Serving as CEO of Project Hope Alliance is her passion, purpose, and calling. When Friend became Project Hope Alliance's (PHA) first CEO in 2013 after serving on PHA's Board of Directors for many years and leaving her lucrative career as a trial attorney, PHA supported one school and 65 students experiencing homelessness. Under her leadership, PHA now serves over 400 children and youth experiencing homelessness, as well as their immediate family members totaling 1,100 annually, across three school districts and one charter school system in Orange County through its site-based model of care. The organization's revenue has increased by 270% and the team has grown to 31 full-time staff members dedicated to ending the cycle of homelessness. Friend and PHA have built a nationally recognized model for ending the cycle of youth homelessness and achieved a high school graduation rate for its students, more than 30% above the national average reducing the likelihood that these youth will experience homelessness as adults by 400%.



Project Youth OC, Santa Ana

Laura Marcum, Chief Executive Officer

Laura Marcum is Chief Executive Officer of Project Youth OC, a Santa Ana-based nonprofit organization providing prevention, diversion, mental health, mentorship, and career readiness programs for underserved youth and families across Orange County. Serving more than 1,500 youth annually, Project Youth OC partners with schools, law enforcement agencies, caregivers, and community organizations to deliver early intervention programs designed to help young people avoid involvement with gangs, substance use, and the justice system while building pathways toward long-term success. A respected nonprofit leader with more than 16 years of experience, Marcum has guided the organization through a significant period of strategic growth and expanded regional visibility. Under her leadership, Project Youth OC increased revenue by 21%, launched a three-year strategic sustainability framework, and



expanded several core programs focused on behavioral intervention and access to opportunity. The first Latina to lead the organization and the granddaughter of migrant farmworkers, Marcum is known for her authentic, prevention-first leadership style and her commitment to creating long-term, community-centered solutions that strengthen youth, families, and neighborhoods across Orange County.

Project Youth OC, Santa Ana

Bianca Carranco, Director of Development & Communications

A nonprofit development and communications leader with more than 15 years of experience, Bianca Carranco oversees fundraising, brand strategy, corporate partnerships, donor engagement, and community storytelling during a period of significant organizational growth. In partnership with KTM Agency, she launched Project Youth OC's first formal public relations strategy and helped lead the organization's rebrand and new website launch. Following declines in government funding, she also helped diversify revenue streams, contributing to more than \$535,000 in collective private revenue growth from 2024 to 2025.



Providence St. Jude Medical Center, Fullerton

Laura Ramos, Chief Executive

Laura Ramos, Chief Executive of Providence St. Jude Medical Center, leads one of Orange County's most respected faith-based hospitals. Founded nearly 70 years ago by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, the hospital is rooted in a life-affirming mission that Laura continues to advance through her authenticity and visionary leadership. Before becoming Chief Executive in 2021, she served as Chief Operating Officer, Chief Nursing Officer, and Vice President of Patient Care Services, leading the development of nationally -recognized centers of excellence in neurosciences, oncology, digestive health, cardiology, orthopedics, and more.



Rancho Mission Viejo, San Juan Capistrano

Laura Coley Eisenberg, Senior Vice President of Regulatory Compliance & Open Space Management

Laura Coley Eisenberg serves as the Senior Vice President of Regulatory Compliance and Open Space Management at Rancho Mission Viejo and has been with the company since 2000. Eisenberg is responsible for the local, state, and federal agency permitting all new development projects for the company. She is also responsible for all operations of The Nature Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo (The Nature Reserve), including land management, species monitoring, budget oversight, strategic planning, and public relations as Executive Director of the Rancho Mission Viejo Land Trust (RMVLT). The Nature Reserve is a growing habitat reserve located in South Orange County. Approximately 75% of the 23,000-acre Ranch has been permanently protected, while thoughtfully planned community development is underway



Celebrating Twenty Years of Stewardship & One Well-Earned Honor!

This year, Rancho Mission Viejo celebrates 20 years of The Nature Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo, two decades of protected open space, thriving wildlife corridors, and trails enjoyed by generations of residents. **None of it would be possible without the leadership of Laura Coley Eisenberg, Senior Vice President of Regulatory Compliance and Open Space Management.**

Congratulations, Laura, on your 2026 Women in Business Award nomination. Thank you for your stewardship, and for making The Ranch what it is today.



2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

across the remaining 25%. This protected open space is managed by RMVLT, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to “preserve and enhance Reserve lands for ecological, educational, charitable, conservation, open space, scientific, and recreational uses.” Following the wisdom of Marguerite “Daisy” O'Neill of The Ranch Family, the guiding principle is to “Take care of the land and the land will take care of you.”

ReadyAI, Irvine

Carol Eastman, CEO

ReadyAI.dev is an enterprise AI advisory and platform partner enabling organizations to establish a governed, board-visible internal AI environment. Under the leadership of CEO Carol Eastman, a proven and respected IT CEO with two successful company exits, ReadyAI is helping C-level leaders and boards define a disciplined approach to AI adoption that balances innovation, oversight, and control. The Platform provides a private workspace for the major LLMs, along with no-code agent building and vibe coding, enabling enterprises to operationalize internal AI with greater speed and consistency while reducing Shadow AI. It is designed to give leadership teams cost discipline and budget certainty as they scale. ReadyAI is grounded in the TAO of AI—Transparency, Accountability, and Observability—principles highlighted in the best-selling book *Governance in the Age of Generative AI* by Dean Yoost and Ashwin Rangan. Ashwin brings CIO leadership experience from Walmart, BofA, and Rockwell, along with his board role at Qtonix Quantum. His decision to join ReadyAI adds strong validation to the company's vision and reinforces its leadership in enterprise AI innovation.



Regal Court Reporting, Santa Ana

Stephanie Leslie, Co-founder

Stephanie Leslie is a transformative force in the court reporting profession—a visionary leader and tireless advocate who has spent more than two decades reshaping what it means to be a court reporter in the modern era through Regal Court Reporting. Leslie has proudly served on the California Deposition Reporters Association board as a District Representative, including a term as President. She is also actively involved with the National Court Reporters Association and most recently served as Event Committee Chairperson for the 2026 DRA Annual Convention. Investing in the next generation, Leslie is deeply committed to the long-term sustainability of the court reporting field. Through mentoring newly licensed court reporters, she fosters the collaborative relationship between current professionals and up-and-coming talent that she believes is essential to the industry's future. Founding Regal Court Reporting in 2007, the agency is one of the last 100% court reporter-owned, steno-only firms in California. A legacy builder, Leslie has positioned Regal Court Reporting as the leading firm in California for the thoughtful acquisition of other privately owned court reporting agencies seeking to transition.



RJI CPAs, Irvine

Diana Zambrano, Senior Tax Manager

RJI CPAs is a full-service accounting and consulting firm recognized by Forbes as one of America's Best Tax Firms, serving industry-leading companies, nonprofits and high-wealth individuals across California. Diana Zambrano is a senior tax manager at RJI CPAs, bringing 20 years of expertise in federal and state tax matters for large and middle-market C-corporations, S-corporations, partnerships, exempt organizations, and high-wealth individuals across the legal, dental, health care, construction, and real estate sectors. Fluent in English and Spanish, Zambrano oversees tax preparation for a diverse clientele while leading internal trainings and mentoring rising accounting professionals. Over her tenure, she has advanced from entry-level staff accountant to senior tax manager, earning her CPA certification and a Master of Science in Tax Law from Golden Gate University along the way. A trusted advisor to clients and colleagues alike, Zambrano is committed to elevating those around her while driving meaningful impact across her firm and the broader industry.



RMO LLP, Costa Mesa

Meghan Glaspy, Managing Partner - Orange County

Joining trust and estate litigation firm RMO LLP in 2021, Meghan Glaspy showed her leadership qualities from the outset and was tapped to lead the firm's Orange County office. Glaspy was named Managing Partner of RMO LLP's Orange County office, making her the first female partner in the firm's history. Glaspy's practice is focused solely on handling contested trust, probate, and conservatorship matters. Glaspy has also made significant contributions to the firm's practice through her leadership. Serving as Managing Partner - Orange County and as a part of the firm's practice management team, she leads the day-to-day operations of the office, leads and mentors a team of lawyers, paralegals, and support staff, handles and oversees casework, routinely appears in court, and heads the firm's business development efforts in the market.



Rutan & Tucker, LLP, Irvine

Kelly Galligan, Corporate Partner

Kelly Galligan is a Partner in the market-leading corporate practice at Rutan & Tucker LLP, Orange County's largest full-service law firm. Galligan serves as a corporate lawyer, founder advisor, and M&A strategist, partnering with founder led and private equity backed companies on high stakes transactions and long-term growth strategy. She advises on roll ups, minority investments, and strategic exits, leading complex deals ranging from \$5 million to \$500 million. Recognized as one of the American Bar Association's Top 40 On the Rise Lawyers in America, Galligan pairs sophisticated dealmaking with meaningful community leadership across Orange County. Galligan currently serves on the board of CASA OC and the Newport Beach Foundation.



Rutan & Tucker, LLP, Irvine

Christina McSparron, Partner

Christina McSparron is a Partner in the Corporate and Tax Department at Rutan & Tucker, the largest law firm in Orange County. She serves as a trusted advisor to entrepreneurs, founders, and corporate clients throughout every stage of the business lifecycle, from formation and growth through strategic transactions and exit planning. McSparron focuses her practice on

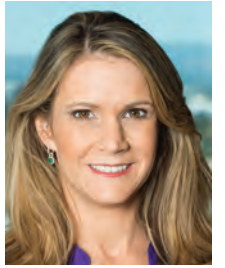
mergers and acquisitions, advising clients on stock and asset acquisitions and sales, private equity investments, including roll-up strategies, joint ventures, and other complex business combinations. Concentrating on the middle market, she regularly counsels clients on transactions ranging from \$5 million to \$300 million across a broad spectrum of industries. In addition to transactional work, McSparron frequently acts as outside general counsel, providing strategic guidance on corporate governance, shareholder agreements, contract negotiations, debt and equity financing, licensing, software matters, and day-to-day business operations. Her multidisciplinary experience spans software and technology, automotive, food and beverage, manufacturing and distribution, and retail and service industries, allowing her to deliver practical, market-informed counsel tailored to each client's objectives. Known for her strategic insight, business-minded approach, and commitment to client success, McSparron has built a reputation as a valued advisor to growing companies and leadership teams navigating complex legal and business challenges.



Rutan & Tucker, LLP, Irvine

Lisa Neal, Litigation Partner

Lisa Neal has over 20 years of experience as a litigator and currently serves on Rutan's three-person Executive Committee. She focuses her litigation practice on real estate litigation, first-party insurance litigation, commercial coverage litigation, fraud, extracontractual and insurance litigation, probate and trust litigation, and business litigation. Neal has vast courtroom experience and has acted as lead counsel in numerous matters involving business contract, insurance, class action defense, fraud, and tort. Neal also assists her clients in managing litigation matters and overseeing the handling of trademark, intellectual property, employment/labor, corporate, and real estate matters. She is also very involved in firm management as she is Co-Chair of the Cybersecurity and Privacy Practice Group, Chairman of the Personnel Committee and a Member of the Partnership Review Committee.



RX3 Foundation, Irvine

Tricia Gasparini, Executive Director

Tricia Gasparini is a seasoned marketing, communications, and social impact leader with two decades of experience driving results for top brands and philanthropic initiatives. She spent eight years at Chevron Corp., leading the company's largest sports partnerships and corporate responsibility efforts, including Super Bowl and college conference sponsorships, under Chevron's STEM Education platform. At Sequoia-backed CRM startup Thanx, Gasparini served as VP and Executive Team member, overseeing Customer Success, Implementation & Launch, and a remote team of Enterprise and Senior Managers, delivering disciplined, data-driven outcomes across the company's entire customer portfolio. Currently, Gasparini serves as Executive Director of The RX3 Foundation, the philanthropic arm of RX3 Growth Partners, co-founded by Aaron Rodgers. With a network of over 70 athletes and celebrities, she supports more than 90 charities. Under her leadership, RX3's flagship Charity Flag Football Tournament has raised nearly \$9 million. In August of 2026, she plans to leverage the structure and success of the renowned flag football event to launch the inaugural RX3 Charity Basketball Tournament. Gasparini has worked on marketing campaigns with brands including Nike, Target, Gap, and Adidas. She is a former D1 soccer team captain at the University of Colorado. She is a devoted wife and mother of two, passionate about instilling in her children the importance of giving back.



Safety Products Global, Irvine

Vinita Tilve, CFO & COO

Safety Products Global is a U.S.-based manufacturer specializing in innovative safety cutting solutions designed to protect both people and products. Founded in 1950 with a simple handheld cutter, the company has grown into a global provider of engineered safety tools focused on preventing workplace lacerations and reducing product damage. Its portfolio includes leading industrial brands such as PHC, Klever, and Slice, all recognized for their emphasis on safety, durability, and user-centered design. With manufacturing and distribution operations in Irvine, California, and Grand Haven, Michigan, and additional international locations in Germany and Hong Kong, the company serves a broad and expanding global customer base. Safety Products Global distributes through major partners including but not limited to Grainger, Fastenal, Uline, MSC, Bunzl, Vallen, Amazon, reaching industries such as; Grocery, Retail, Food Service, Healthcare, Construction, and Government. Recent growth has been driven by strategic acquisitions, including Klever in 2018 and Slice in 2021, as well as multiple industry awards recognizing product innovation and supplier excellence.



Samueli Foundation, Corona Del Mar

Lindsey Spindle, President

Lindsey Spindle serves as President of the Samueli Family Philanthropies, where she leads a connected portfolio of organizations including the Samueli Foundation and Anaheim Ducks Foundation. Appointed by Henry and Susan Samueli in 2022, she was entrusted with advancing their deep commitment to Orange County by strengthening alignment, increasing impact, and ensuring the organization operates with both discipline and care. Under her leadership, the organization has significantly expanded its grantmaking while maintaining a lean and focused operating model—directing the vast majority of resources to community impact. Spindle has guided the evolution of the Samueli Family Philanthropies into a more integrated and responsive system, grounded in trust-based partnership and a commitment to listening to and learning from the community. Her work reflects a belief that philanthropy can combine the rigor and effectiveness of strong institutions with humility and shared leadership. Across all efforts, she remains focused on ensuring the Foundation's work reflects the values of its founders and contributes to a vibrant, thriving Orange County.



Sandstone Financial, Costa Mesa

Allycyn Bennett, Loan Officer

Allycyn Bennett, a proud UCLA graduate in political science and history, offers more than 35 years of mortgage expertise. Widely regarded as one of SoCal's top loan officers, she's licensed in 30 states and nationally recognized for client-first service and industry excellence. With



2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

a powerhouse team and cutting-edge tech, Bennett delivers tailored solutions through over 70 lending institutions. Her offerings span conventional, non-QM, FHA, VA, HELOCs, reverse, fixed, ARM, interest-only, and hybrid loans. She's closed \$100 million in a single year with a 99.3% success rate.

Sayva Solutions, San Diego

Bia Fernandes, Vice President of Client Solutions

Bia Fernandes is Vice President of Client Solutions at Sayva Solutions, where she partners with executive leaders across companies and high-growth organizations to navigate complexity, accelerate transformation, and build high-performing teams. With more than 20 years of experience spanning finance, advisory, and professional services, including Big 4 public accounting, she brings deep expertise in aligning strategy with execution. At Sayva, Fernandes works closely with finance and tech leaders and supporting teams to address critical business challenges across accounting, finance, technology, and enterprise transformation. She plays a key role in helping organizations solve business challenges and executing initiatives with talent, solutions, and advisory support. Her work spans initiatives in supporting people, processes, and systems focused on contributing to stronger operational performance and long-term growth. Known for her relationship-driven approach and strategic insight, Fernandes helps clients build resilient, future-ready organizations while strengthening Sayva's reputation as a trusted partner.



Share Ourselves, Newport Beach

Christy Ward, CEO

Christy Ward is the Chief Executive Officer of Share Ourselves, a nonprofit Federally Qualified Health Center that has been a pillar to the Orange County community, delivering vital whole-person health services since 1970. Ward leads approximately 200 employees across seven clinic sites, overseeing integrated medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, and social service programs that serve thousands of patients and more than 70,000 clinic visits annually. Under her leadership, Share Ourselves expanded clinical capacity with two new clinic openings and one major expansion. Ward oversees advanced capital projects, workforce development, strategic partnerships, and data-driven operations. Since 2019, Ward has strengthened governance and financial sustainability by doubling the organization's budget through securing philanthropic support and strengthening partnerships with CalOptima and Hoag Medical Center. Her emphasis on equity-centered, whole-person care has amplified community impact: distributing over 80,000 bags of groceries, supporting hundreds of households with financial and housing assistance, and mobilizing more than 10,000 volunteer hours. Ward's collaborative leadership and strategic vision continue to expand access to quality care for vulnerable communities.



Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc., Signal Hill

Anoosheh Oskouian, President & CEO

Anoosheh Oskouian is the CEO of Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc. (S&SE), the leading global provider of industrial emissions control, energy recovery, and pollution abatement solutions. With over 25 years of experience, S&SE designs, engineers, fabricates, installs, and services

advanced systems for manufacturers across North America, Europe, and Asia, serving industries like renewable energy, battery manufacturing, oil and gas, product testing, furniture, coatings, and advanced manufacturing. In 2025, S&SE deployed next-generation regenerative thermal oxidizer (RTO) and direct-fired thermal oxidizer (DFTO) systems achieving over 99% destruction efficiency for VOCs and HAPs, reducing client fuel use by up to 30% and securing government incentives up to 25% of project costs. The company expanded globally, with its China office leading oil/gas projects in Southeast Asia, and announced 2026 US growth in dust collection, heat exchangers, and NOx reduction. S&SE strengthened ISO-driven engineering and added key management talent, setting standards amid tightening climate mandates.



Shop Common Thread, Costa Mesa

Stephani Clymer, President

Stephani Clymer is the Co-founder and Owner of Shop Common Thread, a beloved women's boutique she launched in 2006 in Costa Mesa, California. A lifelong entrepreneur with a background in retail and consumer science from the University of Arizona, Clymer built Common Thread to serve busy, modern women seeking effortless, versatile style. What began as a niche concept has grown into a thriving retail brand, with two successful locations in Costa Mesa and San Juan Capistrano, alongside a robust e-commerce store that serves customers nationwide. Rooted in Clymer's intuitive understanding of her customer, Common Thread has become a go-to destination in Orange County for curated, wearable fashion—and the brand continues to explore opportunities for thoughtful expansion across the region. As a hands-on buyer and business owner, Clymer has spent nearly two decades shaping the brand's voice, experience, and loyal community. Known for her collaborative leadership style, she empowers her team while continuously identifying opportunities for growth and innovation within the retail space.



SKB Cases, Orange

Mimosa Marr, Controller

Mimosa Marr serves as Corporate Controller at SKB Cases LLC, an Orange-based manufacturer of protective cases for musicians, athletes, military, and industrial professionals with a nearly 50-year legacy and products sold across the globe. Joining the company in 2025 during a pivotal period of transformation, Marr stepped into one of the most demanding finance roles in the company's history—overseeing a private equity acquisition, integrating an additional brand acquisition, implementing a new ERP system, and building a multi-entity finance organization spanning the U.S., Mexico, and India, all within her first year. Responsible for consolidating multiple legal entities under a single annual audit while simultaneously modernizing financial infrastructure, she has brought structure and clarity to a company growing rapidly on multiple fronts. A born-and-raised Orange County native, Marr is passionate about leveraging AI and automation to transform finance operations and is deeply committed to building high-performing teams and mentoring the next generation of accounting professionals.





Congratulations, Dianne Whitfield!

Tarsus Pharmaceuticals' CHRO & 2026 Women in Business Nominee

Our success has been powered by your unwavering commitment to our people. You have fostered a culture where individuals and teams can thrive, while inspiring us to better serve patients and our broader community.

Congratulations from your Tarsus team on this well-deserved honor!



"Honored to be nominated among the incredible women shaping business in Orange County."

VINITA TILVE

CFO / COO

S FETY PRODUCTS GLOBAL™

KLEVER. slice PHC

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

SmartStop Self Storage REIT, Inc., Ladera Ranch

Jaclyn Groendyke, Vice President, People & Culture

Jaclyn Groendyke is Vice President of People & Culture at SmartStop Self Storage REIT, Inc. (NYSE: SMA), a self-managed REIT with a fully integrated operations team of more than 1,000 self-storage professionals and a portfolio of more than 460 operating properties across 35 states, Washington, D.C., and Canada. Groendyke joined SmartStop in October 2020, bringing nearly 15 years of leadership experience from the luxury hospitality industry, where she held progressive human resources and operations roles at The St. Regis Monarch Beach and Montage International, ultimately serving as director of human resources at Montage Laguna Beach. She also spent nearly a decade as an adjunct instructor at Orange Coast College, teaching within the School of Hospitality, Travel & Tourism. Groendyke holds a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership from Brandman University, earned with honors. At SmartStop, she served first as Corporate Director of Human Resources before being elevated to Vice President of People & Culture in June 2022, overseeing all aspects of HR, benefits, talent, engagement, and organizational development.



Smith Dickson Certified Public Accountants, LLP, Irvine

Deborah Dickson, Managing Partner

From her beginnings as one of the few women working at the "Big 8" CPA firms, Deborah Dickson, CPA, CFE, CFF, MAFF, progressed to form Smith Dickson Certified Public Accountants, LLP in 1982. Dickson remains the only woman to found and manage a "Top Accounting Firm" in Orange County (ranked by the OCBJ). In the process, Dickson has carved out a niche specialty, a Forensic CPA Litigation Support practice, in a tough and competitive field. She has shaped this into one of the most well-known and highly respected forensic CPA and expert witness accounting teams in California. The firm works with leading national and boutique law firms, attesting to Smith Dickson's expertise and success in this field. Dickson has earned CFE (Certified Fraud Examiner), CFF (Certified in Financial Forensics), and MAFF (Master Analyst in Financial Forensics) designations, which are important qualifications for leaders in the forensics CPAs throughout the USA.



Smith Dickson Certified Public Accountants, LLP, Irvine

Gina Lara, Partner, Trust and Estates

Gina Lara is a Partner specializing in Trusts and Estates in Tax and Forensic Accounting for a "Top Accounting Firm" in Orange County (as ranked by the OCBJ). She holds an MBA, is a CFP, EA, and a member of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners and CalCPA.



Snail, Inc., Culver City

Heidy Chow, CFO

Heidy Chow has served as Chief Financial Officer of Snail Games USA since September 2020 and has been a member of the company's Board of Directors since November 2021. As a senior finance and governance executive for the Nasdaq-listed global gaming company, she oversees financial strategy, SEC reporting, corporate governance, and operational finance across a portfolio of internationally recognized gaming properties. During her tenure, the company has continued to expand its global footprint while navigating the complexities of operating as a publicly traded entertainment business. Prior to joining Snail Games USA, Chow was a partner at The Pun Group, LLP from 2015 to 2020 and previously served as a manager at Ernst & Young, where she built extensive experience in accounting, auditing, and advisory services. Since 2019, she has also served as Chair of the Audit Committee for Franklin Wireless Corp.. Chow earned a Bachelor of Science degree from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and is a licensed California CPA.



SoSheBuilds, Irvine

Karla Talisse, Founder

Karla Talisse is the Founder of SoSheBuilds (SSB), a government contracting advisory and fractional growth strategy firm helping contractors break into public works and scale sustainable businesses. Founded in 2017, SoSheBuilds has evolved from a construction project management company into a specialized advisory practice addressing a critical gap in the AEC industry: bridging the space between program participation and actual contract awards. Through bid readiness strategy, pursuit development, and fractional VP of Growth services, SoSheBuilds supports small and emerging contractors in competing for public infrastructure opportunities traditionally dominated by larger firms. The firm partners with public agencies, workforce development boards, and community colleges to deliver cohort-based training programs designed to produce measurable contractor success and long-term economic mobility. With 17 years of experience across estimating, business development, and growth strategy, Talisse brings a rare cross-functional perspective to construction growth and government contracting. She is also a keynote speaker and published thought leader, with a growing professional platform of over 10,000 followers and increasing recognition for her work advancing contractor access to public works opportunities. Under her leadership, SoSheBuilds is scaling toward a multi-million-dollar advisory platform, with training, strategic advisory, and fractional executive leadership as core revenue drivers. Talisse continues to position SoSheBuilds as a modern growth partner for contractors navigating the evolving public infrastructure landscape.



South Coast Conservatory, Laguna Niguel

Jena Minnick-Bull, Executive Director

Jena Minnick-Bull, Executive Director of South Coast Conservatory (SCC), is deeply committed to Elevating Arts Education! SCC is a premier performing arts education institution, dedicated to nurturing creativity and artistic excellence in Orange County. With a dedicated team of 47 employees, including nine administrative staff and 38 accomplished faculty members, SCC delivers comprehensive training across dance, aerial arts, music, and theater. The Conservatory recently experienced significant strategic growth through the successful acquisition of V&T Dance, expanding its reach and program offerings. Furthermore, a key partnership with Saddleback Community College reinforces SCC's



commitment to bridging high-quality arts education with higher learning opportunities. In 2026, Minnick-Bull became a Founding Partner with Momentum Youth Brands to continue her mission of workforce development in arts education in OC. Minnick-Bull's commitment to students and community has been honored with industry distinction, earning "Woman to Watch" from OC Women of Influence in 2016 and "Outstanding Leadership" from Art-E Foundation in 2017 and "Excellence in Finance" from Dance Studio Owner Association in 2021, and key governmental support, receiving formal recognition from CA Assemblymember Laurie Davies and City Council Member Stephanie Oddo in October 2026. On March 13th, 2026 Laurie Davies, CA Assemblymember, awarded her for "Service in the Arts" at the 2026 "Woman of Year" luncheon, and on March 26, 2026 she was a Nominee for the OCBJ's "Excellence in Entrepreneurship" Awards.

South County Outreach, Irvine

Lauren Ruiz, Director of Development

South County Outreach is a leading Orange County nonprofit dedicated to preventing hunger and homelessness by providing food, housing, and wraparound support services to families in need. Serving thousands annually, the organization continues to grow its impact through innovative, dignity-centered programming and strong community partnerships. As Director of Development, Lauren Ruiz plays a pivotal role in advancing the organization's mission through strategic fundraising and donor engagement. Over the past year, she has driven unprecedented growth, securing the two largest gifts in the organization's 35-year history—totaling \$2.5 million—while nearly doubling the average donor contribution. Ruiz also spearheaded the "More Than Food" initiative, a transformative approach to food insecurity that prioritizes dignity and long-term stability, helping reshape how services are delivered across the region. Known for her collaborative leadership style, Ruiz builds meaningful relationships with donors, colleagues, and community partners, strengthening both organizational culture and long-term sustainability.



South County Outreach, Irvine

Sheila Teevans, Chief of Staff

South County Outreach is a leading Orange County nonprofit dedicated to preventing hunger and homelessness by providing food, housing, and supportive services to families in need. Serving thousands annually, the organization continues to expand its reach through strategic growth and community-driven solutions. As Chief of Staff, Sheila Teevans plays a critical role in guiding the organization's operations, strategy, and expansion. With a career spanning more than three decades across the corporate and nonprofit sectors, she brings a unique blend of business acumen and mission-driven leadership. Since joining the organization in 2022, Teevans has helped drive significant growth, contributing to a 35% increase in individuals served while maintaining a high level of support per client. She has been instrumental in expanding access through the launch of a second Upscale Resale location and a new client-choice food pantry and is currently helping lead the opening of South County Outreach's new Lake Forest location, set to open in summer 2026. Known for her collaborative leadership style, Teevans strengthens both organizational culture and long-term sustainability.



Southwest Landscape Inc., Orange

Sandy Hansen, Vice President

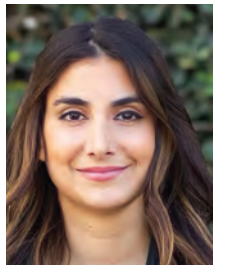
SouthWest Landscape, Inc. began as a small family owned and operated landscape-maintenance business in 1982. Today, it has grown into a full-service landscape management company with a staff of hardworking and dedicated professionals who have made SouthWest Landscape, Inc. a significant force in the landscape industry. While many changes have taken place over the years, one concept has remained the same since the beginning: their total commitment to customer satisfaction. SouthWest landscape, Inc. prides itself on being responsive to the needs of its clients and strives to commit all resources necessary to achieve this goal and ensure complete customer satisfaction. Their full-service approach combines talented teams with dedicated managers who work together to meet client objectives efficiently and effectively. Their recent accomplishments have included an inductee into the Landscape Hall of Fame and Employee of the year award from Lawn and Landscape magazine 2025.



SouthWest Landscape, Inc., Orange

Yocelin Reynoso Prado, Branch Manager

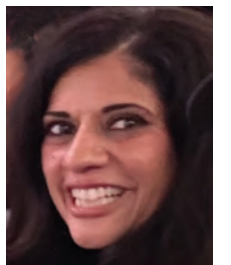
Yocelin Reynoso Prado is the Branch Manager for the Los Angeles division of SouthWest Landscape, Inc., a full-service commercial landscape maintenance company serving Southern California since 1982. In her role, Reynoso Prado leads daily operations, client relations, and team development for a dynamic portfolio of commercial properties, overseeing field teams, budgets, and service delivery standards. SouthWest Landscape has experienced significant growth in recent years, expanding its service footprint and achieving over 200% revenue growth in the past five years. Reynoso Prado has been instrumental in this growth, helping scale operations in the Los Angeles market while maintaining strong client retention and service quality. Known for her leadership, accountability, and commitment to team culture, Reynoso Prado has successfully developed high-performing teams and streamlined operational processes. Her ability to balance client expectations with internal execution has contributed to consistent branch performance and long-term client partnerships. Reynoso Prado's leadership continues to elevate both her team and the organization as a whole.



Specialty Care RX, Orange

Sadhana Maline, CFO

Sadhana Maline has been a wonderful mentor to her four daughters, who have each grown into incredible women. After the company's CFO unexpectedly passed away, Maline stepped in and helped lead the organization through a difficult transition. Through her dedication, leadership, and partnership with the team, she helped the partners grow the company into the successful organization it is today.



Spice Girl Sauces, LLC, Santa Ana

Shachi Mehra, Founder

Chef Shachi Mehra has built a multifaceted career at the intersection of culinary innovation,

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

entrepreneurship, and community leadership. Known for her modern interpretation of Indian cuisine, she has become a prominent force in Orange County's hospitality industry through her work as Executive Chef and Partner of ADYA. Under her leadership, the restaurant has earned widespread recognition for bringing bold flavors and contemporary South Asian cuisine to a broader audience. Beyond the restaurant industry, Chef Mehra successfully expanded into consumer packaged goods with the launch of Shachi's Spice Girl Sauces. Transitioning from hospitality to retail required mastering a vastly different business model, including manufacturing, regulatory compliance, product shelf stability, distribution logistics, and large-scale production partnerships.

Spinnaker Investment Group, Newport Beach

Anika Wilson, Financial Advisor

Anika Wilson, Financial Advisor at Spinnaker Investment Group, provides personalized financial plans and investment management to individuals, families and businesses. Since joining in January 2021, Wilson has launched multiple new initiatives for Spinnaker Investment Group. One of those is a YouTube series called Spinnaker University, geared towards educating millennials and younger generations on the basics of wealth management and preparing for financial success. Another initiative is a new business division called Women & Wealth and offers tailored services specifically for women. Through Women & Wealth, Wilson works with all of Spinnaker's women clientele to educate, inspire, and empower them to take responsibility for their finances, so that they have the ability to protect and control their future, and their family's future, for years to come. Additionally, Wilson frequently speaks on a variety of podcasts and YouTube shows discussing wealth and financial literacy for women.

SPRIG Equity, San Juan Capistrano

Rebecca Raabe, Co-founder & Partner

Rebecca Raabe is a Partner and Co-founder of SPRIG Equity, a majority female-owned medical technology investment firm focused on later-stage investments in innovative healthcare companies. Since launching its inaugural fund in 2023 during one of the most difficult fundraising environments in venture capital history—when first-time funds represented just 6% of total fund closures—SPRIG has successfully raised approximately \$50 million in assets under management. The firm achieved its first major portfolio exit less than one year after Fund I's close, returning nearly the entire inaugural fund to investors through the successful acquisition of Conformal Medical. Raabe is one of three partners leading the firm and is currently helping lead the raise of SPRIG's second fund, targeting \$100 million to expand the firm's differentiated investment strategy. Passionate about improving patient outcomes, Raabe combines her investing background with deep operational healthcare experience to help bring life-changing medical technologies to market and improve patients' lives worldwide.



STEM Advantage, Huntington Beach

Lee Ann Kline, President & Founder

Lee Ann Kline is President and Founder of STEM Advantage, a nonprofit she founded in 2012. She believes 'Talent is equally distributed, but opportunity is not.' STEM Advantage mentors, prepares, and inspires first-generation, low-income, and underserved college students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). STEM Advantage "levels the playing field" empowering students with access to networks, employment, and economic mobility, while providing a vetted pipeline of skilled talent to businesses. STEM Advantage has supported over 1,100 Scholars attending eight California State University campuses in Southern California with 1:1 career support, 1:1 mentors (STEM professionals), professional and career development, scholarships, and community. 100% of Scholars have earned a bachelor's degree in a STEM field. Over 91% of alumni have full-time jobs in their major at leading companies, including Accenture, Aerospace, Amazon, Capital Group, Deloitte, Farmers, Microsoft, and Sony Pictures Entertainment. Many have earned Master's and PhD degrees. Kline has been honored by Los Angeles Business Journal as Nonprofit Executive of the Year (Growing), Orange County Business Journal as a Women in STEM honoree and is an AARP Purpose Prize Fellow.



Sterling Public Relations, Corona del Mar

Paula Steurer, Founder & President

Paula Steurer is the Founder of Sterling Public Relations, a publicity, branding, and marketing firm she established in 2008. Recognized as the driving force behind her firm's award-winning brand development, high-profile media exposure, and deep community relationships, Steurer is known for her strategic insight and innovative thinking. For more than 18 years, she has led Sterling Public Relations with a commitment to white-glove service, delivering exceptional public relations and communications support to discerning brands, nonprofits, executives, and cultural figures. Beyond her professional achievements, Steurer is deeply committed to philanthropy and mentorship, and remains actively involved in the Newport Beach Chamber and Newport Harbor High School's mentor program.



Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP, Long Beach

Esther Cho, Partner-in-Charge, Southern California

Esther Cho is the Partner-in-Charge of Stradley Ronon's Southern California office, a member of its board of directors, and co-chair of the financial services litigation and enforcement practice. Since launching the Southern California office in 2024, Cho continues to lead a growing team of lawyers and business professionals. With more than two decades of litigation experience, Cho has earned her reputation as a strong advocate in securities and regulatory matters, regularly defending financial services firms in complex litigation and arbitration in state and federal courts and forums across the country. Valued for her litigation prowess, Cho represents institutions and individuals in connection with regulatory investigations and enforcement actions.



Celebrating Women Who Lead the Future

Congratulations to **Sabine Howest** and **Jennifer Anaya** on being recognized as Orange County Business Journal Women in Business Awards nominees. Their vision, leadership and commitment to innovation inspire others and help shape the future of Ingram Micro and our technology ecosystem.

We are proud to celebrate your accomplishments and the impact you continue to make every day.

Sabine Howest
SVP, Platform
Services & Support

Jennifer Anaya
SVP, Global Marketing



INGRAM

Congratulations

DIANA GRANILLO, CIC, CRM
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

SCM CONGRATULATES Diana on her nomination for the 2026 Women in Business Awards. We appreciate her unparalleled dedication to client-focused excellence, her outstanding commitment to mentoring future firm leaders and every contribution vital to our success.

SCM is a Southern California firm that has been putting customers and team members first since 1931. We hold a strong marketplace position as a leading regional insurance brokerage firm for middle market businesses. SCM is committed to building and maintaining a strong company culture and is recognized as a Best Places to Work by *Business Insurance* (2021-25) and *Orange County Business Journal* (2023-25).

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2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth LLP, Newport Beach

Kathleen Marcus, Partner; Co-Chair, Enforcement Defense & Investigations Practice; Chair, Compliance & Corporate Governance

Previously serving as Senior Counsel with SEC's Division of Enforcement in Washington, DC, Kathleen Marcus brings a deep understanding of the federal laws and government processes for clients facing regulatory and white collar investigations. Marcus has secured more than 30 declinations for clients facing enforcement actions. Clients rely on the trust she has built with regulators and her ability to interact with government agencies to negotiate a successful outcome. Using her streamlined, careful approach, she has defended clients against accusations of fraud, accounting and disclosure discrepancies, insider trading, breaches of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and violations of the Federal Anti-Kickback statute and False Claims Act. Marcus also helps clients manage cyber security incidents and assists clients in the blockchain space, including cryptocurrency and token offerings. She has served repeatedly as an expert witness in matters involving complex securities law questions. Marcus also brings her investigatory skills and deep knowledge of corporate governance to lead internal investigations. Her thorough yet cost-efficient approach to fact-finding enables her to spot problems quickly, assess potential liability and offer solutions to navigate through challenging regulatory issues and corporations in crisis.



SullivanCurtisMonroe Insurance Services, LLC, Irvine

Diana Granillo, CIC, CRM, Chief Operating Officer

Bringing a broad depth of insurance knowledge and more than 30 years of industry experience, Diana Granillo joined SCM in 2019 as Executive VP and Property Casualty Leader. In 2021 she became Chief Operating Officer and is now a member of the ownership group. Granillo is instrumental to the agency's growth goals, having led the reorganization of the commercial property casualty, employee benefits, and personal lines divisions, and playing a vital role in SCM's continuous pursuit to exceed clients' and carrier partners' expectations. Backed by a proven track record in agency operations and acquisitions of various complexities, she created an acquisition marketing platform that has added tremendous value to SCM with three strategic agency acquisitions since its implementation. She also modernized several systems, processes and administrative functions throughout the company. One of Granillo's greatest strengths is connecting with people, and she leverages this ability to create opportunities to mentor and coach the next generation of SCM's leaders.



SunCoast Properties Inc, Irvine

Joanne Johnston, Executive Liason

Joanne Johnston was born in Brooklyn, New York, majored in foreign languages, and worked for Swissair prior to moving to California. Johnston obtained an accounting degree and worked as the accounting manager for an industrial builder and developer. She was married to Dale Johnston for 48 years until his death in 2021. In 1975, Johnston Yacht Sales was established in Newport Beach which was operated until 1992. After that, she obtained a paralegal degree and became the executive assistant to the CEO of SunCoast Properties where she participated in the growth of this property management and acquisition firm for the last 29 years. During the last 30 years, she has held multiple volunteer positions with Assistance League of Newport-Mesa and Angelitos de Oro (BBBS support group).



Sunday Brunch Agency, Huntington Beach

Christia Brockman, Co-owner

Christia Brockman is a marketing leader and community advocate based in Newport Beach, California. She is currently a Partner at Sunday Brunch Agency, working alongside founder Rachel Svoboda to drive business growth for luxury and lifestyle brands. Brockman specializes in translating complex business goals into creative marketing and event strategies. Her work at Sunday Brunch Agency focuses on brand growth, where comprehensive marketing campaigns are used to elevate brand awareness and deliver tangible results for over 500 clients. She also focuses on strategic leadership, where she manages self-directed books of business and strategic decision-making within the agency's unique female-led ownership model.



Sunday Brunch Agency, Huntington Beach

Rachel Svoboda, Business Owner

Rachel Svoboda is an Orange County-based entrepreneur, marketing strategist, and author known for founding Sunday Brunch Agency, a female-owned, fully remote marketing firm. She is a prominent figure in the Southern California business community, particularly recognized for her advocacy of women in leadership and her "collective" agency model that utilizes custom-built teams for brands like Toyota, Panasonic, and various local ventures.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Rebecca Anderson, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Surterre Properties is a leading Southern California luxury real estate brokerage known for its boutique service, highly accomplished agents, and strong presence across Orange County's premier coastal communities. Within this respected network, Rebecca Anderson stands out as an award-winning Newport Beach real estate agent with nearly 15 years of experience specializing in luxury homes throughout Newport Beach and Corona del Mar. Her longstanding network and trusted reputation allow Anderson to connect clients with off-market and private opportunities, while her strategic, design-forward marketing helps sellers maximize value. Deeply rooted in the Port Streets community, she is also a committed community leader and mother of three.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Angela Caliger, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Angela Caliger stands out as a nationally recognized producer with a relationship-first approach and proven results across both coastal Orange County and the Coachella Valley. Born and raised in a small Midwestern town, Caliger brings a grounded work ethic, honest communication

style, and long-term partnership mindset to every client relationship. After graduating from the University of Iowa, she moved to Newport Beach and helped open offices for a start-up conference calling company that grew into a global billion-dollar enterprise. Currently ranked #364 in the nation and #120 in California by RealTrends, Caliger combines business acumen, creative marketing, high-end photography, omnichannel exposure, and deep market knowledge to serve buyers, sellers, and leasing clients with professionalism, accountability, and exceptional effort.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Roula Fawaz, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Roula Fawaz stands out as one of Orange County's most well-respected real estate professionals, with 30 years of experience and more than 1,200 properties sold over the course of her career. Fawaz's expertise spans Orange County, where she has built an outstanding reputation among clients and fellow agents through her patience, care, negotiation skills, and commitment to smooth, successful transactions. Before entering real estate, Fawaz was an English kindergarten teacher in her native country of Lebanon, a background that informs her thoughtful, personable, and responsible approach. A consistent top producer, Fawaz has also been nominated several times for the Orange County Business Journal's Women in Business Award. She is passionate about what home means to each client and is dedicated to helping buyers and sellers achieve the right price, terms, and outcome.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Genille Lauren, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Genille Lauren stands out as an Orange County luxury real estate professional and real estate attorney with the skill, judgment, and legal insight to expertly guide complex transactions. Lauren began her real estate career in 1997 and, before relocating to Corona del Mar, served high-end clientele in the Beverly Hills area. A graduate of UCLA and Southwestern Law School, she brings a sophisticated legal and business foundation to every client relationship. Her legal background allows her to manage transaction details with competence, professionalism, and confidence, helping clients feel at ease throughout the process. Known for holding herself to a high standard, Lauren is one of Orange County's trusted real estate advisors. Her goal is clear: to help every client achieve the maximum result when buying or selling a home.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Soheila Shirazi, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Soheila Shirazi stands out as a seasoned Newport Coast real estate professional whose experience spans finance, mortgage lending, and luxury residential real estate. Before focusing on helping clients buy and sell homes, Shirazi worked in the mortgage industry, giving her a valuable understanding of finance, loans, and the practical realities that shape real estate decisions. She also holds an MBA from Pepperdine, further strengthening her ability to provide strategic, informed guidance. As a longtime Newport Coast resident, Shirazi has firsthand knowledge of the luxury marketplace and understands how changing market conditions affect buyers and sellers. Known for professionalism, dedication, and outstanding service, she helps clients make educated choices designed for long-term satisfaction while delivering smooth, rewarding, and results-oriented transactions.



Surterre Properties, Newport Beach

Victoria Strombom, Luxury Real Estate Agent

Victoria Strombom stands out as a highly decorated Orange County real estate professional with more than 39 years of experience in California coastal real estate. Strombom has been recognized as an Orange Coast Magazine Top 100 Real Estate All-Star for six consecutive years, from 2019 through 2024. She is also ranked in the top 1.5% of agents in the United States by sales volume by RealTrends America's Best Real Estate Professionals and is a seven-time nominee for Orange County Women in Business. Serving clients from Newport Beach to San Clemente and inland to Mission Viejo and Coto de Caza, Strombom brings deep market knowledge, calm transaction management, and specialized expertise in relocations, divorces, trust sales, 1031 exchanges, income properties, and generational homes. Her background as an ICU and Life Flight nurse further informs her steady, compassionate, client-centered approach.



System Pavers, Orange

Cassi Hallam, Chief Marketing Officer

System Pavers is an outdoor living design company based in California with service areas throughout multiple states and cities across the country. System Pavers was founded in 1992 by Larry Green and Doug Lueck, and early on handled commercial projects such as paver installations for Los Angeles' Union Station and Anaheim's Angel Stadium. Now America's #1 designer and installer of outdoor living systems with over 100,000 installations nationwide, System Pavers has been designing and installing direct-to-consumer outdoor remodeling services for over 30 years. Cassi Hallam is the Chief Marketing Officer at System Pavers, where she drives brand innovation and growth strategy for the nation's leading outdoor remodeler. With over 20 years of marketing and communications experience, she brings a data-driven, customer-first mindset to her position, integrating traditional, digital and field marketing channels to build national brand presence. From driving sales and generating leads to boosting brand awareness and guiding her team of over 100 professionals, Hallam's marketing leadership continues to position System Pavers as a category-defining brand in the home improvement industry.



TALG, Ltd., Irvine

Tenny Rostomian-Amin, CEO & Co-owner

Tenny Amin is a Co-owner and Partner at TALG, Ltd. - a multi jurisdictional law firm with seven offices in the United States located in California, Nevada, Texas, Arizona, Washington, North Carolina, and New York as well as an international office located in Dubai, UAE. TALG, Ltd. focuses primarily on Business, Biotech and Banking law. Amin focuses her practice exclusively

2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

on Family Law and Family Law Mediation. Well-known for her effective and assertive representation, Amin has extensive experience in handling all aspects of family law cases ranging from mediation to trials involving child custody and child support, spousal support, and division of property. Committed to the intelligent and effective representation of her clients, Amin focuses her practice on intricate custody disputes as well as cases involving the characterization and division of high asset and complex marital estates. Amin graduated cum laude from the University of California, Irvine in 2000, earning a double major in Bachelor of Arts in the disciplines of Political Science and Criminology, Law and Society. In 2003, she earned a Juris Doctorate from Pepperdine University School of Law. Additionally, in 2020 Amin earned a Masters of Laws (LL.M.) Degree in Dispute Resolution from the Pepperdine School of Law. Pepperdine's LLM program is ranked #1 in the nation, and she was one of a select handful of students that were admitted to the program.



Talonvest Capital, Inc., Newport Beach

Kim Bishop, Executive Director - Capital Markets

As Executive Director - Capital Markets, Kim Bishop is responsible for leading a business execution team that handles the packaging, placement, and negotiation of \$10 million to \$150 million financings for sophisticated real estate owners and their institutional partners. Bishop's abilities are top-notch. She has elevated her client and transactional leadership, as evidenced by commentary from institutional investors like Carlyle, Invesco, ASB, and CBREI, as well as clients such as William Warren Group and Metro Self Storage, who value her ability to anticipate and resolve issues throughout the due diligence and closing process. She mitigates risk through thoughtful negotiations early in the application phase, ensuring a smoother execution for clients. Her stewardship mindset drives proactive redlining of term sheets and applications, expediting reviews while managing costs. With over 20 years in the capital markets, Bishop brings deep industry expertise, strategic insight, and trusted judgment, consistently instilling confidence in clients and fostering strong, lasting relationships with lenders across life companies, debt funds, and banks.



Tarsus Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Irvine

Dianne Whitfield, Chief Human Resources Officer

Dianne Whitfield has been a committed member of the Orange County business and philanthropic landscape for more than 20 years. In her current role as Chief Human Resources Officer at Tarsus, she has guided the company through significant growth, scaling the organization from 20 employees to nearly 400 while advancing excellence and diversity at all levels of the company, earning national recognition. Prior to joining Tarsus, Whitfield served as Vice President and Head of Human Resources at Evolus, Inc. where she led efforts to support the commercialization of the start-up company's first approved product. Previously, Whitfield held positions of increasing responsibility at Allergan (an AbbVie company), progressing to Director of Global Human Resources. Her experience there spanned a variety of human resources business



partnership and leadership roles, during which she supported both the Commercial and Research & Development organizations and led enterprise-wide initiatives in Global Talent Management. Whitfield holds a BA in Psychology and Social Behavior from the University of California, Irvine, and a Masters of Social Work from California State University, Long Beach.

Tevora, Irvine

Nazy Fouladirad, President & COO

Nazy Fouladirad is the President, COO, and Co-Founder of Tevora, a leading Irvine-based cybersecurity and consulting firm dedicated to helping enterprises secure sensitive data, implement robust security infrastructure, and navigate complex regulatory compliance. As the strategic driver behind the company's operational growth, Fouladirad has been instrumental in scaling Tevora to serve nearly 1,500 clients nationwide, driving continuous growth and expanding the firm's national footprint. A proven innovator and entrepreneur, Fouladirad co-founded MightyID in 2023, developing a breakthrough Identity and Access Management (IAM) resilience platform. The software was a pioneer in "cyber resilience" capabilities, helping companies recover from serious cyber attacks. MightyID was successfully acquired by global technology leader Semperis in January 2026, achieving a major entrepreneurial milestone. Through her ongoing strategic guidance at Tevora and her remarkable track record of successful operational growth, Fouladirad remains a driving force in the highly demanding cybersecurity sector.



TGR Foundation, Irvine

Cristina Fernández, Vice President, Programs

Cristina Fernández is the Vice President of Programs for TGR Foundation, a nonprofit founded in 1996 by Tiger Woods with a mission to empower students to pursue their passions through education. Headquartered in Irvine, CA, TGR Foundation is committed to providing opportunities that unlock the unlimited potential in the lives of young people from under-resourced communities. In 2026, the Foundation is celebrating 30 years of driving dreams together. Through its TGR Learning Labs and signature education programs focused on science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) educational enrichment, career and college readiness and health and well-being, TGR Foundation has served more than 217,000 students. Headquartered in Irvine, CA with a team of nearly 100 professionals, the foundation is currently expanding to three new Learning Labs across the country, including Los Angeles, Atlanta and Augusta, GA, after opening its second location in Philadelphia in 2025. Fernández leads programming that prepares students for college and career success, including the award-winning Earl Woods Scholar Program. She has spent her entire career advancing college access and success for young people, particularly first-generation college students.



The Arts & Learning Conservatory, Costa Mesa

Debora Wondercheck, Founder & CEO

Debora Wondercheck is the Founder & CEO of the Arts & Learning Conservatory (ALC), a leading Orange County nonprofit transforming young lives through high-quality arts education.

Congratulations
Laura Peters &
Karla Delacruz!



KARLA
DELACRUZ



LAURA
PETERS

e360 proudly celebrates **Laura Peters and Karla Delacruz**, nominees for the 32nd Annual Women in Business Awards.

Your leadership, impact, and commitment to our clients, partners, and teammates embody e360 CAREs and the people-first approach we bring to every client relationship.

That same commitment drives e360 to help enterprises transform, innovate, and achieve meaningful business outcomes through AI, Cybersecurity, Composable Enterprise, and Managed Services.

Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!



2026 Women in Business Award Nominees

A classically trained cellist and professor, she built ALC from the ground up, growing it from 21 students to 3,800 served annually and scaling the organization into a \$4 million enterprise with 65 employees across programs in music, theater, dance, and technical theatre production. Over two decades, Wondercheck has made equitable access to her mission, expanding ALC's reach into underserved and low-income communities to ensure every child has a place in the arts. Her visionary leadership recently culminated in ALC's 23rd anniversary celebration and the opening of a state-of-the-art theater, a testament to the organization's extraordinary growth. A pioneer in arts workforce development, Wondercheck launched paid Apprenticeship programs that create real career pathways for youth. Recognized with numerous honors for her impact on arts education and community development, she remains a fearless champion of creativity as a catalyst for youth empowerment and lifelong success.



The Flora May Foundation, San Clemente

Debbie Hansen-Bosse, Founder & CEO

When a child is in crisis, most services focus on the child. Debbie Hansen-Bosse built the model that supports the parent. As Founder and CEO of The Flora May Foundation, she leads a highly regarded, all-female Orange County nonprofit supporting more than 400 parents annually through adolescent mental health and substance use challenges. The Foundation provides immediate, confidential guidance and a clear plan of action when families face critical decisions. Built on lived experience, her team of women who have raised at-risk youth delivers real-time, practical support through complex moments, filling a gap in traditional care and stabilizing families. Hansen-Bosse also founded Working Women Winning (VWW), an intensive workforce program achieving a 75% employment rate and expanding into San Diego and Los Angeles Counties. Her leadership has earned national recognition, including 2025 Nonprofit of the Year by the American Business Awards and selection to Orange County's Civic 50. She serves on OneOC's Nonprofit Advisory Board, is an Advisory Member of Passkeys' Institute for Community Impact, and an Ambassador for Success with Purpose.



The KYA Group, Santa Ana

Lisa Chavez, Director of Marketing & Administration

KYA is an employee-owned specialty general contractor serving communities throughout California and Texas, with more than 300 employees, hundreds of projects completed annually, and over \$300 million in annual volume. Recognized for its strong culture, innovation, and commitment to employee wellbeing, due to Lisa Chavez's stewardship - KYA has received multiple, consecutive Top Workplaces honors, including recognition by the Orange County Register and USA Today. Since joining KYA in 2017, Lisa Chavez has been instrumental in supporting the company's growth and continued success through her leadership in financial analysis, business development, and strategic planning. Chavez is widely respected for her collaborative leadership style, operational expertise, and passion for building meaningful relationships both internally and externally. She consistently creates systems and processes that improve efficiency while fostering a culture centered on excellence, innovation, and service. Beyond her professional achievements, Chavez founded HERizon, an initiative dedicated to empowering women in the general contracting industry through mentorship, networking, education, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, she also pioneered the partnership between KYA and the Santa Ana Unified School District to establish a six-week paid internship program for district high school students enrolled in the Building Trades pathway. This program provides students with valuable hands-on workforce experience while exposing them to both college and skilled trades career opportunities.



The Literacy Project, Newport Beach

Sue Grant, Founder & Volunteer CEO

Sue Grant, an impassioned visionary and lifelong advocate for service, founded The Literacy Project in 2009 with a bold mission to eradicate illiteracy and empower underserved youth. Under her leadership, the organization has become a force in educational equity, delivering a comprehensive, no-cost reading program to more than 12,000 students from low-income families across six states. Dedicated to changing the trajectory for children struggling with foundational literacy, she has secured over \$6.6 million in funding to expand its impact. The program's proven 30-hour model drives results, with students achieving average skill gains between 76% and 129%. Beyond the classroom, The Literacy Project has donated more than \$2.1 million in educational games, benefiting over 55,750 family members. Most recently, the organization doubled its budget, expanded service into three additional states, and increased services in affordable housing communities and after-school programs to further close the literacy gap.



The Shea Center, San Juan Capistrano

Robin King, Corporate Relations Director

Robin King brings more than 25 years of experience in business development, marketing, promotions, and sales to The Shea Center. A seasoned executive with a strong background in the for-profit sector, she leverages deep expertise in cause marketing, event sponsorship sales, and strategic relationship-building to expand corporate engagement and philanthropic support for the organization. Working alongside The Shea Center's development team, board members, committee leaders, and corporate partners across Southern California, King helps drive fundraising efforts that support an annual budget of more than \$8 million. Throughout her career, she has led the creation and placement of more than \$25 million in advertising and marketing campaigns, representing hundreds of radio and television stations locally and nationally, with clients including American Airlines, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, Wells Fargo, and the San Francisco 49ers. Despite these accomplishments, King remains grounded in what matters most: serving clients, colleagues, and sponsors with integrity, emotional intelligence, and a commitment to excellence. Her natural ability to connect with people, cultivate lasting relationships, and inspire collaboration has made her a respected leader and trusted partner. Driven by a deep commitment to inclusivity, fairness, and opportunity for all, King continues to advance The Shea Center's mission with passion and purpose every day.



The Spaulding Agency, Aliso Viejo

Jessica Spaulding, President

The Spaulding Agency, under the leadership of Jessica Spaulding, has solidified its reputation as a leading public relations strategist for the commercial real estate industry as well as many cities and public sector entities. Her industry longevity, spanning close to 20 years, is due to a high level of customer service which has also earned longtime client relationships, and creativity in delivering effective and brand building public relations campaigns.



Timree Gold Gallery, Costa Mesa

Timree Gold, Principal Artist & Founder

Timree Gold is an Orange County native, self-taught artist, entrepreneur, and internationally recognized creative known for her approachable, imperfect, and most importantly, fun artistic style. As the founder of Timree Gold Gallery, she has built a nationally celebrated brand rooted in creativity, patriotism, and community connection. Known as the "Pioneer of Paint Parties," Gold developed the signature "Timree Technique," a whimsical painting style designed to make art accessible and enjoyable for all ages, regardless of experience. Her classes, recognized among the Top 10 Art Classes in the United States, have expanded nationwide through her virtual Paint Club and immersive studio experiences. Gold's vibrant artwork and live painting performances have attracted celebrity clients and events including Johnny Depp, Gwen Stefani, Snoop Dogg, POTUS, and the American Music Awards. Her licensing partnerships with Michael's, Mayfair, Zulily, and International Greetings have further expanded her national reach. Beyond business success, Gold is deeply committed to community impact, partnering with CHOC Children's Hospital to deliver bedside painting experiences that bring joy, healing, and meaningful connection to children and families.



Tiyya Foundation, La Palma

Meymuna Hussein-Cattan, Founder & CEO

Meymuna Hussein-Cattan is the Founder & CEO of Tiyya and the Founder of its social enterprise, Flavors from Afar. Through Tiyya, she leads a growing nonprofit dedicated to supporting refugees and displaced people through providing economic advancement, family services, and community integration. The organization has secured millions in wages for program participants and placed individuals across a wide range of industries, reflecting its measurable impact and steady growth. Flavors from Afar, her culinary concept and restaurant, showcases refugee chefs and their cuisines, creating both employment opportunities and a platform for cultural storytelling. Under Hussein-Cattan's leadership, the enterprise has gained national recognition for its innovative model blending food, storytelling, and social impact. A recognized leader in her field, Hussein-Cattan was named a L'Oréal Paris Woman of Worth and a Top 10 CNN Hero, and continues to earn accolades for her work advancing equity, representation, and opportunity for displaced communities.



Tlaquepaque Restaurant, Placentia

Rosalina Davis, Owner

Tlaquepaque Restaurant, a landmark dining destination in Old Town Placentia, founded in 1965, is a family-owned independent business now celebrating its 61st anniversary and third generation of leadership. Over six decades, the restaurant has grown into a resilient and innovative small enterprise, employing more than 24 team members and serving a diverse, countywide clientele. Despite the challenges of the restaurant industry and the need for economic revitalization in its historic district, Tlaquepaque has achieved steady year-over-year growth, strengthened operations, expanded its market presence, and demonstrated exceptional adaptability during the COVID 19 pandemic era. Known for its authentic recipes, cultural heritage, and commitment to culinary excellence, the business has also reinvested significantly in its historic 100-year-old building, preserving original architectural elements while completing a full exterior renovation. Tlaquepaque's longstanding community leadership is reflected in numerous awards, philanthropic support for higher education scholarships, and decades of advocacy for Old Town revitalization—efforts that contributed to securing a \$10 million Enhanced Infrastructure Finance District (EIFD) set to launch this year. This will push the area for future economic growth and community development. Our leadership has fostered a culture of creativity, resilience, and service excellence ensuring the restaurant not only endures but thrives as a cornerstone of the community.



TruArc Health, Irvine

Margaret Bredehoft, Chief Development Officer

TruArc Health is an Irvine-based health care innovation company advancing diagnostic, data-driven, and technology-enabled solutions across three enterprise lines of business: Gnosis, a full-service clinical laboratory; Gnosis For Her, a women's breast imaging platform; and Healthy Campus, a school-based behavioral health technology solution. The company's mission is to empower individuals, communities and providers to collaborate on the journey to better health through cutting-edge diagnostic and data insights. TruArc Health's portfolio spans diagnostics, precision medicine, women's health and youth behavioral health, reflecting a broad and growing approach to improving care access and outcomes. Recent milestones include projected revenue growth of more than \$20 million in Gnosis' first two years through three new diagnostic service lines: toxicology, pharmacogenomics and EdenDx endometrial cancer detection. Healthy Campus is projecting \$20 million in first-year revenue and more than \$100 million in recurring revenue, while currently supporting more than 1 million students across California through CYBHI infrastructure. Gnosis For Her is targeting \$2.5 million in its first 12 months, with a franchisable national expansion model.



Turelk, Newport Beach

Erin Pysnik, Director of Business Development

Turelk is Southern California's premier commercial general building contractor, specializing in high-end tenant interior construction, life sciences, and healthcare environments. Founded in 1978, the firm has grown into a regional powerhouse across Orange County, Los Angeles, and Long Beach. With nearly 48 years of experience, Turelk has expanded into specialized laboratory and technical facilities for biotech and aerospace sectors, earning consistent recognition as a top-tier



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contractor by the Orange County Business Journal and maintaining an industry-leading 90% repeat client rate. As Director of Business Development, Erin Pysnik has been a driving force behind Turelk's strategic growth. She leads pursuit strategy, client engagement, interview management, and cross-functional coordination across business development and operations. Her implementation of new pursuit management processes measurably improved win rates, accountability, and the quality of client-facing deliverables. She also expanded Project Executive involvement in key pursuits, strengthening client confidence and delivery outcomes. Beyond business results, Pysnik is a trusted mentor who invests in her team through coaching and guidance—making a lasting impact on both company culture and organizational performance.

UBS Financial Services, Newport Beach

Jennifer Povlitz, Vice Chair

UBS is a leading global wealth manager and financial services firm with more than 105,000 employees worldwide and approximately \$7 trillion in client invested assets. Jennifer Povlitz, CFA®, is Vice Chair and Managing Director in U.S. Global Wealth Management, where she helps guide the firm's highest-value clients and advisor teams to the right expertise and opportunities. Povlitz previously served as Division Director, where she helped grow the West division to \$5 billion in revenues and more than \$700 billion in client assets. Povlitz is widely recognized for bringing together wealth management, asset management, and banking capabilities to drive innovation and deliver integrated client solutions. Before joining UBS, she held senior leadership roles at Merrill Lynch and U.S. Trust, including co-leading Merrill Lynch's Private Banking group in New York, where she doubled the business, and leading the West Region from San Francisco, overseeing 43 offices, 800 advisors, and more than \$150 billion in client assets.



UCI Health, Orange

Tatyana Popkova, Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Vice President, Ambulatory

Tatyana Popkova serves as the Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Vice President of ambulatory services at UCI Health, one of California's largest academic health systems. In this unique and impactful role, she leads strategy formulation and execution, overseeing the following areas: network growth and operations of the UCI Health enterprise ambulatory division, strategic project management, marketing, communications, business development and consumer digital strategy. Since 2022, she has served UCI Health and the community in making high-quality, accessible academic medicine available more patients in Orange County than ever before.



uDirect IRA Services, LLC, Irvine

Kaaren Hall, CEO & Founder

Kaaren Hall is the Founder and CEO of uDirect IRA Services, LLC, a leading provider of self-directed IRA accounts since 2009. With over 20 years of experience in real estate, mortgage lending, and property management, she has helped thousands of investors take control of their retirement funds and invest in alternative assets, including real estate, private lending, and precious metals. A recognized expert in self-directed



retirement accounts, Hall is a sought-after speaker and has presented at major industry events, including BiggerPockets' BPCON conferences. She is also the founder of OCREIA (Orange County Real Estate Investors Association), where she has built a thriving investor community through education and networking since 2012.

University of California Irvine, Irvine

Kate Klimow, COO & Associate Vice Chancellor, Advancement Operations

Kate Klimow serves as Chief Operating Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor for University Advancement & Alumni Relations at UC Irvine, where she provides executive leadership, strategic planning and operational oversight to advance the university's fundraising and engagement priorities in support of the university's mission of excellence in teaching, research, and public service. At UC Irvine since 2012, she has previously led government relations for the university, served as Chief of Staff for Strategic Communication and led Beall Applied Innovation as Chief Administrative Officer. With experience in both public and private sectors, she has held key roles at the Disneyland Resort, KB Home, and Orange County Business Council, among other Fortune 500 companies and non-profit associations. UC Irvine delivers academic excellence and innovation that power opportunity and economic impact. Founded in 1965, UC Irvine is ranked among the nation's top 10 public universities by U.S. News & World Report. With more than 36,000 students, UCI is Orange County's second-largest employer, contributing \$7 billion annually to the local economy and \$8 billion statewide.



Vanguard University, Costa Mesa

Sandra L. Morgan, PhD, RN, Professor; Executive Director, Global Center for Women and Justice

Dr. Sandra Morgan has built a career at the intersection of healthcare, academia, ministry, and advocacy, becoming one of the most respected voices in the fight against human trafficking and violence against women and children. As Executive Director of the Global Center for Women and Justice (GCWJ) at Vanguard University, she leads a growing internationally recognized initiative focused on anti-trafficking research, prevention education, survivor advocacy and community collaboration. A tenured professor, registered nurse and ordained minister, Dr. Morgan has spent more than two decades building cross-sector partnerships that unite educators, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, policymakers, and nonprofit leaders to combat exploitation. Under her leadership, the GCWJ's annual Ensure Justice Conference has become a leading space for anti-trafficking education and advocacy, while the 371 "Ending Human Trafficking" podcast episodes reach listeners in 172 countries with more than 433,000 plays worldwide. Through her leadership, research and public advocacy, Dr. Morgan has helped position Orange County as a national leader in human trafficking prevention and response efforts.



Verus Aerospace, Anaheim

Joyce Pae, Chief Financial Officer

Verus Aerospace is a Private Equity backed Aerospace and Defense manufacturing company. Its corporate is in Anaheim, CA. Joyce Pae has been the Chief Financial Officer since 2018. She's completed 5 business acquisitions and a company spin-off. Before spin-off, the top-line

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was \$600 million. Since the spin-off, Verus showed double digit growth on topline, and expect similar growth in '27. As a Chief Financial Officer, Pae manages both finance and HR, focused on topline growth, cash generations, and talent management. Pae completed five business acquisition and a company spin-off. During Covid, she's managed the cash flow & liquidity, with 40% reduction in sales. She's a result-oriented leader with integrity, vision, and authenticity. She supports the top-line growth, yet focuses on cost control, to boost higher bottom line and cash growth.

VF Developments LLC, Costa Mesa

Victoria Vu, Victoria

As a first generation Asian American female and a leader and trendsetter in the Halloween costume and lingerie industry, Victoria Venice Vu has taken her passion and trend setting skills in fashion design and business and applied them to real estate development. In 2015, she founded and is Managing Partner of VF Developments, LLC. VF Developments, LLC strives itself with strength, honor, and integrity to provide emerging neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles and Orange Counties to develop Class "A" building and design finishes at affordable market rents to our new residents. VF Developments, LLC has acquired and transformed over a dozen properties to throughout high demand, gentrifying areas in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. VF Developments, LLC hunts for investment opportunities and creates significant value for our clients and investors. We manage a multitude of processes including finding unique, off market opportunities, syndicating properties, and overseeing renovations with our team. With a solid design background from the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandise, Vu along with her foreign team converts her extensive fashion design skills into unique architectural and interior compositions transforming distressed multi-family properties into modern, award winning market-ready apartment home communities.

Villa Roma & Cambalache Grill, Laguna Hills

Teresa Razo, CEO & Owner

Teresa Razo is the Owner of Villa Roma and Cambalache Grill in Orange County. Both restaurants are family owned and operated. Their staff is family, a family that serves their community. Both their restaurants serve Argentine & Italian cuisine, but most importantly, both feed the soul of their community. Their mission and purpose are to take care of their community, as their community has taken care of them! Their community has enjoyed and preferred their food and service for over 20 years. Their restaurants have been able to continue against all statistics and life events. Their second location, Cambalache was able to break even within the first month which is a testament of the love and support they have from their community. As they continue their hospitality journey, they will also continue to serve their community in all aspects and continue feeding their soul.

Visit Newport Beach, Newport Beach

Ashley Johnson, Senior Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer

Orange County native Ashley Johnson, CDME, is an award-winning destination marketing executive whose 20-year career in hospitality and tourism is a testament to purposeful leadership and genuine love for Southern California. As Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer for Visit Newport Beach, the official destination marketing organization for one of the most renowned cities on the West Coast, she steers the nonprofit's full marketing strategy, from advertising and press communications to digital innovation, community relations, and business intelligence. A proud member of the executive leadership team, Johnson shapes Newport Beach's global brand and drives the meaningful economic impact that sustains local businesses and communities. Before this chapter, she spent 16 years at Visit Laguna Beach, including six as President & CEO, where she elevated a beloved coastal town into a world-recognized destination. Holding the prestigious Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) designation and a journalism degree from the University of Arizona, Johnson brings both strategic rigor and a storyteller's heart to everything she does.

VitalConnect, San Jose

Haley Schwartz, VP Marketing

VitalConnect is a healthcare technology company focused on expanding access to medical technology and improving patient care through connected solutions. Haley Schwartz serves as VP of Marketing, bringing more than a decade of medical device commercialization experience and a track record of launching products globally while maintaining compliance, safety, and efficacy. Prior to VitalConnect, Schwartz led enterprise go-to-market strategy at AliveCor as VP, Enterprise Marketing, expanding commercialization of the Kardia portfolio across hospital systems, including initiatives such as Kardia 12L for HCPs and a Veteran Program. Earlier, she held progressively senior roles at Edwards Lifesciences across engineering, clinical, sales, and global product management, leading global market strategies for a capital medical device platform and contributing to revenue growth from \$30 million to \$100 million in three years. Schwartz is a published author (Innovation in Nephrology, Elsevier), fluent in French and English, and holds a B.S. in Biomedical Engineering from RPI.

Vivid Creative House, Costa Mesa

Melissa Morrison, Founder

Vivid Creative House is a full-service event, communications, and culture agency headquartered in Costa Mesa, California. Founded in 2025, the boutique firm serves corporate organizations nationwide across three integrated practice areas: Events, Communications, and Culture. In its first year, the agency has grown from a solo venture into a networked operation with preferred vendor relationships, delivering boutique-level service for mid- to large-scale corporate clients with project budgets ranging from \$75,000 to \$10 million. At the helm is Melissa Morrison, Founder and Principal. Morrison brings more than 15 years of corporate experience



spanning event production, strategic communications, and organizational culture; including a decade in VP-level leadership at a publicly traded global company. She holds an MBA from USC's Marshall School of Business and a BA from UC Santa Barbara. Since launching Vivid Creative House, Morrison has self-sourced all client engagements and earned a reputation grounded in strategic alignment, flawless execution, and on-budget delivery.

Walsworth LLP, Irvine

Dee Cohen Katz, Managing Partner

Dee Cohen Katz has reshaped Walsworth into one of California's fastest-growing, majority women-owned law firms. Katz joined Walsworth in 1995 as an associate attorney, became an equity partner in 2004, and was appointed Managing Partner in 2019. As Managing Partner, she drives strategic growth while sustaining an active legal practice. Katz has helped substantially increase firm revenue and has grown the firm's employees more than 10% within the past 12 months, positioning Walsworth as an influential, forward-thinking firm committed to excellence and inclusion. Walsworth is a certified majority women-owned law firm with over 65 attorneys across California and its primary office in Orange County and is the largest California-based member of the National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF). Currently celebrating 10 years as a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE), the firm drives innovation, delivers exceptional legal results, and consistently earns recognition for its results and diversity from organizations such as The Daily Journal, Law360, and the Orange County Women Lawyers Association.



Waymakers, Irvine

Ronnetta Johnson, CEO

Ronnetta Johnson is a committed professional, spending more than 40 years in nonprofit leadership roles. She joined the Orange County nonprofit Waymakers in 1995, holding several key positions in advance of her appointment to CEO in 2015. In 2025 she marked her thirtieth year with Waymakers. Johnson's dedicated leadership has strengthened Waymakers' role as a well respected Orange County non-profit. With over 50 years of service to the community, Waymakers provides crisis support, stabilization, and coping skills for children, young adults, and other vulnerable populations involved in the criminal justice and mental health systems. Johnson's leadership has continued to build on the organization's historic roots as one of the first nonprofits in the region to shelter youth ages 11 to 25 and address critical community needs.



Western National Property Management, Irvine

Laura Khouri, President & COO

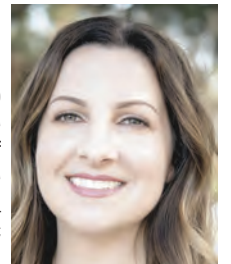
Laura Khouri is a visionary leader whose four-decade career has made a lasting impact. As President and COO of Western National Property Management (WNPM), she oversees one of the largest multifamily portfolios in California, leading 750 associates and managing more than 25,000 apartment homes across Southern California and Nevada, representing over \$8.8 billion in assets. Khouri has held executive leadership roles spanning operations, human resources, training and development, risk management, investor relations, and ancillary services. Her leadership style has also made her a powerful advocate for future leaders within the industry. She is a sought-after industry speaker and panelist, where Khouri openly shares her experience and expertise to inspire others to pursue leadership with confidence and authenticity. Even during challenging economic conditions, Khouri's leadership has driven WNPM's portfolio growth by 16% over the past 13 months. She spearheaded WNPM's landmark partnership with the Anaheim Ducks, making WNPM the first management company featured on a professional sports jersey. Widely respected as a speaker, mentor, and industry advocate, Khouri exemplifies excellence, leadership, and lasting service. If you meet Khouri, it doesn't take long to realize she is a truly special person, someone you genuinely want to know and keep in your life. She leaves a lasting impression on everyone she meets.



WISEPlace, Santa Ana

Brateil Aghasi, CEO

Brateil Aghasi is the CEO of WISEPlace and a visionary leader dedicated to serving women experiencing homelessness. She has led over \$30 million in new affordable housing developments across Santa Ana, Lake Forest, and Mission Viejo—creating more than 51 units for survivors of domestic violence, seniors, and other vulnerable populations, marking the first housing projects in WISEPlace's 96-year history. She champions a trauma-informed model that integrates mental health care, therapeutic support, and financial empowerment to provide lasting stability. Since 2018, when the organization faced closure, Aghasi has tripled both revenue and the number of individuals served. Her honors include Santa Ana Chamber Person of the Year (2020), Nonprofit of the Year (2021), and National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Agency Leader of the Year (2011).



YCM CPA INC., Irvine

Yiru Shi, CEO & Founder

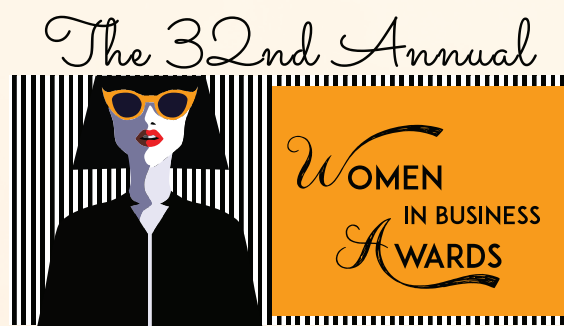
Yiru Melody Shi is the Founder of YCM CPA INC., a fast-growing international accounting firm established in August 2020. Specializing in high-stakes SEC audits, the firm supports a diverse global clientele spanning the United States, Europe, and Asia. Under her visionary leadership, YCM has expanded rapidly to a dedicated team of 40 global employees, generating \$6.8 million in revenue in 2025. A testament to the firm's elite technical capability, YCM has two clients listed on Nasdaq in 2025 alone. In addition to this flagship venture, Shi co-founded North America CPA Alliance Corp in 2020. She has successfully scaled this partnership into a highly profitable, million-dollar tax and accounting firm. Beyond her extensive professional achievements and entrepreneurial success, Shi remains deeply committed to social impact. She actively serves her community by volunteering her time and donating financial resources to various non-profit organizations.





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Miller Castings, Inc. Jennifer Laird
Miracles for Kids Autumn Strier
Mountain Mike's Pizza, LLC Carol DeNembo
Murtaugh LLP Michelle Generaux
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Musick Peeler & Garrett LLP Natasha Wu
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My Mountain Mover Amanda Desuacido
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New Directions For Women
Heather Black-Coyne
Newmark Julie Rios
NuBella Med Spa Brandy Casey
OC CEO Collective Anne Tammel
OC Growth Advisors Marla Noel
Octane Janelle Brunette
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Operations Edit Lacy Picklo
Orange Coast College Patricia Falzon
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Orange County United Way
Ann Truxaw Ramirez
Orangewood Foundation Tiffany Mitchell
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Danielle Fragalla
Performance Contracting, Inc. (PCI)
Karina Eshilian
**Planned Parenthood of Orange and
San Bernardino Counties** Krista Hollinger
Pollinator Protection Fund Laura Ford
Power Pulse EMS Personal Training
Devon Belanger
Premier Workspaces Amy Fuller
Pretend City Children's Museum Ellen Pais

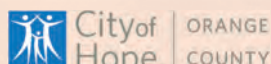
Pro-Dex, Inc. Alisha Charlton
Progeny Psychiatric Clinic Dr. Linda Trinh
Project Hope Alliance Jennifer Friend
Project Youth OC Bianca Carranco
Project Youth OC Laura Marcum
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