



The profile of the Business Woman of the Year winner is on Page 1



# San Diego Business Journal 2017 BUSINESS Women OF THE YEAR awards



Profiles of Lifetime Achievement and Courage Award honorees - Page 24  
Profiles of the nine other winners - Page 28



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# Letter From The Publisher



San Diego's economy has much going for it, but no element is more dynamic or encouraging than its brilliant and diversely talented population of executives who happen to be women.

The San Diego Business Journal is proud to have the longest-running recognition program in our area for women business leaders at 24 consecutive years. This year's roster of nominees and winners is superb, a shining sample of what makes our region strong and our future bright.

In these pages you will read about women from just about every industry segment San Diego has to offer. Their accomplishments are impressive and worthy of celebration.

This year's Business Women of the Year competition was our toughest yet. We went through two rounds of judging, first cutting the field almost in half, and then submitting our 100 finalists to our panel of judges for the selection of winners, grouped by company size. And for the first time, in addition to the category winners, we announced an overall Business Woman of the Year, the executive who achieved the highest score from our judges.

That very-deserving winner is Illumina's Dawn Barry. I think everyone in town understands what a big impact Illumina will have on our region and the global life-sciences field, but when you read our profile of Barry, you'll get a deeper appreciation of the human talent driving it, and the company culture at Illumina that lets executives such as Barry excel.

We also were honored to give special recognition to Marine Corps Lance Corporal

(ret.) Sarah Rudder; her ability to overcome the most horrifying of circumstances and become a dedicated community leader truly inspired our audience.

And what a thrill it was to have Lifetime Award winner Judi Sheppard Missett at our Nov. 15 celebration. The Jazzercise founder and CEO has admirers around the world, and after her talk, it was easy to see why.

All of our winners displayed grace and class in their comments to the audience. Everyone at the San Diego Business Journal is honored to celebrate their achievements and share their stories with you.

Special thanks to our sponsors who make the Business Women of the Year Awards possible: Title sponsor Union Bank and Gold sponsors Kaiser Permanente and MRC. It's gratifying to work with partners who understand the importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of women in business.

After reading this special section, I'm sure you will agree with me that San Diego has amazing women business leaders. They make us feel grateful and optimistic about the future of our local economy.

Sincere congratulations and thanks to all of our finalists and winners. We can't wait to see what you will achieve in 2018.

Huntley Paton  
President and Publisher  
San Diego Business Journal

San Diego Business Journal  
**2017** BUSINESS  
WOMEN  
OF THE YEAR  
awards

## Judges



**Kim Folsom**  
Co-Founder  
Founders First  
Capital Partners  
LLC

Kim Folsom is a high tech executive and serial entrepreneur with more than 25 years of expertise growing innovative technology companies. She has experience founding, leading and building startups for which she raised \$30 million in institutional venture financing.



**DeLinda Forsythe**  
CEO/Founder  
Innovative  
Commercial  
Environments

DeLinda Forsythe has thrived in the contract furniture industry for more than 30 years. She founded ICE in 2006, and the company has grown to be named in the Top 100 Fastest Growing Companies in San Diego from 2013 to 2016. Inc magazine ranked ICE in the top 5000 Fastest Growing Companies in the U.S. 2014 to 2017.



**Alessandra Lezama**  
CEO  
Abacus Next

Alessandra Lezama assumed the role of CEO for Abacus Data Systems in 2013. Under her leadership the company has experienced a corporate growth rate of 250 percent and the addition of more than 100 employees.



**Crystal Sargent**  
Founder/CEO  
Invested Advisors  
Inc./Invested  
Traveler

Crystal Sargent has executive experience in commercial, private and retail banks, including building and leading sales and corporate marketing teams. Her diverse endeavors include being a guest lecturer for Roskilde University in Copenhagen, Denmark.



**Nancy Rohland-Heinrich**  
Executive Vice  
President  
National  
University

Nancy Rohland-Heinrich has worked in education for over three decades. She is involved in community organizations supporting education, the military and business community.

## 2017 Business Women of the Year Finalists

- |  |   |   |  |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Jennifer Barnes</b><br>Pro Back Office                                      | <b>Wendy Cohen</b><br>Kitchell  | <b>Flossie Hall</b><br>Healthy Momma  | <b>Becky Kahn</b><br>AMN Healthcare Services, Inc. | <b>Sheri Nasim</b><br>Center for Executive Excellence, Inc.             | <b>Deborah Solomon</b><br>Kid Ventures                                   |
| <b>Dawn Barry</b><br>Illumina  | <b>Jaye Connolly-LaBelle</b><br>RippleNami, Inc.  | <b>Sheree Harrison</b><br>CBIZ MHM LLC  | <b>Bonnie Khang-Keating</b><br>Smith Group JJR     | <b>Margie Newman</b><br>Intesa Communications Group, LLC                | <b>Michelle Stansbury</b><br>Little Penguin PR                           |
| <b>Amber Baynard</b><br>Bill Howe Plumbing, Heating & Air, Restoration & Flood | <b>Elisabeth Cullington</b><br>HoyleCohen LLC   | <b>Mervat Hassan</b><br>UBS Financial Services, Inc.  | <b>Julie Kilpatrick</b><br>JLL                     | <b>Karmin Noar</b><br>San Diego Workforce Partnership                   | <b>Grace Staten</b><br>MassMutual  |
| <b>Denise Bevers</b><br>KindredBio   | <b>Susanne de la Flor</b><br>Litivate Reporting + Trial Services                            | <b>Charla Heimer</b><br>McKinney Capital & Advisory   | <b>Sondra Kiss</b><br>Kissinger Group              | <b>Kristin Norby-Moseman</b><br>Morgan Stanley                          | <b>Nia Stefani</b><br>Xnergy Financial LLC                               |
| <b>Allison Blake</b><br>WorthPointe  | <b>Norma Diaz</b><br>Community Health Group   | <b>Angelina Hendricks</b><br>Verimatrix   | <b>Danna Korn</b><br>Sonic Boom Wellness           | <b>Kristie Nova</b><br>Bespoke Partners                                 | <b>Carolyn Taylor</b><br>Weatherly Asset Management                      |
| <b>Jennifer Borba von Stauffenberg</b><br>Olive Creative Strategies            | <b>Amber Eck</b><br>Haeggquist & Eck LLP  | <b>Bretton Hevener</b><br>Sleep Data  | <b>Erin Krehbiel</b><br>ACI Specialty Benefits     | <b>Kristie Nova</b><br>Bespoke Partners                                 | <b>Shireen Thor</b><br>Maria Shireen                                     |
| <b>Shari Brasher</b><br>Fresh Start Surgical Gifts                             | <b>Sheila Eivazi</b><br>Costanzo Financial Group  | <b>Tara Hoffman</b><br>Bob Hoffman Photography & Video                                      | <b>Cecilia Kucharski</b><br>Balfour Beatty US      | <b>Danielle O'Connor</b><br>Moss Adams LLP                              | <b>Robin Toft</b><br>Toft Group Executive Search                         |
| <b>Sara Brown</b><br>Sara Brown Events   | <b>Elizabeth Fitzsimons</b><br>San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce                       | <b>Stephanie Holly</b><br>Tide Rock Ventures  | <b>Susan Kuruvilla</b><br>Managed Solution         | <b>Kim Perell</b><br>Amobee   | <b>Jessica Toth</b><br>Solana Center for Environmental Innovation        |
| <b>Tara Burd</b><br>T.Burd Law Group, APC                                      | <b>Bre'an Fox</b><br>FS Design Group  | <b>Star Hughes-Gorup</b><br>Hughes Marino, Inc.   | <b>Michelle Lai</b><br>Taiyo Yuden (U.S.A.) Inc.   | <b>Ilana Plumer</b><br>Main Path Marketing                              | <b>Susan Tousi</b><br>Illumina   |
| <b>Anel Califano</b><br>MUFU Union Bank  | <b>Denise Jackson</b><br>Balboa Travel  | <b>Kimberly Jackson</b><br>Kaiser Permanente Insurance Company & Junior League of San Diego | <b>Wendy Lanahan</b><br>Qualcomm Incorporated      | <b>Courtney Prato</b><br>Vistage Worldwide, Inc.                        | <b>Brooke Valle</b><br>San Diego Workforce Partnership                   |
| <b>Jolanta Campion</b><br>Cushman & Wakefield                                  | <b>Kimberly Jackson</b><br>Kaiser Permanente Insurance Company & Junior League of San Diego | <b>Agnes Lee</b><br>ResMed  | <b>Agnes Lee</b><br>ResMed                         | <b>Heather Riley</b><br>Allen Matkins                                   | <b>Felicia Vieira</b><br>Crafted Cocktails                               |
| <b>Carin Canale Theakston</b><br>Canale Communications                         | <b>Kara Jensen</b><br>Bop Design  | <b>Mary Lockwood</b><br>Mindera   | <b>Mary Lockwood</b><br>Mindera                    | <b>Olivia Roemer</b><br>TAG   | <b>Michele Vives</b><br>Douglas Wilson Companies                         |
| <b>Cashmere Carrillo</b><br>Beauty Bakerie Cosmetics Brand                     | <b>Nan Jiang</b><br>BioLegend, Inc.   | <b>Silvia Mah</b><br>Hera Labs  | <b>Silvia Mah</b><br>Hera Labs                     | <b>Dawn Saunders</b><br>Crosbie Gliner Schiffman Southard & Swanson LLP | <b>Ina von Ber</b><br>The Ambassadorial Roundtable                       |
| <b>Kristin Carroll</b><br>Rescue Agency  | <b>Stephanie Jimenez</b><br>First Associates Loan Servicing, LLC                            | <b>Laura Maly</b><br>Wonderist Agency   | <b>Laura Maly</b><br>Wonderist Agency              | <b>Rachel Scatizzi Thompson</b><br>Smith & Scatizzi LLP                 | <b>Kathleen Webber</b><br>California Manufacturing Technology Consulting |
| <b>Deana Carter</b><br>Carter Financial  | <b>Salma Jutt</b><br>Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc.  | <b>Gina Marsaglia</b><br>Pizza Port   | <b>Gina Marsaglia</b><br>Pizza Port                | <b>Terry Schmidt</b><br>Guild Mortgage                                  | <b>Amber Yoo</b><br>SKY Facial Plastic Surgery, Inc.                     |
| <b>Kecia Caughey</b><br>South Coast Copy Systems                               | <b>Kristin Kahle</b><br>NavigateHCR   | <b>Stacy Mendes</b><br>Underground Elephant   | <b>Stacy Mendes</b><br>Underground Elephant        | <b>Julie Seal-Gaustad</b><br>Mirus Promotions, Inc.                     | <b>Yuanyuan Zhou</b><br>Whova, Inc.                                      |
| <b>Gina Champion-Cain</b><br>American National Investments, Inc.               | <b>Alreen Haeggquist</b><br>Haeggquist & Eck LLP  | <b>Shanna Missett Nelson</b><br>Jazzercise, Inc.  | <b>Shanna Missett Nelson</b><br>Jazzercise, Inc.   | <b>Diane Sikora</b><br>Tri-City Medical Center                          |  |



# When women succeed, everyone wins

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**Union Bank is proud to sponsor the San Diego Business Journal's Business Women of the Year Awards. Congratulations to our own nominee Anel Califano, along with the many talented women who were nominated and awarded this year.**

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## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

# Jazzercise Founder Remains Energetic Force in Fitness World

■ By PATTI ANDERSON

“Why Not?”

With those two words **Judi Sheppard Missett**’s mother instilled the best advice any young visionary needed to follow her dreams. And with that inspiration, Missett founded a dynasty that changed the face of fitness for generations of women around the world.

Missett pioneered the dance aerobics movement with her innovative Jazzercise concept, connecting with an untapped audience and, in the process, building a global corporation that continues to dominate in the lucrative health and wellness industry. With international headquarters in Carlsbad, the company today spans more than 30 countries with 8,300 franchises. Entrepreneur.com credits **Jazzercise** as one of the most valuable franchises in the world with annual revenues of about \$100 million.

While still a college student at **Northwestern University** in Evanston, Illinois, Missett started the company, inspired by a well-known jazz dance impresario.

Missett remembers, “He gave me the go ahead to turn my students away from the mirror. You could say Jazzercise was born in his studio.”

In the early days of leg warmers and Lycra, Missett found just the right groove that attracted women nonplused by the masculine-fueled gym workouts dominated by Jack LaLanne and Joe Gold. Her distinctive approach, combining high energy dance, targeted exercise and aerobic workouts, has proved an enduring business model that has continued to maintain devotees through the years of fitness fads and ever-changing exercise styles. The average customer stays with the program for seven years.

Moving to Carlsbad in 1972, Missett grew the company not only through classes, but by selling VCR tapes for home use (a revolutionary concept at the time).

Missett has kept the company a family affair. Though she is still very actively involved with oversight as CEO; her daughter, **Shanna Missett Nelson**, has taken the helm as president. Missett still keeps herself in killer shape, leading the occasional class, and sometimes joined by her two granddaughters.

Missett has used her success to reach out to communities and give back. Jazzercise has raised more than \$28 million for a variety of charities with ongoing indoor and outdoor events. Missett has been recognized with many honors including the Gus Giordano Legacy Award (named for her mentor) in October.

In 2016 Missett was invited to the White House as part of the prestigious State of Women Summit which included launching an initiative called “GirlForce.”

With this program Missett said, “I’m proudest of the fact that we’ve opened our



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

In founding Jazzercise, Judi Sheppard Missett has led the creation of more than 8,300 franchise operations in 30 countries.

Oceanside and Carlsbad Jazzercise centers to young women, 16-21, and offered them free classes through 2017.”

Missett still travels as a much sought after keynote speaker and is a featured blogger for Huffington Post. The company will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. Missett says: “I can’t wait to tick that one off the bucket list.”

## COURAGE AWARD

# Marine Veteran Finds Her Calling, Inspiration in Competition



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Sarah Rudder’s message at the Business Women of the Year event was to find an avenue to fulfill your passion, whether it was in business or sports or anything else.

■ By PATTI ANDERSON

On Sept. 11, 2001, a day that devastated the lives of so many, **Sarah Rudder** was being promoted to Lance Corporal in the **U.S. Marine Corps** in front of The Pentagon when American Airlines’ Flight 77 crashed into the building. She immediately became part of the rescue operation, pulling survivors and non-survivors from the building, though she had sustained an earlier ankle injury during the Marine’s intense “Crucible” boot camp training. With adrenaline and her desire to do as much as she could carrying her through the rest of the day and night, she did not realize that a fallen concrete block had reinjured her ankle.

For years, Rudder battled with her injury, undergoing five surgeries to save her fractured leg. Each surgery gave her hope, a chance that her leg might heal and allow her to return to the work she loved. But the decision to amputate in 2014 was ultimately what gave her back the life she wanted. She overcame a blood clot in her first year as an amputee and found a way to heal both inside and out when a group of fellow Marine veterans invited her to start competing in sports.

Since then, the Temecula resident has found a calling in competition. At the 2016 Invictus Games, she became the first American to win gold and, with seven medals to her name, became the most decorated competitor of the Games. This September she won five medals while competing at nine events at the Invictus Games in Toronto. Great Britain’s Prince Harry, who founded the event in 2014 as an international competition for wounded service members, awarded Rudder her first gold medal. Rudder’s husband, son, sister, and parents were on hand to watch her race to victory.

Rudder has become a tireless advocate for wounded warriors who never give up fighting. She served as an ambassador at the DoD Warrior Games in Chicago earlier this year, helping the new athletes.

“As an ambassador, it was an honor because I was able to see the first steps of new athletes coming in and to look at them, knowing that they’re making a change in their lives just the way I did, I couldn’t be more proud of them,” she said.



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## BUSINESS WOMAN OF THE YEAR

## Women:

→ from page 1

2017 Business Woman of the Year.

“San Diego can show the world what’s possible in terms of deploying genomics in a meaningful way,” Barry said in a Nov. 16 interview, less than 24 hours after winning the award.

San Diego life sciences giant Illumina drove down the cost of studying genomes — an organism’s complete set of DNA — to where it’s a routine diagnostic test. Now the company is applying its sequencing technology to more fields, with Barry playing a critical role.

**Crime Fighting**

Barry oversees six teams spanning complex disease to preventative genomics to criminal casework.

In just the last year, she took the lead in Illumina spinning out **Verogen**, a San Diego startup that develops, manufactures and sells forensic products and services. With Illumina’s sequencing technology, crime labs can make matches in tricky cases with degraded DNA, or DNA of multiple people.

“The technology really fit an unmet need in matters of justice,” Barry said.

She was the executive sponsor of a partnership that resulted in the launch of the Illumina Bio-Rad Single-Cell Sequencing Solution, a product for studying the biology of individual cells to better understand complex disease. And those are just two highlights in a year of new products and inked partnerships. All told, revenue from the six business areas

she oversees exceeds \$1 billion annually.

For Barry, personal loss underscored the importance of genomics. In 2012, both her parents died of cancer within a year of each other. She was left wondering if sequencing technology could have detected the diseases sooner, or if they could have been treated with greater precision.

“State-of-the-art in cancer is still burning with radiation, poisoning with chemo and chopping out tissue. So having to endure that and then hospice for both parents, you sit there and say, ‘We can do a heck of a lot better.’”

She spoke about the experience during the conference TEDxSanDiego 2016.

Right after their deaths, she buried herself in work, declining to pause. It was only when her boss called her out that she allowed herself to grieve. For some, sadness is debilitating. Barry considers it motivating in a way.

**Lifesaving Work**

“Sadness powers me to work every day, focused on how we can keep people healthy by leveraging the power of the genome,” she told the audience.

Genetics, she noted, play a role in nine out of 10 leading causes of U.S. deaths. So, Barry advocated for engaging the community to ensure more are sequenced, both so individuals have a better picture of potential health risks and so scientists have more data to draw from to learn how environmental factors influence disease.

She can also be found in front of audiences promoting science in general, from **Girl Scouts** to seniors.

Offstage, she’s sought to attract and anchor genomics companies to San Diego, including helping establish the brand Genomics Capital of the World. And she’s a driving force of Understand Your Genome, which promotes personalized medicine in the medical community. Currently the organization is partnered with the **San Diego Venture Group** to stimulate investment in genomics among high-profile venture capitalists.

**Genomics Capital**

“This is absolutely the genomics capital of the world. The collaboration that you get from researchers to clinicians to big data people to high tech people — everybody is just passionate about making an impact.”

Barry grew up gardening and surrounded by animals in Connecticut, sparking an interest in science. So she got a bachelor’s degree in biology from the **University of Vermont**, and then a master of business administration from the **University of Connecticut School of Business**.

Marrying business and science gave her the ability to turn insights into action.

“I like to be that bridge — to really get the science out,” she said.

Barry combines a passion for genomics with a keen understanding of how to apply data, said **Eric Topol**, executive vice president and professor of molecular medicine at **The Scripps Research Institute**. He’s worked alongside Barry on a number of projects, including speaking at an Understand Your Genome event.

“She is really one of the great leaders in life science who I’ve met over the years,”

Topol said.

She believes genomics holds potential to tackle the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Take food security.

Earlier this year, Illumina donated sequencing technology to the **African Orphan Crops Consortium** in Kenya to study the genetic characteristics of critical crops. This will allow plant breeders to boost crop disease resistance and yields, a project that falls under her business area.

What’s next for San Diego’s genomics scene? Barry said for those eyeing setting up a genomics business in San Diego, she wants to put together a primer on where labs could set up, the big players in the space and other key information. For that reason she co-founded the **NP Genomics Society**.

Ever an evangelist, she wants those who aren’t steeped in the field to get involved, too.

“It takes a community to drive meaningful change. And so we can’t just be science people and laboratorians and expect the world to change. We really have to make it an inclusive conversation.”

San Diego Business Journal  
**2017 BUSINESS Women OF THE YEAR awards**

## Congratulations Kim Perell, Amobee CEO on her recognition by the San Diego Business Journal for the Business Woman of the Year Awards!



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ON BEING NAMED A “2017 BUSINESS WOMEN OF THE YEAR” FINALIST.

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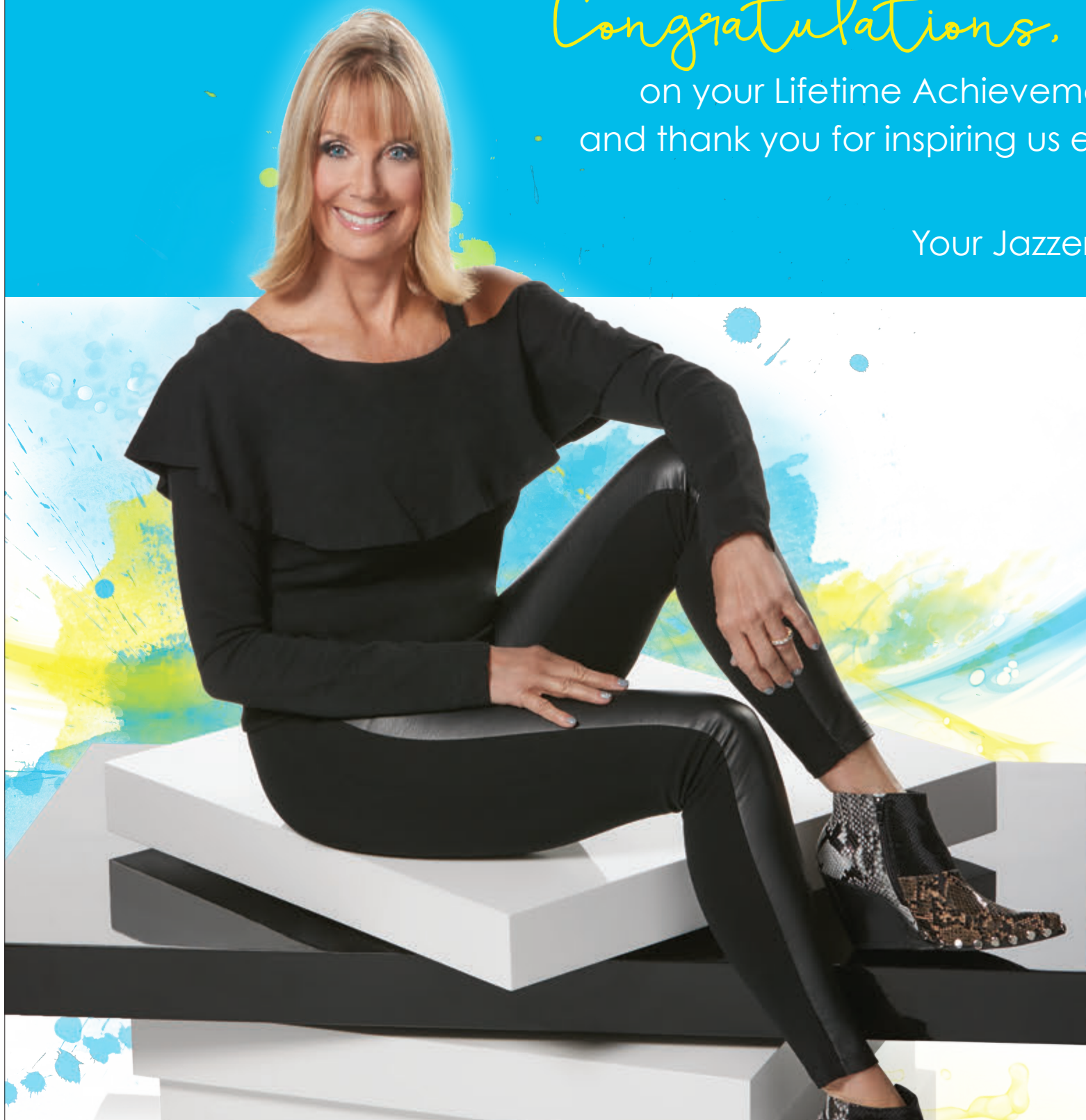
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*Congratulations, Judi*

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## SMALL BUSINESS CATEGORY

## As Name Suggests, RippleNami CEO's Influence is Spreading

■ By JOE TASH

As the chairman and CEO of **RippleNami Inc.**, **Jaye Connolly-LaBelle** has a way of making things happen.

Since the San Diego-based global technology company was founded in 2015, she has secured funding, signed up customers, and ramped up operations on two continents, Africa and Europe.

While company founder and chief business development officer **Phil Gahn** is out in the field, seeking new opportunities to expand RippleNami's business, Connolly-LaBelle is pulling the levers to drive the company forward.

"I'm all about execution and strategy," she said.

Her colleague, Gahn, has said of her, "She gets (stuff) done."

"Dust does not settle under her feet. She moves," said **Terry Dunmire**, a member of RippleNami's board of directors.

The company was named for the concept of taking a ripple of data and turning it into a tsunami of information, said Connolly-LaBelle, 54, who has a background in mergers and acquisitions, as well as corporate turnarounds.

RippleNami's app relies on data stored in a blockchain platform, which can be viewed as a map on a smartphone or tablet. Examples of its uses so far include mapping wells in Africa to help people find clean water more quickly and efficiently, and a database of services for

military veterans in the U.K.

In recognition of Connolly-LaBelle's work on RippleNami, she was honored Nov. 15 at the San Diego Business Journal's Business Women of the Year awards, in the small company category.

RippleNami's app has the potential of mapping many different types of data, from road networks and schools to areas impacted by disease or conflict. The idea is to put the data in a map that can be used to conduct business transactions, allocate resources and "connect unconnected people to the resources they need not only to survive but to thrive," she said.

"They can start to visualize their world, what is meaningful in their world," she said. "Everything they need is right there at their fingertips."

#### Background of Acquisitions

Previously in her business career, Connolly-LaBelle has served as president and CEO of **PathCentral Inc.**, which was acquired by **XIFIN**; president and CEO of **A-Life Medical Inc.**, which was acquired by **United Health Group**; vice president of business development and mergers and acquisitions at **InSight Health Corp.**; and director of internal audit at **LabCorp**.

One of the company's current initiatives is working with the government of the West African nation of Sierra Leone to create a "smart country," by digitiz-

ing information about its resources, and plugging that data into RippleNami's mapping software, Connolly-LaBelle said.

She estimates that so far, the company's efforts have touched 20 million people in Africa and the U.K. Now that RippleNami's Kenya office is open, Gahn has moved on to Southeast Asia to explore business opportunities in that region.

"We don't sleep very much," she admitted.

#### A Cancer Survivor

Beyond her role with RippleNami, Connolly-LaBelle serves on the board of **Walden Family Services**, which provides support for young people who have been in the foster youth system. She and her husband, **James LaBelle**, chief medical officer for **Scripps Health**, are both cancer survivors, and they also support efforts to fight the disease.

Her daughter, **Kiley**, a law school graduate, was recently awaiting word on whether she had passed the California bar exam.

One of the activities Connolly-LaBelle and her husband enjoy is travel. Connolly-LaBelle recently returned from a trip to South Africa, and her next voyage will take her to Patagonia. She also loves climbing mountains.

"My goal is to see everything in the world, every country," she said.



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

**Jaye Connolly-LaBelle is praised for her vision, energy and execution.**

Perhaps the same drive that pushes Connolly-LaBelle to travel the world and climb mountains also fuels her business success.

"She's one of those people you just can't stop. Once she's made her mind up, it's going to happen," said RippleNami board member **Parker Hinshaw**.

**KITCHELL**

**Wendy Cohen // KITCHELL**  
VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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*noun*

a person who introduces new methods, ideas, or products

See also: visionary, creator, pioneer, trailblazer

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## SMALL BUSINESS CATEGORY

# Diversity A High Priority for Biotech Executive Search Firm

■ By JOE TASH

For **Robin Toft**, placing women and minorities in executive positions in the life sciences sector is more than just a job.

"It's just been a blast, my passion project," said Toft, 57, founder and CEO of the **Toft Group Executive Search**, an executive search firm headquartered in San Diego.

She and her firm have been recognized through awards and their industry reputation for placing women into 42 percent of the executive slots they have filled for clients.

Toft's most recent accolade came Nov. 15, when she was an honoree in the small business category of the 2017 Business Women of the Year Awards, put on by the San Diego Business Journal.

Creating a more diverse workforce at the intersection of biotech and high-tech isn't just the right thing to do, according to Toft - she is convinced diversity can help boost a company's fortunes.

"We've made a huge effort to know female talent. Studies show a diverse company is more innovative," she said.

Over the first two decades of her career, Toft worked as a biotech executive. She served at such firms as **Roche**, **ViroLogic Inc.** (now **Monogram Biosciences**), **LabCorp** and **SmithKline Beecham Clinical Laboratories**. In 2006, she changed

career paths and joined **Sanford Rose Associates**, a San Francisco-based executive search firm specializing in the life sciences, where she was managing director.

She founded the Toft Group in 2010, and the firm now has 18 employees (14 of them women) in three major biotech hubs - San Diego, San Francisco and Boston. They handle about 100 executive search assignments annually, a number that is growing, Toft said.

Toft's understanding of the life sciences industry and the different roles for which she recruits set her apart in the executive search field, said **Maggie Osburn**, a member of Toft's advisory board.

And her experience fighting colon cancer (she was diagnosed in 2005) left her with a deep appreciation of the importance of her work.

"These companies are saving lives," Osburn said of the Toft Group's clients.

## Personal Hurdles

Toft's battle with cancer, as well as losing her home in the 2007 San Diego wildfires, have demonstrated her resilience and fortitude, said Osburn.

"She's fair, smart, hard-working, tenacious and loyal," said Osburn. "She owns the search as if she was CEO of the company and it was her position she was trying to fill."

The Toft Group doesn't waste time,

either, when it is working to fill an executive position for one of its clients. Some 60 percent of the placed job candidates are identified within two weeks of the search initiation, and included on the first slate of candidates presented to clients, according to the firm's website.

## Community Commitment

In addition to her work with the Toft Group, Toft serves on the boards of the **Scripps Mercy Hospital Foundation**, the **Clarity Foundation** in support of ovarian cancer patients and **LEAD San Diego**, which helps to develop civically engaged leaders.

She also puts on her sneakers to participate in the annual Susan G. Komen walk to support breast cancer research, which she has done since 2010. She took part in the latest edition of the three-day, 60-mile fundraising walk in November.

When she's not helping clients find the right match for an open position, Toft enjoys hiking and taking her three labs out on the trail, as well as yoga and working out in the gym.

She has also been bitten by the travel bug, and among her favorite destinations are Hawaii and Africa, which she has visited multiple times.

But she may derive the most satisfaction of all from her job.

"It doesn't feel like work," she said.



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Robin Toft has carved out a niche in executive search for biotech firms, not just in San Diego but nationally.

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## SMALL BUSINESS CATEGORY

## CEO Guides Charity Through Expansion to Additional Markets

■ By JOE TASH

Shari Brasher has watched **Fresh Start Surgical Gifts** grow from a small San Diego-based charity to an organization with national reach, which aims to help children with physical deformities enjoy a brighter future.

Brasher joined the organization in the early 1990s as a volunteer, soon after it was founded by a local plastic surgeon. She later joined the board of directors, and during a search for a new CEO, she was tapped by her board colleagues for the top spot. She has served as CEO since 2001.

Today, Fresh Start, which is based in Carlsbad, conducts free, life-changing surgeries for children and young adults, both in San Diego and Chicago. Brasher is in talks to start a third branch of the charity in Texas.

Fresh Start helps disadvantaged youths who suffer from physical deformities due to birth defects, accidents, abuse or disease, according to the group's website. Brasher said in San Diego alone, some 200 surgeries and dental procedures are performed each year. Thanks to partnerships with **Rady Children's Hospital** and the **University of Chicago Medical Center**, operating rooms are made available free of charge for surgery on weekends that are held every other month.

On Nov. 15, Brasher, 54, was honored at the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Awards in the small company category.

"I almost feel guilty receiving the award, there are so many worthy volunteers," she said. "They are the real heroes."

Brasher spoke of the doctors, nurses, dentists, anesthesiologists and non-medical volunteers who keep the organization running.

#### Free Services to Children

Fresh Start's services are free to recipients. The patients have a variety of needs, from removal of scars and disfiguring birthmarks, to braces and dental work. Fresh Start will provide medical care if the procedure is not covered by insurance or the child's family has no insurance or can't afford the deductible. Transportation and lodging costs are also covered, she said. In San Diego, about half the patients are local and the rest come from countries around the world.

The nonprofit is able to use 100 percent of donations for direct services to the charity's recipients, thanks to a large gift that pays for annual overhead expenses, made by the late philanthropist Jeanne Cox Brady.

Since Fresh Start was founded, some 7,000 children have been helped with health and dental care valued at \$33 mil-

lion, said the group's website. Some 500 people volunteer each year.

The surgery can have a profound impact on children's lives, she said.

"A lot of times kids keep their faces down because they're trying to hide," she said. School performance improves post-surgery, she said, with many of the children going on to become the first in their families to attend college.

#### Family Support

For Brasher, who also serves on the foundation board for **Sage Creek High School** in Carlsbad, where her two sons attend, community service – and supporting Fresh Start – is a family affair.

"My boys and husband (**Bob Brasher**) are long-time volunteers. It's important to know people can get their families involved and teach them about giving back."

For relaxation, Brasher enjoys hitting the links, and she is immediate past chair of the **Morgan Run Club and Resort** board. She also serves on the board of the **San Diego Sports Medicine Foundation**.

The admiration she feels for her volunteers flows both ways.

Fresh Start board member and volunteer surgeon **Dr. Michael Brucker** wrote of Brasher in an email: "Her passion for Fresh Start's mission and her vision for



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Shari Brasher has been CEO of Fresh Start Surgical Gifts since 2001.

its future has helped our charity grow to levels unimaginable to me 10 years ago. Shari would selflessly argue that a charity is only as strong as its volunteers, but our efforts would be directionless and small without Shari's leadership."

## Investment Banker Finds Opportunity in Lower Middle Market

■ By JOHN COX

The previous investment bank tried for a year to find a buyer for a certain Southern California manufacturing company. Nothing. Then the owners hired **Nia Stefani**.

She could see there were probably two good reasons the lower middle market company hadn't sold. The buyer would have to be familiar with a niche sector, and it would have to accommodate split ownership, in which half the business was owned by a would-be retiree, and half belonged to a younger partner eager to stay involved.

Stefani got them their price within a month, she said, and both partners got to do as they wished.

"It's because of our knowledge in the market," said Stefani, founder and CEO of national investment banking firm **Xnergy Financial LLC**.

Stefani is a winner of the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award in the category of small company.

Established in 2000, San Diego-based Xnergy provides corporate finance and merger-and-acquisition services to emerging growth companies. The firm employs 25 people, all but five of whom work in the local area.

Before opening Xnergy, Stefani

worked as a lawyer specializing in mergers and acquisitions and securities. She negotiated and structured a wide range of transactions.

While every one of her investment banking clients has had different needs, the case is usually that the ownership entity wants to sell, or it needs additional capital. Stefani sees her role as understanding the situation, then tapping her range of potential investors, including specialty lenders and private equity.

It helps that Stefani has years of experience in the lower-middle market. She said it's a specialization that's generally too big for small-business brokers small and too small for most other investment bankers.

#### Capital Constraints Common

Stefani remembers one California client – she wasn't at liberty to disclose names – that was more or less typical of those she works with now. That is, it faced a lot of opportunities but was what she calls "capital-constrained."

The business could have grown organically or through acquisition, Stefani said. To the owner, though, the most important thing was not to give up a controlling majority as it grew.

"We brought him a lot of different offers in a very short amount of time," she said. Ultimately, a buyer was found that

assigned the company a higher valuation than expected while also allowing the owner to maintain a controlling interest.

Another former client, this one in the specialty retail sector, had plans to grow by buying up small companies over a period of many years.

With Xnergy's help, Stefani said, he gained access to more than \$300 million in inexpensive debt. It allowed him to buy a larger competitor in short order.

"He was really able to cut years off of his business plan," she said.

#### Driven to Succeed

Relatively speaking, not a lot of women are investment bankers; Xnergy has two. While Stefani hesitates to generalize, it seems to her women put a lot of care into their clients.

"I stay up at night. I think about my clients," she said. "I take it very seriously when I engage a client."

Maybe this extra attention gives her an advantage, she said.

"It's very important to me. Failure is not an option. Every client has to succeed. I really, truly care," she said before pausing for a moment. "But I don't know if that's a woman thing."

Stefani mentors local startups and is involved in the San Diego chapter of **Tech Coast Angels**. She was named among the Most Promising Up and



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Nia Stefani helps find potential buyers and investors for private companies.

Coming Women by the **New York State Commerce Association**.

Xnergy has received a certificate of appreciation by the City of Los Angeles, and has earned the **U.S. Commerce Association's** Financial Services Award.



## MEDIUM BUSINESS CATEGORY

# Chief Product Officer Also Succeeds in Developing Co-Workers

■ By JOHN COX

Product developer **Marcie Gately** was getting antsy.

The project she was hired to spearhead had been held up in detailed planning for the better part of a year. Some coding work had been done, but it became clear much of it would have to be redone.

Around her at **Zeeto**, the San Diego-based digital marketing startup she joined two years ago as chief product officer, others may have felt pleased to have an existing product up and running online. Not many tech companies its size have that luxury. But Gately couldn't wait.

"It finally came to the point where I said, 'Let's start,'" said Gately, 46. "I like to err on the side of action."

Her ensuing success made Gately winner of the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Awards in the category of medium-size business.

## The Right Consumer

The Internet advertising platform she helped develop, ZAN, is seen as crucial to Zeeto's future. Building on the downtown company's existing digital marketing services, the system pinpoints marketing campaigns so ads go in front of just the right consumers.

Automated online advertising typically targets people based on inferences drawn from their online behavior. Problem is,

there's no guarantee someone who visits a cycling website, for instance, is in the market for a new bicycle seat.

The system Gately helped develop is more direct: It rewards publishers whose readers fill out surveys about themselves. ZAN may ask people specifically whether their bicycle seat needs replacing.

Part of ZAN had to face publishers, part had to face advertisers. There were close to 30 engineers involved, plus Gately's team of nine product developers. It ended up costing millions of dollars.

For her, the whole experience was on the familiar side of unfamiliar. She'd had a previous job where the assignment, like at Zeeto, was to break new ground with web-based technology.

She worked from July 1999 to September 2001 as director of product development at **WebSideStory Inc.**, a pioneer in web analytics. What was then a San Diego-based company's new way of harvesting information has since become the basis of an entire industry.

Gately said Zeeto's engineers and product developers, like those at WebSideStory, "don't have anyone else we can copy."

CEO and co-founder **Stephan Goss** said by email Gately's experience and management style gave Zeeto a "pragmatic, action-oriented approach that has put us in a great position with our launch in July. Our clients have had great reactions to the product, and we're ready to

scale and add features as we grow over the coming years."

## Women's Leadership Program

Another of Gately's projects at Zeeto is a women's leadership program. She modeled it after a mentorship she received as an executive assistant at computer maker **NCR Corp.** She said the experience imparted highly valuable, practical lessons that still her guide her approach to management.

Her goal when she launched women mentorships at Zeeto was to provide students the equivalent of 15 years of experience, centered on leadership and execution.

A big topic is how to communicate as a woman, Gately said. There is also a lot of focus on networking, cultural competence and "impostor syndrome," or the unjustified fear of being exposed as incompetent.

A front-end developer at Zeeto, **Shay Baumgart**, said the mentorship program helped her break bad habits and has given her communication tools.

"The key (knowledge) and insight I have gained are unlike any program I have completed in my career," she said in a statement. "It has proven its worth immediately."

Gately said the plan is to expand the program outside the company. But regardless, she sees attention to women's career needs increasing.



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

**Marcie Gately of Zeeto this past summer launched a platform two years in the making.**

"There's going to be more and more companies like Zeeto that are open to these kinds of things," she said.

# Attorney Shows Prowess in Building Business, Finding Talent

■ By JOHN COX

More than five years have passed since **Tyson & Mendes LLP** won the case that made its name, a landmark California Supreme Court ruling that essentially limited certain insurance damages.

The San Diego-based law firm could have celebrated the victory and moved on. In retrospect, that would have been a mistake.

Instead, Tyson & Mendes assigned one of its young lawyers, **Cayce Greiner**, to make sure clients and businesses across the country understood the ruling and were kept up to date on relevant cases that have followed.

Her newsletters, presentations, social media outreach and website redesign have helped cement the firm's reputation as an expert on the matter. Company revenue rose more than 70 percent during the year ended July 2017.

Managing Partner **Robert Tyson** said Greiner, promoted client relations partner in May, was largely responsible for the jump. He said she continues to find new ways to distinguish the firm.

"She understood our strengths early on, and took the torch and ran with it — helping us gain new business and attract new attorneys, almost simultaneously," he said by email.

Some of what he's referring to there,

about helping bring in new talent, speaks to Greiner's various leadership roles within the firm. In addition to her marketing and business development work, she runs Tyson & Mendes' women's initiative, continuing education efforts and young professionals group.

Greiner is a winner of the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award in the category of medium company.

## Marketing Prowess

Born in Dallas, the 32-year-old moved to Colorado in middle school. After undergraduate studies at the **University of Colorado**, Boulder, she enrolled in law school at the **University of Hawaii**. An ensuing fondness for the beach later persuaded her to move to San Diego.

It wasn't until after taking part in many large cases that she took on marketing duties. That closer involvement in the life of the larger firm — Tyson said she's one of its hardest workers — led her into the various leadership roles.

Overseeing the firm's women's initiative, Greiner helps create mentoring and other support opportunities for Tyson & Mendes' women lawyers and clients. She organizes events and programs that include networking intended to build lasting relationships even beyond the firm's activities.

The young professionals group also involves networking, as well as education and professional growth.

## Emphasizing Continuing Ed

Meanwhile, the training program she leads, Tyson & Mendes University, teaches the firm's lawyers techniques their colleagues have developed since its founding in 2002.

One of her first actions as partner was to propose maternity leave for all of the firm's employees. She hopes other businesses follow Tyson & Mendes' example.

Sounds like a lot, doesn't it? But on top of all that, Greiner presents continuing education and legal updates on California law and litigation strategies. She also leads the firm's autonomous vehicles practice group. And she's creating T&M Giving, a community giving program that would encourage employees to donate their time to child education and welfare organizations.

In her extra time, Greiner is a triathlete training for a 2018 half ironman. She hopes to raise money for injured military veterans and first responders.

"I have a passion for fitness. I think for me, personally, it gives me balance," she said. "It's one of my primary outlets."

Client **Kim Bush** assistant vice president of global TPA operations for **Alied World**, said in a written statement



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

**Cayce Greiner leads the firm's women's initiative and its continuing education program.**

that Greiner is a mentor who leads by example.

"What impresses me most ... is her desire to impact the world around her for the good," Bush wrote. "She has an inner drive to celebrate and lift others."



LARGE BUSINESS CATEGORY

# Chula Vista Health Plan CEO Has Roots in Customer Service

By JESSICA KING

How many people can say that their first job at 14 years old directly led to their successful executive career?

At least one – **Norma Diaz**.

As CEO of **Community Health Group**, the now 56-year-old Diaz leads more than 300 employees and nearly 300,000 members who belong to the nonprofit health plan.

The Chula Vista-based group was named the second highest quality Medi-Cal health plan in California and the highest in San Diego County by the National Committee for Quality Assurance in 2016.

For her leadership qualities and accomplishments, Diaz was recently named a recipient of the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award in the Large Company category.

"It was a very proud moment to look around and see all the women who were making progress (in the business world) because that wasn't always the case," said Diaz, referring to the crowd at the Nov. 15 awards luncheon.

Diaz started with CHG through a middle school work-study program when she was 14 years old. She worked as a file clerk for what was then known as the San Ysidro Health Center. Though the job was

new, Diaz was well familiar with the center because her family utilized its services.

### Early Impressions

Diaz said she remembers sitting in the lobby on multiple occasions and growing angry over how she perceived low-income patients, including her very ill father, were treated by receptionists. She said she vowed then and there that she was going to be a receptionist someday and be the best receptionist she could be.

"I just thought that people who were so sick needed the very best care," said Diaz, describing how the receptionists seemed cold and distant, and more robotic in their instructions than nurturing.

Diaz concedes that she was looking at them through the lens of a child and perhaps there was more to what she saw but the perception she had was not good and not one that she ever wants to be perpetuated to another generation of CHG members.

"My husband says he is married to a CEO and a social worker," said Diaz, referring to her tendency to be overly protective and maternal.

Also tenacious, Diaz continued to work her way up from file clerk at CHG as continued her education through **San Diego State University** and **National University**, earning a bachelor's degree

in sociology and a Masters in Business Administration.

### Monitoring Customer Service

One program she has implemented at CHG is the 33 Points of Magic. This involves monitoring employees, though internal auditors and sometimes through mystery shoppers, to make sure they are successfully addressing 33 points that make for good customer service both in person and via phone calls, of which CHG receives nearly 2,000 a month. The points range from the tone of voice used to repeating someone's name. When needed, employees who fail to adequately exhibit Magic receive remedial training. It's not about firing people, Diaz said, it's about helping them be the best they can be at their jobs.

"Norma is a very detailed-oriented leader that really focuses on employees and our members, and she's done a great job in that regard, and she's a vital part of the community in the South Bay," said co-worker **David Ritchie**, director of contract administration for Community Health Group.

In addition to **CHG**, Diaz is an active participant in **MANA de San Diego**, a Latina empowerment organization. Diaz recently received the Latina Success Award from MANA de San Diego.



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Norma Diaz has worked for Community Health Group since she was 14.



## Congratulations Shari Brasher



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## LARGE BUSINESS CATEGORY

## Executive's Teamwork Approach Drives Growth at Financial Firm

■ By JESSICA KING

Intelligent ... collaborative ... compassionate. All three describe **Stephanie Jimenez** to a tee, according to the co-worker who nominated Jimenez for the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award.

Jimenez, 47, was honored earlier this month in the Large Company category.

As Senior Vice President of Operations for **First Associates Loan Servicing LLC**, Jimenez oversees more than 200 employees of the financial services company, which is located on the edge of Carmel Mountain Ranch and Rancho Bernardo in northeastern San Diego.

"She's a true team player in every sense of the word," said nominator Blythe Lawton, senior director of marketing for First Associates.

Lawton went on to say it's Jimenez' lack of ego despite her high caliber accomplishments that make her such a powerful and respected female executive.

Indeed, Jimenez is most proud of the impact she has had on others.

"Whether it was setting an example for my children or a team member that you can succeed while treating people with respect or watching an employee who

was struggling turn it around and be a top performer, I truly enjoy being able to participate in the success and growth of others," said Jimenez, who has more than 25 years of leadership experience for a variety of financial services companies.

Jimenez joined First Associates in July 2015 as its vice president of servicing operations, leading back office and project management for the organization. She was tasked with rebuilding the operations infrastructure for significant expansion. She also revamped the reporting structure, implemented new call center protocols and established a human resources department to enable rapid growth.

She was promoted to her current role in February 2016 – a mere eight months after she started with the company.

"As we worked to craft and optimize overarching operations processes, I was promoted to lead the entire division," she explained.

#### Driven By Growth

Jimenez grew up an Army brat, moving with her family every two-and-a-half to three years. Though she lived all over the globe, Jimenez said she always felt like San Diego was here home and she

relocated here permanently in 2004.

She lives in the Rancho Bernardo area, having chosen to raise her family here with no plans to move away again.

What drove her to join First Associates was "the opportunity to make impactful decisions and help develop the corporate strategy for ongoing, sustainable growth," Jimenez said.

Adding to her list of accomplishments in her current role as senior vice president, Jimenez helped open a call center in Tijuana. The project was a 10-month effort.

#### Keeping Pace With Change

The most challenging part of her job is the pace, according to Jimenez.

"We are a fast-paced, growing company," she said. "Getting everything done and done well is invigorating, but can also be challenging."

Fortunately, the job is also rewarding.

"Hands down, the people (are the most rewarding part of it)," Jimenez said. "I have the privilege of leading an amazing group of people that are truly like a family. We are committed to supporting one another and keep pushing each other to always do better."



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Stephanie Jimenez has made a significant impact in her short time at First Associates Loan Servicing LLC.

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LARGE BUSINESS CATEGORY

# Manager Has Eye for Efficiencies at Tri-City Medical Center

By JESSICA KING

Once a nurse, always a nurse. As the Clinical Manager of Acute Care Services and Outpatient Infusions at **Tri-City Medical Center**, **Diane Sikora** manages a \$15 million budget and a team of 230 nurses. It's a role that she does well thanks to her previous experience as a nurse at the same Oceanside hospital.

So well, in fact, that the 57-year-old Vista resident recently won the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award in the Mega Company category.

"Before we make a decision, we get people involved who are actually doing the work because at the end of the day, we can sit in a room and decide what should work but we have no way of knowing for sure," Sikora said of the way she approaches her work.

In the past year, Sikora's work has included the development of a new model for core staffing levels that balanced the state's required ratio of one nurse for every five patients with the finance department's need to measure productivity and staffing levels.

Sikora also recently led an initiative that reduced the need for oversight in two of her four units, which netted a savings of nearly \$160,000 in the program's

first year.

The new model was something Sikora spent about four hours creating on an Excel spreadsheet to show finance experts how nurses need to be seen as whole parts of the equations and not fractions that can be somehow mathematically broken down into fourths or halves or any other partial measurement.

Sikora also spearheaded a system in which patients in four rooms with two beds each could be monitored two nurses and an assistant simultaneously using a four-square type approach, with the nursing staff being situated at the point at which the four rooms all meet.

"Finance and nursing just have different languages," she said, adding it took multiple meetings to come to an agreement but showing them as opposed to just talking about it, helped reach a resolution both sides could live with.

### Work Flow Expert

Sikora said that being a nurse first allows her a perspective on work flow that a finance expert just can't have unless they are explicitly shown it.

Sikora's other accomplishments include helping to merge operations for two acquisitions and oversees a palliative care program for Tri-City.

The acquisitions brought the infusion

part of an oncology office to the hospital. Sikora met the challenge of transitioning those oncology office employees into hospital employees.

For some time, Tri-City tried to offer hospice services but the program just didn't work quite right, according to Sikora. That is until Tri-City partnered with **Silverado Hospice** and now the program is working, she said.

### SoCal Native

Sikora is originally from Hesperia in San Bernardino County. She trained at **Victor Valley College** in the High Desert before moving to San Diego County in 2000. Locally, she has worked exclusively at Tri-City, first as a nursing assistant then later, a registered nurse.

She is married and has four children and two grandchildren.

She was nominated for the San Diego Business Journal's 2017 Business Women of the Year Award by her boss, Chief Nursing Officer **Sharon Schultz**.

"I was very surprised to be a finalist let alone the winner," Sikora said, admitting that she had practiced saying, "It's nice just to be nominated," when she and her husband attended the Business Journal's award luncheon.

She added, "I'm a nurse, not a businesswoman!"



Bob Thompson/Fotowerks

Diane Sikora advanced through the nursing ranks at her only employer, Tri-City Medical Center.

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San Diego Business Journal

**2017 BUSINESS WOMEN OF THE YEAR awards**

Clockwise from top left: Laura Maly, Rachel Scatizzi Thompson, Courtney Prato, Wendy Cohen, Elizabeth Cullington, Deana Carter, Kimberly Jackson, Kristin Kahle

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# Women-Owned Businesses

Ranked by 2016 gross revenue


Researched by  
Gina Bertuzzi










Rank (last year)	Company Address Website Phone	Gross revenue: 2016 2015 (millions) % + (-)	# of employees as of 9/1/2017: Full-time Part-time Companywide	Certified women- owned business? Agency certified by <sup>(1)</sup>	% women- owned	Company description	Majority owner(s) Year est. locally
<b>1</b> (3)	<b>Jazzercise Inc.</b> 2460 Impala Drive, Carlsbad 92010 www.jazzercise.com 760-476-1750	 \$95.41 \$97.7 (2)	wnd wnd 140	N NA	100	Leading dance fitness company with 8,300+ franchisees offering group fitness classes worldwide	Judi Sheppard Missett 1972
<b>2</b> (4)	<b>Innovative Employee Solutions Inc.</b> 9665 Granite Ridge Drive, Suite 420, San Diego 92123 www.innovativeemployeesolutions.com 858-715-5100	 \$78.6 \$79 (1)	28 2 30	Y WBENC	100	Nationwide payrolling & HR administrative solutions for your contingent workforce	Karla Hertzog 1974
<b>3</b> (5)	<b>I.E.-Pacific Inc.</b> 150 W. Crest St., Escondido 92025 www.iepacific.com 760-294-7097	 \$39.82 \$29.75 34	26 1 27	Y SBA	100	General contractor, engineering	Diane Koester-Byron 1993
<b>4</b> (NR)	<b>Cask</b> 9350 Waxie Way, Suite 210, San Diego 92123 www.caskllc.com 858-634-6200	 \$33.2 \$35 (5)	54 1 176	Y SBA	100	Results-oriented business & tech consulting firm helping customers execute & enable transformation	Elizabeth Guezzale 2008
<b>5</b> (6)	<b>Professional Maintenance Systems</b> 4912 Naples St., San Diego 92110 www.pmsjanitorial.com 619-276-1150	 \$28.12 \$24.67 14	736 206 942	Y WBENC	100	Full-service janitorial company	Karen Berry 1982
<b>6</b> (7)	<b>Destination Concepts, Inc.</b> 2620 Financial Court, Suite 101, San Diego 92117 www.destinationconcepts.com 858-274-7979	 \$21.16 \$20.28 4	57 274 331	Y WBENC	100	Destination management, event design, production & logistics services	Brynne Frost, Ana Reilly 1998
<b>7</b> (NR)	<b>Cultura</b> 5010 Shoreham Place, Suite 110, San Diego 92122 www.wearcultura.com 858-755-1390	 \$18 \$18 0	26 2 28	Y WBENC	100	Offers a breadth of furniture solutions tailored to clients needs; partnered with 250+ manufacturers	Anne Benge 2009
<b>8</b> (8)	<b>Neyenesch Printers Inc.</b> 2750 Kettner Blvd., San Diego 92101 www.neyenesch.com 619-297-2281	 \$17.76 \$17.81 (0)	70 0 70	Y NWBOC	67	Commercial sheet-fed UV printer, prepress, bindery, shipping, & Kodak digital presses	Carol Bentley, Kandy Neyenesch 1899

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<b>9</b> (9)	<b>Kahala Travel</b> 3838 Camino del Rio N., Suite 300, San Diego 92108 www.kahalatravel.com 619-282-8300	 \$16.82 \$16.47 2	10 wnd 10	Y ORCA	99	Travel agency	Joyce Dentt 1987
<b>10</b> (10)	<b>Balboa Travel Inc.</b> 5414 Oberlin Drive, Suite 300, San Diego 92121 www.balboa.com 858-678-3300	 \$14.04 \$13.8 2	35 9 150	Y PSWSDC	54	Personalized corporate travel management, custom vacations, meeting, incentive & event solutions	Denise Jackson, Andrea da Rosa, Jose (Joe) da Rosa 1969
<b>11</b> (NR)	<b>ACI Specialty Benefits</b> 6480 Weathers Place, San Diego 92121 www.ACISpecialtyBenefits.com 800-932-0034	 \$12 \$10 20	50 2 71	Y DBE <sup>(2)</sup>	100	Top 10 benefits provider of EAPs, work-life benefits, corp. concierge & student assistance	Ann Clark 1983
<b>12</b> (NR)	<b>PIA Agency</b> 5930 Priestly Drive, Carlsbad 92008 www.thepiaagency.com 760-930-9244	 \$10.71 \$5.65 89	43 3 46	Y WBENC-West	wnd	Creative content agency comprised of filmmakers, creatives & strategists	Cheryl CEO 1997
<b>13</b> (15)	<b>City Wide Maintenance of San Diego</b> 4849 Ronson Place, San Diego 92111 www.gocitywide.com 858-505-0202	 \$8.8 \$7.2 22	135 22 157	Y WBENC	100	Management company in the building maintenance industry managing more than 20 services	Linda Kafka, Lisa Fortman 2005
<b>14</b> (17)	<b>J Public Relations</b> 1620 Fifth Ave., Suite 700, San Diego 92101 www.jpublicrelations.com 619-255-7069	 \$7.62 \$6.04 26	57 1 58	Y NA	100	Public relations firm specializing in travel, hospitality & luxury lifestyle brands	Jamie Lynn Sigler, Sarah Evans Thelen 2005
<b>15</b> (13)	<b>PrideStaff</b> 2710 Loker Ave West, Suite 160, Carlsbad 92010 www.pridestaff.com 760-438-0161	 \$6.73 \$9.65 (30)	4 wnd wnd	Y Caltrans	100	Staffing firm specializing in customer service, administrative, finance, accounting, manufacturing	Christine Rupp 1999
<b>16</b> (NR)	<b>Toft Group Executive Search</b> 12520 High Bluff Drive, Suite 150, San Diego 92130 www.thetoftgroup.com 925-837-5800	 \$6.3 \$6.82 (8)	18 0 wnd	Y wnd	100	Retained executive search firm dedicated to the life science & digital health markets	Robin Toft 2010
<b>17</b> (18)	<b>VIA Technical LLC</b> 591 Camino de la Reina, Suite 929, San Diego 92108 www.via-technical.com 619-704-1400	 \$5.21 \$5.17 1	9 3 12	Y WBENC, WBE	100	Technical recruiting/staffing firm offering contract, contract to hire & direct hire services	Natalie Viani 2005
<b>18</b> (22)	<b>BSE Engineering Inc.</b> 10680 Treena St., Suite 100, San Diego 92131 www.BSEngineering.com 858-800-6000	 \$5.17 \$4.93 5	19 1 20	N NA	51	Mechanical, electrical, plumbing & energy, eng. services, sustainable eng.	Tamara Badkerhanian-Ganev, Alan Brown 1967



# Women-Owned Businesses

Ranked by 2016 gross revenue

Researched by  
Gina Bertuzzi

Rank (last year)	Company Address Website Phone	Gross revenue: 2016 2015 (millions) % + (-)	# of employees as of 9/1/2017: Full-time Part-time Companywide	Certified women- owned business? Agency certified by <sup>(1)</sup>	% women- owned	Company description	Majority owner(s) Year est. locally
<b>19</b> (19)	<b>Sonic Boom Wellness</b> 5963 La Place Court, Suite 100, Carlsbad 92008 www.sonicboomwellness.com 760-438-1600	 \$4.87 \$5.16 (6)	41 1 42	N NA	50	Worksite wellness program specializing in improving daily health habits by driving social engagement	Danna Korn, Bryan Van Noy 2007
<b>20</b> (NR)	<b>Grahovac Construction Company Inc.</b> 8418 La Mesa Blvd., La Mesa 91942 www.grahovacconstruction.com 619-466-6693	 \$4.6 \$4.7 (2)	11 2 13	Y Supplier Clearinghouse	51	General Contractor for commercial, industrial, public works & financial institutions	Gina M. Grahovac Franklin 1985
<b>21</b> (21)	<b>Katz &amp; Associates</b> 5440 Morehouse Drive, Suite 1000, San Diego 92121 www.katzandassociates.com 858-452-0031	 \$4.35 \$3.99 9	wnd wnd wnd	Y Caltrans	95	Community relations, public involvement, strategic communications	Sara Katz 1986
<b>22</b> (23)	<b>Oakley Relocation</b> 13026 Stowe Drive, Poway 92064 www.oakleyrelocation.com 858-602-1010	 \$4.11 \$3.73 10	25 wnd wnd	Y WBENC	100	Full-service moving & storage company	Linda Oakley 2008
<b>23</b> (NR)	<b>Fashion Stork</b> 2470 Ash St., Suite 3, Vista 92087 www.fashionstork.com 585-237-8675	 \$4.03 \$3.76 7	8 10 18	Y wnd	72	Men's styling service offering outfits through monthly subscription boxes	Victoria Ley 2013
<b>24</b> (24)	<b>Chase Pacific Property Management &amp; Real Estate Services</b> 9968 Hibert St., Suite 105, San Diego 92131 www.chasepacific.com 858-271-8841	 \$4.02 \$3.53 14	5 2 7	N wnd	100	Full residential property management, real estate, leasing & HOA services throughout S.D. County	Cheryl Chase-Gerry 1988
<b>25</b> (25)	<b>intelliSolutions inc.</b> 591 Camino de la Reina, Suite 420, San Diego 92108 www.intellisolutions-inc.com 619-683-2139	 \$3.73 \$3.52 6	25 3 28	Y U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce	76	Engineering services, program management, SATCOM, maritime surveillance, cybersecurity	Jamie Moraga 2006
<b>26</b> (29)	<b>Staff Smart Inc.</b> 11590 W. Bernardo Court, Suite 220, San Diego 92127 www.staffsmart.net 619-342-2600	 \$3.53 \$2.71 31	6 1 7	Y WBENC	75	IT staffing, placement, direct hire & executive search	Christine Hoffman- Hicks 2008
<b>27</b> (NR)	<b>Picnic People</b> 6496 Marindustry Drive, Suite A, San Diego 92121 www.picnicpeoplesandiego.com 858-586-1717	 \$3.53 wnd	15 175 190	Y NA	100	Fun interactive events featuring full service catering, beverages, team building, etc.	Lisa Richards 1984
<b>28</b> (31)	<b>Pure Water Technology of San Diego</b> 4683 Mission Gorge Place, San Diego 92120 www.pwtstd.com 619-564-8500	 \$3 \$2.56 17	8 wnd wnd	Y WBENC	51	Environmentally friendly drinking water solutions	Tina Scherr 2009
<b>29</b> (26)	<b>Streeter Printing Inc.</b> 9880 Via Pasar, Suite C, San Diego 92126 www.streeterprinting.com 858-566-0866	 \$2.97 \$2.88 3	19 0 19	Y CPUC	51	Offset & digital printing, graphic design, bindery, mailing services	Adrienne Streeter 1980
<b>30</b> (33)	<b>At Your Home Familycare</b> 6540 Lusk Blvd., Suite C266, San Diego 92121 www.atyourhomefamilycare.com 858-625-0406	 \$2.55 \$2.4 6	5 160 165	Y Calif. Dept. of Social Services	100	Customized non-medical, in-home care serving seniors, disabled over the age of two & veterans	Laurie Edwards-Tate 1984
<b>31</b> (44)	<b>Boutique Recruiting</b> 591 Camino de la Reina, Suite 1020, San Diego 92108 www.boutiquerecruiting.com 858-800-4935	 \$2.4 \$0.91 165	50 0 50	N wnd	100	Staffing & recruiting agency specializing in finance & accounting positions	Innesa Zavulunova, Sema Zavulunova 2014
<b>32</b> (32)	<b>San Dieguito Engineering Inc.</b> 462 Stevens Ave., Suite 305, Solana Beach 92075 www.sdeinc.com 858-345-1149	 \$2.18 \$2.37 (8)	19 1 20	Y CPUC, SBA	wnd	Civil eng., surveying & mapping, subsurface utility eng., stormwater mgmt.	Annie Aguilar 1974
<b>33</b> (35)	<b>CCS/PR Inc.</b> 2888 Loker Ave. E., Suite 316, Carlsbad 92010 www.ccspr.com 760-438-5250	 \$2.1 \$2.09 1	9 1 10	Y WBENC	100	Customer references, case studies & testimonials, white papers, professional writing, web content	Gayle Mestel 1973
<b>34</b> (34)	<b>Media Planning &amp; Placement</b> 9605 St. Andrews Drive, Santee 92071 www.sdcreativedirectory.com 619-562-6622	 \$2.08 \$2.17 (4)	1 0 1	Y Caltrans, State of Calif.	100	Media buying, advertising, promotional coordination	Gloria Valenti Gerak 1987
<b>35</b> (37)	<b>Cambridge Management Group Inc.</b> 3400 Fourth Ave., San Diego 92103 www.cambridgengmi.com 619-497-0771	 \$2.05 \$1.76 16	28 23 40	N wnd	100	Specializing in all phases of residential property management within S.D. County	Linda Morris, Kendra Bork, Kayla Roeder 2006
<b>36</b> (36)	<b>Beta Wealth Group</b> 16870 W. Bernardo Drive, Suite 170, San Diego 92127 www.betawealthgroup.com 858-207-3377	 \$2 \$1.86 7	3 0 3	Y U.S. SEC	100	Investment adviser	Jodi Vleck 2009
<b>37</b> (43)	<b>Reef Real Estate Services Inc.</b> 1620 Fifth Ave., Suite 770, San Diego 92101 www.reefrealestate.com 619-780-0101	 \$1.49 \$1.24 20	9 0 9	N wnd	100	Full-service property management company that manages commercial investment real estate	Kerrie L. Ozarski 2012
<b>38</b> (27)	<b>Marlene Imirzian &amp; Associates Architects</b> 240 N. Market Place, Escondido 92029 www.imirzian-architects.com 760-480-5548	 \$1.42 \$2.87 (51)	wnd wnd wnd	Y SBA	100	Full service architectural firm providing programming, feasibility, master planning & design	Marlene Imirzian 1999



# Women-Owned Businesses

Ranked by 2016 gross revenue

Researched by  
Gina Bertuzzi

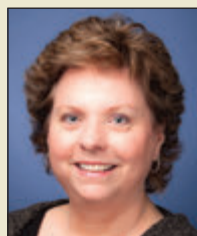
Rank (last year)	Company Address Website Phone	Gross revenue: 2016 2015 (millions) % + (-)	# of employees as of 9/1/2017: Full-time Part-time Companywide	Certified women- owned business? Agency certified by <sup>(1)</sup>	% women- owned	Company description	Majority owner(s) Year est. locally
<b>39</b> (40)	<b>Oussoren Eppel Corp.</b> <sup>(3)</sup> 6369 Nancy Ridge Dr. #B, San Diego 92121 www.fleisherproducts.com 858-483-6770	 \$1.4 \$1.42 (1)	9 3 12	Y DOT	56	Manufacturer of architectural interior signage, employee name badges, large format digital printing	Judy Eppel 1946
<b>40</b> (41)	<b>Network Services Corp.</b> 560 N. Highway 101, Suite 4B, Encinitas 92024 www.networkservicescorp.com 760-274-2010	 \$1.39 \$1 39	15 wnd wnd	Y WOSB	100	Provides internet broadband, IP hosted phones, cloud services, cybersecurity solutions	Pamela L. MacDonald 2007
<b>41</b> (NR)	<b>Color Card Administrator Inc.</b> 7898 Ostrow St., Suite E, San Diego 92111 www.colorcardadministrator.com 858-292-7583	 \$0.81 \$0.6 35	3 3 wnd	Y WBEC	wnd	Advanced online business card management for any size company, government agencies & organization	Gayle Hawks 2002
<b>42</b> (NR)	<b>Tera Consulting Services</b> 1999 Buckman Springs Road, San Diego 91906 www.terafit.com 619-886-9019	 \$0.8 \$1.4 (43)	1 0 18	N wnd	51	Helps to maximize IT investments; reduces IT overhead, project & maintenance costs.	Nyla Carlisle, Rodrigo Recio, Gerardo Valdes 2017
<b>43</b> (45)	<b>Innovative Tub Solutions</b> <sup>(4)</sup> 9733 Caminito Doha, San Diego 92131 www.innovativetubsolutions.com 858-442-4583	 \$0.6 \$0.86 (30)	10 1 11	Y WBENC	100	Serving the hotel industry nationwide, refinishing & non-skid services to make bathtubs like new	Janis Stevens 1993
<b>44</b> (50)	<b>Mirus Promotions Inc.</b> 3245 University Ave., Suite 1413, San Diego 92104 www.miruspromotions.com 619-786-7734	 \$0.57 \$0.41 <sup>(5)</sup> 38	6 3 9	N wnd	100	National experiential marketing company that builds brands through meaningful live interactions	Julie C. Seal-Gaustad 2009
<b>45</b> (NR)	<b>Connected Women of Influence</b> 6965 El Camino Real, Suite 105, Carlsbad 92009 www.connectedwomenofinfluence.com 800-591-1673	 \$0.57 \$0.43 31	3 wnd 6	N wnd	100	Professional association of women leading people, projects, teams & companies	Michelle Bergquist 2008
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>Nexus Search Group</b> 4858 Mercury St., San Diego 92111 www.nexus-searchgroup.com 858-336-7609	 wnd wnd	3 0 3	N wnd	100	Boutique search firm that specializes in the permanent placement of attorneys	Nicole Sutton, Katie Dougherty, Alicia Vargas 2015
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>PEP Productivity Solutions Inc.</b> 1651 Scooter Lane, Fallbrook 92028 www.PEPww.com 760-731-1400	 wnd wnd	wnd wnd wnd	N wnd	95	Personal & team productivity, leadership development, information management & technology training	Lynn S. Sherman 1990
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>Pangea Biological</b> 6812 Embarcadero Lane, Carlsbad 92011 www.pangeabiological.com 760-723-3231	 wnd wnd	16 wnd 16	wnd CPUC	55	Pangea provides environmental services to energy clients for gas, electric & renewable projects	Amy Rowland 2006
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>SD Leadership Institute</b> 300 Carlsbad Village Drive, Suite 108A-128, Carlsbad 92008 www.sdleadershipinstitute.com 858-240-5640	 wnd wnd	4 2 wnd	Y SDBC	60	Providing ICF credentialed executive coaching & leadership development for individuals & teams	Tamara Furman 2014
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>Center for Executive Excellence</b> 7001 Crystalline Drive, Carlsbad 92011 www.executiveexcellence.com 760-521-6382	 wnd wnd	2 wnd wnd	N wnd	100	Coaching & consultancy organization serving CEOs, executive teams & the companies they lead	Sheri Nasim 2013
<b>NR</b> (NR)	<b>Smith Consulting Architects</b> 13280 Evening Creek Drive S., Suite 125, San Diego 92128 www.sca-sd.com 858-793-4777	 wnd wnd	30 0 30	Y WBENC	100	Architectural services including master planning, architectural/interior design & project mgmt.	Cheryl Smith 1988



**JUDI SHEPPARD MISSETT**  
Owner, 1972  
Jazzercise Inc.



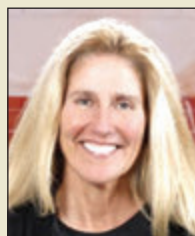
**KARLA HERTZOG**  
Owner, 1974  
Innovative Employee Solutions Inc.



**DIANE KOESTER-BYRON**  
Owner, 1993  
I.E.-Pacific Inc.



**ELIZABETH GUEZZALE**  
Owner, 2008  
Cask



**KAREN BERRY**  
Owner, 1982  
Professional Maintenance Systems



**BRYNNE FROST**  
Owner, 1998  
Destination Concepts, Inc.



**ANA REILLY**  
Owner, 1998  
Destination Concepts, Inc.



**ANNE BENGE**  
Owner, 2009  
Cultura

**NA** Not applicable  
**wnd** Would not disclose  
**(NR)** Not ranked  
**Source:** The companies and their CPA/CFO-attested documents.  
Due to rounding off, some percentages appear to be incorrect.

To the best of our knowledge, this information is accurate as of press time. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the list, omissions and typographical errors sometimes occur. Please send corrections or additions to the Research Department at the San Diego Business Journal, 858-634-4635. This list may not be reprinted in whole or in part without prior written permission from the editor. Some companies have declined to participate or did not return a survey by press time. It is not the intent of this list to endorse the participants nor to imply a company's size or numerical rank indicates its quality.

(1) Certifying agencies include, Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), Woman Business Enterprise (WBE), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA), National Women Business Owners Corporation (NWBOC), California Association for Health Services at Home (CAHSAH), California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), Women Owned Small Business (WOSB), Pacific Southwest Minority Supplier Development Council (PSWSDC), and Small Business Administration (SBA).

(2) Disadvantaged Business Enterprise.  
(3) DBA Gateway Marketing Concepts and Fleisher Products and Signs.  
(4) Formerly known as Perma Safety Tub Co.  
(5) This number is different from last year due to a change in account method from cash basis to accrual basis.



# ON THE SCENE | San Diego Business Journal Event

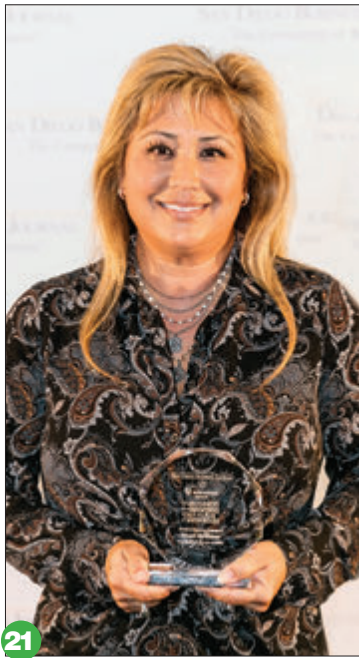
## 2017 Business Women of the Year Awards

The San Diego Business Journal held its 24th annual Business Women of the Year Awards on Wednesday, Nov. 15, at downtown's Hilton San Diego Bayfront hotel. More than 450 business, civic and nonprofit leaders attended the event that recognized women from throughout the region for their professional and community accomplishments.

Sponsors for the event included title sponsor Union Bank; gold sponsors Kaiser Permanente and MRC Smart Technology Solutions. Additional support was provided by Petals By The Beach. Susan G. Komen San Diego was the event's nonprofit recipient.







1. Inaugural Courage Award Recipient Marine Corps Lance Corporal (Ret.) Sarah Rudder; Emcee Pat Brown, Pat Brown Productions
2. Jolanta Campion, Cushman & Wakefield; Edie Feffer, Irvine Company
3. Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Judi Sheppard Missett, Jazzercise Inc.
4. Rana Sampson, Title Sponsor Union Bank; Catherine Wormell, Mindera; Morgan Busalacchi, UnionBanc Investment Services (Title Sponsor Union Bank); Mary Lockwood, Mindera; Carlee Harmonson, Title Sponsor Union Bank; Maeda Webster, The Private Bank at Title Sponsor Union Bank
5. (Top Left to Right) Jessie Campbell and Rachel Harris, both with Toward Maximum Independence; Caliph Assagai, Caliph Assagai Speaking & Coaching; Elaine Kaminski Becerra, BNY Mellon Wealth Management; (Bottom Left to Right) Sarah Cueto, Eastridge Workforce Solutions; Kathleen Gamez and Veronica Rubio, both with City National Bank
6. Business Woman of the Year Recipient Dawn Barry, Illumina
7. (Top Left to Right) Jaymie Bradford, Carole Ravago, Jerry Sanders, Katie Tran, Mike Reynolds, Lisa Kelley; (Bottom Left to Right) Fred Baldwin, Elizabeth Fitzsimons, Alison Phillips, Amanda Nelson, all with San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
8. Huntley Paton, President & Publisher, San Diego Business Journal; Sarafina Scapicchio, Girl Scouts San Diego; Rodger Dougherty, Gold Sponsor Kaiser Permanente
9. Donna Durckel, Gold Sponsor Kaiser Permanente
10. (Top Left to Right) Carisa Wisniewski, Moss Adams LLP; Bill Bussiere, Mad Engine Melody; Le Patourel, Alyssa Strobel, Kyla Campos, all with Moss Adams LLP; (Bottom Left to Right) Laura Roos, Danielle O'Connor, both with Moss Adams LLP; Michelle Pardini, American Council on Exercise
11. (Top Left to Right) Miriam Roman, Scott Carroll, Ann Warren, Isabel Castro, Eric Bearden, Roberto Fierro-Chavez; (Bottom Left to Right) Joseph Garcia, Winner Large Company Category Norma Diaz, Noreen Koizumi, David Ritchie, all with Community Health Group
12. Winner Small Company Category Jaye Connolly-LaBelle, Holly Smithson, both with RippleNami Inc.
13. Winner Large Company Category Norma Diaz, Community Health Group
14. Winner Mega Company Category Diane Sikora, Tri-City Medical Center
15. Winner Small Company Category Robin Toft, Toft Group Executive Search
16. Winner Medium Company Category Cayce Greiner, Tyson & Mendes LLP
17. (Top Left to Right) Jamie Johnson, Jennifer Yetzer, Courtney Nelson, Jenessa French, Kapua Conley, Susan Bond; (Bottom Left to Right) Grant Larsen, Winner Mega Company Category Diane Sikora, Sharon Schultz, Esther Beverly, Steve Dietlin, all with Tri-City Medical Center
18. Winner Medium Company Category Marcie Gately, Zeeto
19. Winner Small Company Category Nia Stefani, Xnergy LLC
20. Shaina Gross, Nonprofit Event Recipient Susan G. Komen San Diego
21. Winner Small Company Category Shari Brasher, Fresh Start Surgical Gifts
22. Winner Large Company Category Stephanie Jimenez, First Associates Loan Servicing LLC
23. Emcee Susan Taylor, Scripps Health
24. (Top Left to Right) Samantha Alston, Riamour Bell, Alexa Fee, Mahmoud Elwahab, Devan McClane; (Bottom Left to Right) Sarah Crout-Hamel, SueEllen Conway, Kara Molenaar, Matt Whalen, Katie Fleck all with Gold Sponsor MRC Smart Technology Solutions