

BRANDED CONTENT
SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM & AWARDS 2023



Honorees & Finalists

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Letter from the Publisher



The San Fernando Valley Business Journal was proud to celebrate many of the leading lights of business in the Valley for our newly expanded Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards event at the Hilton Woodland Hills on Thursday, September 14th. This year, we brought the Valley's Community of Business™ together, in person, for a half day of inspiration, education, and recognition.

Our morning started with a series of TEDx-style speakers, discussing some of the most riveting and important issues impacting women with leadership roles in business today. Speakers included Roberto Barragan, managing director, ICON CDC; Sonya Kay Blake, president & CEO, Valley Economic Alliance; Precious Mayes, CEO and president, Pacifica Hospital of the Valley; Stacey McKinnon, chief operating officer, chief marketing officer and wealth advisor, Morton Wealth; and Kristen Walker, Small Business Institute director, MBA director, David Nazarian College of Business and Economics, CSUN.

These inspiring talks were followed by a dynamic panel discussion that provided real-life examples and actionable takeaways on the topic of visionaries and leadership. Our insightful panelists included Sue Fries, owner/president, Ecola Termite; Jerri Hemsworth, chair, Echelon Business Development; Pegi Matsuda, MA, CFRE, owner, Onboard – Business & Community Consulting; Shandrea Niblett, chief operating officer, SPECTRUM Commercial Real Estate, Inc.; and HannahCamille Thomas, CEO, Zodella.

The event culminated with our Women's Leadership Awards luncheon, where we celebrated the accomplishments of the Valley's most talented executives. From an impressive roster of finalists, we presented eight standout honorees with awards. Across the next few pages, you will read inspirational stories about those local women who have achieved remarkable success despite various obstacles and challenges, as well as profiles on each of the finalists.

We are grateful to our sponsors, whose support and involvement made this event possible.

Congratulations to all the finalists and honorees!

Best regards,

Josh Schimmels
Publisher & CEO

EMPOWERING LIVES

El Centro de Amistad congratulates the 2023 Women's Leadership Symposium winners and applauds their dedication and hard work in empowering lives in their communities.

Who we are:

El Centro de Amistad has proudly served the San Fernando Valley for 46 years providing a range of bi-lingual comprehensive Mental Health and Family Services while empowering lives for a better tomorrow.



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12

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FEATURED SESSIONS

- A.I.: Possibilities and Pitfalls of Artificial Intelligence
- Finding Value in an Uncertain Real Estate Market
- Current Me vs. Future Me: The Modern Investor Dilemma
- Mastering the Tax Game: Boost Your Business and Save on Taxes
- Battle of the Spouses: Financial Edition

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CEO OF THE YEAR HONOREE

DENISE BEAN WHITE

CEO & Founder
Consortium Media

As Consortium Media's founder and leader, Denise Bean White's innovative cultural brand work has successfully helped local, regional, national, and international brands resonate with all generations by developing consistent messaging that reaches today's complex and multifaceted consumers. The secret to her forward-thinking brand strategy work is her unparalleled passion for 'ancient cultures.'

With more than 35 years of experience in newspaper, radio, network television and brand strategy background, White's unique perspective provides an in-depth creation of messaging and brand personalities that build and communicate corporate identities, while utilizing trend analysis and her Five Pillars of Marketing Success to deliver cost-effective results.

The corporate philosophy of White and Consortium Media is to do well in the world by doing good works, and her passion to spark change inspired her to develop a deepened focus in social change and behavior shift work in children's issues, including foster family recruitment, the fight against children trafficking, tobacco prevention programs, and developing mentoring programs for youth in need. White helped pioneer positive changes in language use and perception of foster care as it transitions to resource parenting. She has been innovative in helping change the thought process around foster care and adoption, debunking myths and misunderstandings about becoming a resource for youth.

White also devotes time to reach the underserved communities and hard to reach populations. Inclusivity with branding and messaging is another passion. She developed opportunities to speak with VC Mixteco communities in their places of work.



SONYA KAY BLAKE

FINALIST
President and CEO
The Valley Economic Alliance

Sonya Kay Blake stepped up to the plate as president and CEO of The Alliance at the onset of the COVID pandemic. During this time, she quickly created virtual programs to assist companies in staying afloat, resilient, and open during economic downturns. During this period, she envisioned and held 22 webinars with over 1700 businesses registered for critical resources and contacts.

Under Blake's stewardship, the Alliance helps companies start, grow and thrive in the Valley. With her leadership, she helps create jobs and livelihoods for new neighbors and their families. The Alliance supports the mom-and-pop businesses along Valley's main streets. In turn, those mom-and-pop shops provide amenities and attractive, engaging, and compelling destinations for people to visit the Valley and spend their hard-earned dollars in the region. The Alliance also convenes various thought leaders and ensures development of the Valley region in a smart, inclusive, intelligent, and equitable way.



LAUREL MINTZ

FINALIST
Founder and CEO, Elevate My Brand
Partner, Fabric VC

Laurel Mintz, JD, MBA, has accumulated a wealth of professional experience and overcome various challenges throughout her career. As the CEO and founder of Elevate My Brand, an award-winning marketing agency based in Los Angeles, Mintz has displayed her exceptional leadership skills. She has successfully served a diverse range of clients, including startups and renowned global brands such as Facebook, Verizon Digital Media Group, PAW Patrol, and Zendesk. Mintz's ability to connect with people and their stories sets her apart and enables her to foster meaningful relationships with clients.

In 2022, Mintz expanded her impact by launching Fabric VC, a venture capital firm. Drawing upon her extensive experience working with over 200 companies in the consumer packaged goods (CPG) and technology sectors, she established Fabric VC with the aim of connecting diverse founders with the funding they need and deserve.



More Than Just Networking. *Way More!*

We believe a networking organization should include powerful member benefits in addition to building lasting relationships. Benefits that will take your business to the next level.

Echelon Business Development Network offers exceptional marketing advantages, including member videos and podcasts, as well as opportunities for blogging and publishing, all complemented by effective Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies. Additionally, Echelon organizes monthly meetings in a mastermind-style format, ensuring active participation from every member.

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- TopTrustedAdvisors.com Directory
- Echelon Member Blog
- Echelon YouTube Channel
- And Yes, Monthly Mastermind-Style Meetings

Congratulations to our Member Awardees!



Jerri Hemsworth

Woman-Owned Founder of the Year Award



Harriet Oberman

Executive of the Year Award

A Multi-Level Membership Organization for Owners, Partners and Associate Attorneys, Accountants, Wealth Advisors, Insurance Professionals, Investment Bankers, Real Estate Professionals, and Business Service Professionals





EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR HONOREE

HARRIET OBERMAN

Partner
JRRO LLP

Harriet Oberman is a leader and partner in the CPA firm, JRRO LLP. She works closely with physicians, dentists, and other healthcare professionals, as well as closely held businesses, to assist them with their accounting, financial statement preparation, planning, tax, and consulting needs. Oberman started her career at Amgen, where she served as director of finance. After 13 years at Amgen, Oberman went into public accounting at TF Oberman & Associates so she could dedicate herself to advising business owners and healthcare professionals on how to better run their businesses. Bringing her corporate perspective and business experience to her clients, she looks beyond just tax returns or financial statements. In 2017 after seven years of solo entrepreneurship, she merged her practice into JRRO LLP.

To Oberman, leadership means being a dedicated and compassionate guide to her clients and JRRO team members. She understands that effective leadership involves active listening, clear communication, and an unwavering commitment to ethical practices. She values the trust her clients place in her, and views her role as an opportunity to make a positive impact on their financial well-being.

Oberman received a Bachelor of Science from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, with a major in biology and minor in mathematics. She also earned an MBA from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA. Oberman is a member of the California Society of CPAs and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. She holds a Certified Public Accounting license and the Chartered Global Management Accounting designation.

**DARLA LONGO**

FINALIST

Vice Chairman / Managing Director
CBRE

Darla Longo has been one of CBRE's most successful investment brokers in her more than 40 years in commercial real estate. Throughout her career, she has been involved in approximately \$72.8 billion of investment sales totaling over 1.5 billion square-feet, sold over 21,000 acres of land, and leased over 229 million square-feet. She is recognized as a pioneer for women in commercial real estate.

In 2021, CBRE has recognized Longo with the highest honor of her career by naming a national award after her. The Darla Longo Award recognizes one next-generation producer who is the absolute very best and brightest in our industry. Nominees significantly stand out from their peers for their work ethic, ability to overcome obstacles, engagement in the CBRE platform, and embodiment of our RISE values. They are leaders of the CBRE culture and are riveted on excellence in serving their clients.

**JODY TOERNER**

FINALIST

Chief Operating Officer
LightGabler

Jody Toerner began with LightGabler when it opened its doors in 2011 as the office manager but was soon made executive director in 2013 and COO in 2022. Her duties involve every aspect of firm management. She is instrumental in overseeing and coordinating its growth, 29 employees (including 19 attorneys), and over 4,000 clients.

Toerner is truly the hub around which the firm revolves. Some of her responsibilities include reviewing and approving all insurance coverage, IT vendors and software, and COBRA/medical and related health care coverage. She manages all internal accounting, works with the firm's CPA, supervises and approves all billing (approximately 800 client bills per month) and handles all HR functions. She works with the firm's bankers on all details and participates heavily in marketing decisions. She regularly works with the firm's managing attorney and the attorney practice department managers to oversee the firm's work and workflow.



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WOMAN OWNED FOUNDER OF THE YEAR HONOREE

JERRI HEMSWORTH

CEO & Creative Director
Newman Grace Inc.

Jerri Hemsworth is the founder, CEO and creative director of Newman Grace, a creative, marketing and branding firm in Woodland Hills. She has lived her career with one goal in mind: to provide great creative and marketing services for growing brands. And since 1996, that's precisely what she and Newman Grace have done. As creative director at Newman Grace, she oversees all creative campaigns. She has supervised creative and brand development projects for companies ranging from startups to the Fortune 500 companies.

She has served on numerous non-profit boards, both charitable and associations. She is a past president of both the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Ventura Chapter and NAWBO-California.

In Spring 2023, Hemsworth launched the Echelon Business Development Network as a "new type of networking model" for business professionals actively working across Southern California. Echelon members are top-tiered, trusted advisors comprised of attorneys, accountants, wealth managers, business & financial consultants, insurance professionals, marketing and PR professionals, and bankers. Echelon is led by two female executives, Hemsworth and Renee Jacobs. According to Hemsworth and Jacobs, the Echelon Business Development Network is a premier business development organization designed for trusted business advisors which allows its members to build enduring relationships. Echelon helps its members grow their businesses by utilizing a dynamic portfolio of exclusive marketing resources and business opportunities. The primary goals of Echelon are to significantly increase business development, SEO, personal and professional growth for its members.



MICHELLE O'GRADY

FINALIST
CEO & Founder
Team Friday

Michelle O'Grady is a Los Angeles City native, communications expert, and strategist who has advised foundations, non-profit organizations, policymakers, and businesses on how to develop strategies to shift culture and connect with communities. Her work spans over 20 years in multiple industries including fashion, consumer product goods, entertainment, and healthcare.

In 2012, O'Grady founded Team Friday, a creative marketing agency that focuses on crafting tactics that resonate with specific cultural and regional distinctions that help clients build stronger connections with their target communities. In 2022, as founder and CEO, she became one of the 23.7% of women-owned businesses to reach a decade in business. To this day, Team Friday puts to practice the principle that most successful brands have – that marketing goes beyond just the use of external communications but is infused into every aspect of the organization.



PAULETTE PANTOJA

FINALIST
CEO
Blu Digital Group, Inc.

Paulette Pantoja is a visionary leader recognized for her innovative use of technology within the film and TV digital supply chain industry. As the CEO of Blu Digital Group, she has built a global media technology company that provides end-to-end digital media software and services to the OTT, broadcast, and video streaming industries.

Pantoja founded Blu Digital Group in 2007 as the first dedicated Blu-ray Disc testing facility in the film and TV home entertainment industry. Since then, she has led the company's expansion into media processing and software licensing of its patented and proprietary cloud-based solutions for digital distribution workflows. With a focus on quality, speed, scalability, and efficiency, Blu Digital Group's award-winning cloud-based software leverages AI and automation to set the standard for digital media distribution. Under Pantoja's leadership, Blu Digital Group has grown to about 200 full-time employees and has facilities in multiple countries.

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CHAMPION OF WOMEN HONOREE

ALICIA BARMORE

CEO & Founder
Favour Consulting Group

Alicia Barmore is the founder and CEO of Favour Consulting Group, an LA-based company that has been dedicated to helping countless female entrepreneurs become nonprofit leaders in the community for over two decades. Despite divorce, losing everything, and raising two boys as a single-mother, Barmore tenaciously persisted and launched Favour Consulting Group.

It was through volunteering at a local homeless shelter that she began to meet women from all walks of life who wanted to start their own businesses. She now leverages her passion and purpose to assist women in the pursuit of becoming vehicles for change.

The women-lead nonprofits Barmore has helped start and develop through Favour Consulting Group include: 10 Toes In, Ordered Steps and Women on the Grow, just to name a few. She also volunteers with the Peggy Beatrice Foundation that is dedicated to providing housing for LA's homeless. Her passion for developing women and organizations has brought hundreds of nonprofits to life, producing sustainable change in communities across the country.

Barmore's drive to equip others to do good in their spheres of influence is her greatest asset. Whether she's building a nonprofit from the ground up or creating resources to empower leaders in purpose-driven business development, her goal is to create big-picture impact that will forever change the lives of her clients and anyone connected to them.



RITA BOCCUZZI

FINALIST
CEO
Flourish Inc.

Rita Bocuzzi's primary focus is financial education and empowerment in order to elevate her community, with a special focus on women so that they can educate their families and friends. She believes that a financially educated society is an elevated society and she absolutely practices what she preaches.

In her free time, she hosts complimentary workshops such as "Wine Women & Wealth," "It's No Secret to be Wealthy: Money 101," "Be Wealthy Challenges," and "It's No Secret Money Masterclass." In addition to creating a thriving community for women to network and grow, she also prioritizes creating a safe space for women to learn about money without judgment, pressure and fear. Many women who Bocuzzi has supported through her events have come from environments that did not support their development and growth. She is mindful when hosting these events in order to empower these women.



BARBARA PERRIER

FINALIST
Vice Chairman
CBRE

Barbara Perrier has been with CBRE for 34 years and is a leading investment broker specializing in industrial and land sales. Perrier has been a proud member of CBRE's Women's Network and has been an Advisory Board member since its inception 22 years ago. She recently became part of the Board Emeritus. She is passionate about mentoring young professionals and has participated in many mentoring programs. She actively trains young professionals to take the reins, one of the reasons why she is an inspiration and mentor to women in commercial real estate.

She is also passionate about assisting Los Angeles' homeless community. She and her daughter participate in the National Charity League, volunteering at a local homeless shelter whose mission is to lift people out of homelessness. As a volunteer, she provides birthday cakes for children, cooks meals and currently serves on its Board of Directors.

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LightGabler congratulates Jody Toerner on being a finalist for the 2023 Women's Leadership Award, Executive of the Year.

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ADVOCATE HONOREE

OLGA DURAN

Patient Services Director (retired July 2023)
Valley Community Healthcare

Olga Duran has served her community for over 64 years as an educator, cross-cultural specialist, parental advisor, NGO consultant and community representative to civic and county boards. Motivated by her real-life experience as a single parent working three jobs to sustain her family, Duran was determined to address how poverty and adverse environments adversely affect the ability for children to thrive and succeed. She became a catalyst in redirecting parents in the community to better childrearing models while monitoring and overseeing training for staff of the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation Childcare centers located in low-income area throughout the state.

Duran developed culturally sensitive leadership courses, self-esteem workshops for students in community colleges and universities of Los Angeles County. She also oversaw training programs for women in non-traditional occupations, and developed and implemented successful outreach campaigns and prevention strategies programs for gang members, their siblings. She received the opportunity to oversee a \$1.5 million dollar Perinatal Program for Substance Abusing Women and their Children. Her strategies resulted in many women successfully completing the six-month program, regaining custody of their children and obtaining their Chemical Dependency Certification.

In July 2023, after 26 years with Valley Community Healthcare, Duran retired as its patient services director. Always supportive of her community, Duran is already engaged in volunteering with her church, developing a resource infrastructure to support its anticipated growth and needs. She is currently working on a request for support to build transitional housing for homeless and the underserved in the Santa Maria area.



JORDYN JACKSON

FINALIST
Co-Founder
SOAR Jewels

In 2014, Jordyn Jackson united with her sister Taylor Jackson to form their own 501(c)(3) charity, Soaring Samaritans Youth Movement (SSYM). Jackson hand delivers soccer balls to share the joy of soccer, school supplies, clothes, and humanitarian aid to youth living in difficult conditions.

Seven years ago, Jackson created SOAR Jewels, a socially responsible business where she hand-makes bracelets to help fund proceeds for SSYM. She does this through her Chaminade school club, Bead 4 Balls where kids involved can earn service hours towards graduation. At the end of the year, the club chooses an organization to donate funds to. This year, they chose Asperger Autism Network. Struggling to produce enough inventory for SOAR Jewels alone, Jackson formed a partnership with 14 schools in her local district. As the district's first student-owned, "service-learning" business, the group made over 3,000 bracelets and raised \$60,000 for SSYM.



TERRI HILLIARD OLSON

FINALIST
Principal
Terri Hilliard, P.C.

Terri Hilliard Olson is an attorney, mediator, certified exit planning advisor, certified Alzheimer's Disease and dementia care trainer whose practice centers on advanced estate and business succession and exit planning, asset preservation, special needs trusts and family protection planning for seniors and others.

With offices in Westlake Village, Burbank, Santa Barbara and San Diego, Olson's law practice has grown through referrals and her pillars of success: truth, justice, honor and character. Mediation and advisory service are at the core of her expertise, and she resolves issues with respect, dignity and a humanistic approach. As a private mediator, Hilliard is focused on helping families, elders, individuals and businesses resolve disputes through family meetings and, if needed, mediation. Her firm offers unbiased assistance in how to locate quality nursing home and assisted living resources, including strategies for how to pay for long-term care.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AMAZING SFVBJ LEADERS!

It is an honor to work along-side you to facilitate your vision.

Education

Workplace

Planning

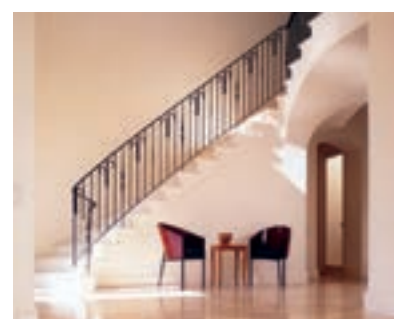
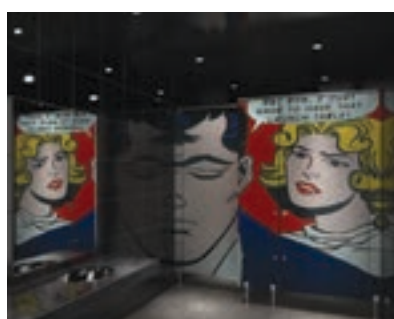
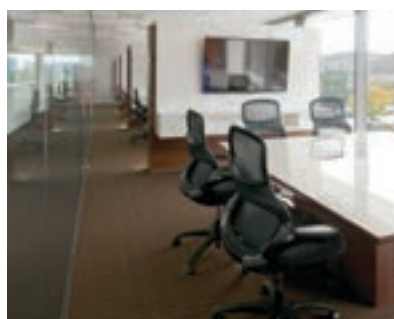
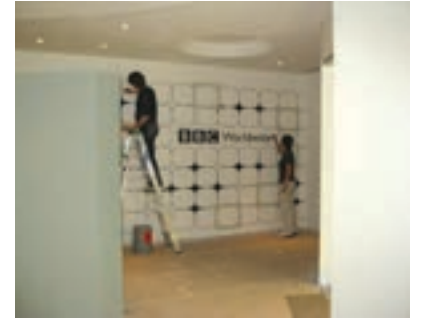
Branding Communication

Entertainment / Retail / Hospitality

Architecture

Commercial

Residential





MENTOR OF THE YEAR HONOREE

ROSALINDA VINT

President
Women of Substance & Men of Honor

Rosalinda Vint dedicates all of her time to helping at-risk populations such as foster and formerly incarcerated youth. The key is an at-risk population where state/community resources are limited and one lacks support from relatives. Vint is herself a former foster youth who grew up in Los Angeles County. She was sexually, physically, verbally, and emotionally abused. Although it has all had an impact on her well-being, she has worked through her trauma in therapy and has come out to the other side, ready to help and mentor others.

Vint was a senior executive with a Fortune 500 company where she worked for over 20 years. By the end of her tenure, she received the highest-ranking award one can obtain there, then decided to quit her job to start her non-profit organization, Women of Substance & Men of Honor because she felt compelled to reach out and help mentor at-risk youth.

Vint is a licensed chaplain for foster care and detention-based youth. She partners with various organizations and companies to bring training and resources inside juvenile detention facilities so that the youth are transitioned well before being released. She also was a volunteer Chaplain for Yang-Young Adult Action Network group at California Institute for Women in Corona. Currently, she hosts a leadership class for foster youth in group homes and those inside the detention facility. Every week, she teaches youth how to become independent, how to have a healthy relationship, and how to prioritize goals.



CHANDER ARORA

FINALIST
Biotech Faculty
 Los Angeles Mission College

Dr. Chander Arora's contributions focus on outreach and inclusion of underrepresented, underserved and displaced populations thereby providing them employment opportunities and increasing the talent pool for a high demand, high growth sector. For the past two years, this is helping break the cycle of poverty, reduce unemployment in the local community, and in turn, enhancing the economy.

Dr. Arora's presentations and workshops at different conferences and ATE Center of Excellence are helping to share lessons learned and project outcomes to a national audience, and help other organizations create pathways to technology careers for adults seeking reemployment. She is also widely involved in disseminating project results via interviews and publications. Her involvement with work source development centers and America's Job Centers of California to recruit non-traditional students is creating a pipeline for the unemployed to prestigious Biotech companies. The workshop material and videos also serve broader science communities.



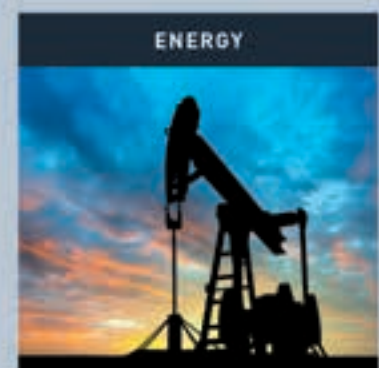
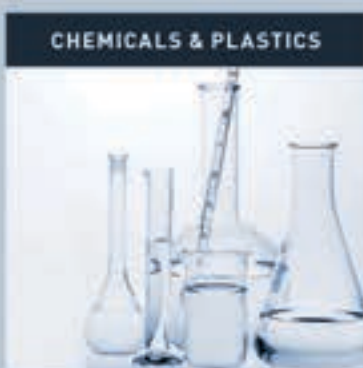
CLAUDIA SHAH

FINALIST
Lead Adviser
 SBDC

In addition to her impressive professional experience in the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) program, Claudia Shah has also demonstrated a strong commitment to bettering the careers of women in an informal or formal mentorship role. She understands the importance of supporting and empowering women in their professional journeys.

Shah's work with Spanish-speaking small business owners since 2015 has allowed her to witness firsthand the challenges faced by underrepresented entrepreneurs. She has embraced the role of a mentor, offering guidance, advice and resources to help women thrive in their business endeavors. Her dedication to diversity, equity and inclusion within the SBDC program has also made her a key player in advancing opportunities for Hispanic and Latina entrepreneurs in LA County. Shah ensures that these business owners have equal access to the resources and support they need to start and grow their businesses.

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NEXTGEN WOMAN OF THE YEAR HONOREE

KAYLA SINGER

CEO
Luna CX

Kayla Singer began her career at PwC in the Deals Practice, focusing on M&A valuation and strategic value consulting for Fortune 500 clients across multiple sectors. Singer presented valuation models to some of the largest companies in the world; she can take complicated financial concepts and translate them into language anyone can understand. She then transitioned to management consulting. Singer has traveled to 40 countries, immersing herself in a wide variety of cultures and types of people.

Recognizing her love for building teams and outsourcing, Singer started her own firm to do just that in September of last year. Her company is called Luna CX and Singer is growing her business and hopes to have a 500-person company in the next 5 years. She specializes in building incredible teams and helping her clients become more successful and improve their service practices.

On top of her business roles, Singer is also a principal in her family office with more than 70 fund investments across real estate, private equity, venture capital, and debt. The office also has several co-investments with funds and more than 70 direct investments. She helps bring in investment opportunities and is part of the team that provides advisory services for the leaders of the portfolio companies which can benefit. She excels at identifying and solving business problems and bringing in new work, clients and managing them. Singer can tackle any problem you put in front of her and is a champion for helping other women succeed.

NOMINEE 2023 WOMENS' LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Congratulations

Katie Higgins

Vice President / General Manager

Western Jet Aviation, A StandardAero Company

StandardAero solves some of the biggest aviation challenges through ingenuity, teamwork and collaboration. Our culture is built on respect, open communication and recognition for a job well done. We focus on teamwork to create a supportive environment where everyone can bring their skills and perspectives to the table. With over 100 years of experience in the aviation industry, we have the stability, resources and training to help our team achieve their career goals.

FINALIST





MAKYLA CERVANTES
FINALIST
Chief Executive Officer
Baila Conmigo Dance Experience

Makyla Cervantes is the chief executive officer of the Baila Conmigo Dance Experience. She has scaled a dance program into two school campuses serving over 400 children with four dance instructors and 22 volunteers. She is on pace for a third campus for the program and has achieved all of this at the age of 16! (She just turned 17).

Cervantes is also a 4.3 GPA student, founded the Women in Business Club on Granada Hills High School campus and partnered with Pepperdine and UC Irvine to provide young women mentorship. Along with bringing various forms of dance in communities which lack studios and affordability, she has brought experienced young dancers into leadership roles and given them jobs. She has 22 volunteer dancers and has successfully been able to partner her efforts with charter schools.



JANE DAVIDSON
FINALIST
Associate Attorney
Munck Wilson Mandala

Jane Davidson has been dedicated to serving the Los Angeles community her entire 30 years of life. She currently serves as development vice president-elect on the Management Council for Junior League of Los Angeles, which is a women's volunteer and leadership training organization. Last year as Harvest Boutique co-chair, she put on an event that raised over \$140,000 for the organization's programs. Davidson is also a deacon at San Marino Community Church where she was recently called to serve as a Stephen's Leader, restarting a program that has been dormant for 25 years to better provide pastoral care services to members of the church community going through difficult times.

Davidson is a mentor for graduates of the UCLA Law Fellows program which helps students from historically underrepresented backgrounds pursue a career in law. She also serves on the Scholarship Committee for USC's LGBTQ alumni association.



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CYNTHIA FRAUSTO

Director, Marketing & Public Relations
Antelope Valley Medical Center

Cynthia Frausto has 28 years of marketing experience, and has been involved in the economic development, healthcare and nonprofit industries. She has enhanced and built strategic initiatives that included marketing campaigns, community partnerships, and public relations planning. She previously worked for a managed service organization focused on radiology marketing, where she reorganized the department and structured an on-boarding program and implemented a client resource management software.

Commencing her hospital career as Antelope Valley Medical Center's marketing and public relations director in the middle of a global pandemic was no easy feat; however, Frausto quickly went to work and soon after launched the hospital's new website, and successfully rebranded the hospital with a new name and look.



KATIE HIGGINS

Vice President / General Manager
Western Jet Aviation, a StandardAero company

Katie Higgins entered the aerospace industry working for the German company Lufthansa Technik and quickly moved into management roles focused on growing new operational units and increasing profit of existing business units. At the age of 36 she was selected for her first executive position at a Lufthansa subsidiary.

A few years later Higgins joined Western Jet Aviation on Van Nuys Airport as CFO when the 20 year old company was partnering up with a private equity firm. She drove structural change, helping Western Jet to grow into a very successful business with 60% increase in number of employees within three years as well as opening a second facility location. This year Western Jet Aviation was acquired by StandardAero, which has chosen Higgins to be vice president/general manager of the Van Nuys site.



STACEY MCKINNON

COO
Morton Wealth

While Stacey McKinnon serves as COO and CMO at Morton Wealth today, she has worked various jobs throughout her life: barista, fitness instructor, marketing associate, receptionist, food server, and wedding planner. These jobs influenced how she sees the world and shaped her values to be empowerment, empathy, and excellence. By the time she shifted into financial services in 2014, she had a diverse range of expertise in teamwork and business management to share with Morton Wealth.

Since becoming COO in 2017, McKinnon has been an integral part of growing Morton Wealth from 30 to 55 employees. The firm now serves over 1,000 households and \$2 million AUM. She continues to serve 20 clients and feels that maintaining a personal touch allows her to stay connected to their needs and results in better client experiences.



SHANDREA NIBLETT

Chief Operating Officer
Spectrum Commercial Real Estate, Inc.

Shandrea Niblett has a rich background in commercial real estate, starting her career as an administrative assistant at Grubb & Ellis, where she developed a passion for the field. She went on to work at NAI Capital, where she quickly climbed the ranks from administrative assistant to office manager, overseeing the company's top-performing administrative department while also receiving her real estate license.

After 13 years at NAI Capital, Niblett took her career to the next level and is now the chief operating officer of Spectrum Commercial Real Estate, Inc., where she played a key role in the development of the company from the ground up. Today, the firm is a well-established commercial brokerage and property management company focusing on the San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita submarkets.



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Congratulations to Ayisha Jeter, Arcutis interim Chief Commercial Officer, and all the Women Who Lead nominees

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Moving the Needle Toward More Diverse, Inclusive MBA Programs

More women are seeking MBAs than ever before, according to a survey released earlier this year that found MBA programs are nearing the gender parity mark with more than 41 percent of women enrollment. Fortune magazine reported that this news is “timely” since the Fortune 500 “finally hit double-digit representation for women CEOs in 2022.”

The MBA program at CSUN’s David Nazarian College of Business and Economics is among those institutions seeing more gender parity. Women continue to be attracted to the Nazarian MBA program demonstrated by an increase in admissions from 43% in 2010 to 57% in fall 2023. In addition, Nazarian College’s program continues to see an increase in racial and ethnic composition of MBA students compared to a decade ago thanks to initiatives that have proven attractive to students considering an MBA.

FLEXIBLE RELEVANCE

Classes are held Monday through Thursday from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., and occasional Saturdays. Students typically take two courses per semester and complete MBA coursework

in about 2.5 years. Elective offerings focus on providing timely and relevant topics that help differentiate a student in their workplace and add career value.

Nazarian College Marketing Professor Kristen Walker, who also serves as director of the college’s MBA program, says the program provides flexibility for students who need to reduce or accelerate their academic load commensurate with career and family demands.

“Obtaining an MBA can be challenging even under the most favorable situation,” Walker said. “But when you are working, raising a family and going to school for your MBA, it can be tasking. That’s why Nazarian College’s MBA program offers a flexible schedule format with evenings and weekends for its students.”

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE THROUGH CONSULTING AND COMPETITION

Nazarian College MBA students not only learn, but they also pay that knowledge forward by helping businesses as part of the culminating experience in the Nazarian College Small Business Consulting Program.

Through continued support from the Wells

Fargo Foundation, MBA student teams consult with and address specific challenges or needs of small businesses and non-profits in the San Fernando Valley region. The teams dedicate up to 650 hours of consulting services for each client, resulting in a comprehensive report detailing their findings and recommendations.

In addition to helping small businesses, the program assists students by providing them with highly marketable skills that increase their earning power and marketplace value.

“Students gain confidence and make greater personal connections by working directly with small business owners” said Walker. “They see first-hand many of the challenges and

opportunities, which is an incredibly valuable experience.”

PURPOSE LEADS RECOGNITION

Nazarian College MBA consulting teams are consistently recognized for producing quality,



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LINDA LEE, CCIM
Executive Vice President

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top-tier projects. Each year, Nazarian student teams compete in the Small Business Institute Project of the Year Program. With the guidance of university professors, teams across North America provide business consulting for actual companies. Top teams are recognized at the SBI's annual conference.

For the second year in a row, two Nazarian College MBA teams were awarded first place in the 2023 Small Business Institute Project of the Year competition.

• **Graduate Feasibility Study/Comprehensive marketing category:** Under the advisement of Dr. Walker, a student team won first place for its work with client Ollivier Security Systems & Network Engineering and President and CEO Louis Boulgarides. The student team included Alma Angel, Brian Friedman, Romario Gonzalez, Leticia Meza-Guerrero, and Michael Shaffa.

• **Graduate Consulting/Specialized category:** Under the advisement of Dr. Deborah Cours, a student team won first place for its work with client Valley Economic Alliance and its President and CEO Sonya Blake. The student team included Armand Abellian, Fatima Contreras, Sonja Mheryan, Linet Onanian, and Anabel Villalobos.

MATADOR PRIDE

The college's MBA program is regularly recognized by state and national rankings. This includes University HQ, which ranked it No. 18 on its list of "Best California MBA Schools and Programs." The list included eight other CSU campuses. In addition, U.S. News & World

'Nazarian College's MBA program offers a flexible schedule format with evenings and weekends for its students.'

Report recently ranked Nazarian College's MBA program as:

- No. 2 for part-time CSU MBA programs
- No. 2 among 23 public universities in the California State University system
- No. 14 among MBA programs in California

Few MBA programs can equal CSUN Nazarian in graduating MBAs prepared to work and lead in a diverse and global business environment, said Walker.

"Our college takes pride in our MBA students and alumni who are accomplished professionals representing incredibly diverse backgrounds in a variety of industries in the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles County and Ventura County regions," she said. "Our graduate students view their MBA as a smart investment and have the desire to understand the business environment better to offer innovative insights."

Learn more at mba.cus.edu.



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The Power of Volunteer Leadership and the Road to Entrepreneurship

An interview with Pegi Matsuda, CEO / founder, On Board Business & Community Consulting

Pegi Matsuda is an experienced and enthusiastic leader in both her professional career and in her passion for serving the community. She has more than 30 years of experience leading companies and organizations during times of significant industry change. She's at the helm of change every day as she serves her diverse clients and their unique needs and while serving as a board member of several nonprofit organizations. As a member of numerous executive teams, she's led change in several industries including telecommunications, natural gas, a membership association, publishing and in health care. Celebrating five years as the founder and CEO of her own consulting practice, she's sharing her story of the power of volunteer leadership and how serving the community inspired her to become an entrepreneur.

How did you become engaged with the community?

MATSUDA: The usual response from many people is that they followed the example of their parents or a friend invited them to a community volunteer activity. My path to volunteerism came through my first professional job. I always say the path towards volunteerism doesn't matter. All that matters is once you serve the community, stay connected by volunteering in any capacity you are able. After graduating from college, I was fortunate to work for a major telecommunications company, GTE Telephone Operations, which went on to become Verizon Communications in 2000. The president and CEO and the vice president of public affairs had a major impact on my interest in volunteerism. As a young college graduate, I had a bird's eye view as I watched them expertly navigate through the multitude of volunteer activities and identifying how best to utilize the company's resources to help Los Angeles become a better place. After serving a year in plant operations, I was invited to join the company's community development team and had the opportunity to help the company chart a new path into the future. Community relations is certainly an art, but there is some science to the profession, as well. We started by creating a community relations strategic plan, connecting community engagement activities with tens of thousands of community volunteer projects and encouraged employees to become actively engaged in the community. While the company did not seek out recognition, we were honored for our employee volunteer program by the President of the United States along with 50 other US companies.

My first volunteer assignments were what you'd imagine. I helped feed the poor in downtown Los Angeles, planned holiday events for children living in poverty, helped as a "hugger" at the Los Angeles Special Olympics as participants crossed finish lines, passed out community resource information at community events and I also walked a lot of dogs for the local animal shelter.



Pegi Matsuda facilitating the Visionary Leadership panel at the Women's Leadership Symposium, September 14, 2023

'What you don't learn in college and what you might not learn in your career, you can learn as a volunteer.'

What did you learn as a community volunteer?

MATSUDA: I tell this to young people all the time. What you don't learn in college and what you might not learn in your career, you can learn as a volunteer. So, pick a skill you want to learn and are not learning in school or in your career and identify how you can learn that skill through volunteer service.

My favorite volunteer assignments included serving on the committee of a major golf tournament (The Los Angeles Open which is now the Genesis Invitational) when I didn't know how to play golf nor did I understand golf "jokes." I'm not a financial professional but serving on a board helped me understand how to read income statements and balance sheets. I've also participated in the hiring of audit firms to conduct nonprofit audits and I've learned a great deal about strategic planning and community development. While my career in market planning, community development, media relations and communication provided a solid foundation for my volunteer activities, I was also able to see, up close, how many of these skills would be put to the test in my volunteer service. Watching some nonprofit organizational structures crumble, non-

profit leaders coming and going, strategic plans ignored and other sorts of mayhem, serving on a board during times of intense pressure from the outside world was definitely an experience that shaped me in so many positive ways.

The big five lessons learned?

- 1) Seeing how organizations grow and decline and the impact on communities;
- 2) Understanding the importance of positive and not so positive leadership;
- 3) The importance of hiring and developing the best employees and when to "let go" of employees who are not the right organizational "fit;"
- 4) How to deal with obstacles; and,
- 5) Metaphorically, how you may sometimes stumble on "boulders" but learn how to skip over the "pebbles" of life, you see on the ground.

How did volunteerism inspire you to start your own business?

MATSUDA: It's usually a career or a specific set of experiences that lead you to entrepreneurship. In my situation, volunteerism played a significant role in my career today, perhaps more than my corporate and small business positions. Volunteerism helped me gain confidence in my decision-making. I learned how to put fears aside when situations went down darker paths than expected. Taking the lead and "inserting myself into the process" taught me there is a role for all of us in any process to overcome obstacles. Looking back, climbing out of, and around obstacles, gave me the confidence to believe in myself and that situations would improve. Volunteerism continues to inspire me today. People always say, "know your passion" and that passion will lead to a great volunteer opportunity. I wish I found this to be true. Most of my passion for community

issues came about indirectly and grew from various volunteer activities. I've participated in quite a few volunteer projects where I felt like a "fish out of water." Surprisingly, it was these type of volunteer activities that allowed me to actually find my passion and also helped to grow my vision for community service and for my professional career. I always say take a chance volunteering for a project that may not initially fit your skills and interest. Who knows? You may find yourself on a path to becoming an entrepreneur.



PEGI MATSUDA, MA, CFRE

BUSINESS: On Board LLC

DATE FOUNDED: August 2018

SERVICES: Organizational planning & design, board development, community development, fundraising, communications

WEBSITE: onboard.biz



Pegi Matsuda with her Most Trusted Advisor, Kacie Haworth.



Attending the Fernando Award Foundation's annual nominee reception. L-R, volunteers Tori McNeese and Rojean Kashanchi.



With gal-pals Fiona Hutton, Sue Bendavid, Tamara Gurney and Jane Skeeter attending the Inspirational Women Awards Reception.

On Board LLC celebrates five years in business and community consulting.*

Since On Board opened its doors in 2018, CEO **Pegi Matsuda** has proudly supported the nonprofits listed here through volunteerism and/or through philanthropic support.



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Attending the VICA Business Hall of Fame Awards Program.



Client meeting with Alex Guerrero and Pastor Shane Scott, Macedonia Community Development Corporation.