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of the  
Year

2012 Woman of the Year

*Patti Ellish*

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Susan Bailey  
EJGH Supervisor of Pulmonary Services

## Passionate About Caring

East Jefferson General Hospital congratulates Susan Bailey on today's distinction as a Woman of the Year. Susan joined the EJGH team in 1993. She developed an interest in respiratory therapies through the health issues of her own family. "I could see the tremendous impact these therapists could have on their patients and it inspired me." Today, Susan holds the title of Pulmonary Supervisor. She says the best part of her job is working with patients and her team. "I truly get excited about coming to work every day, knowing what a positive impact our work can have on our patients lives."

Susan is one of more than 3,000 EJGH Team Members working hard to deliver the highest levels of comfort and care every day to our region.



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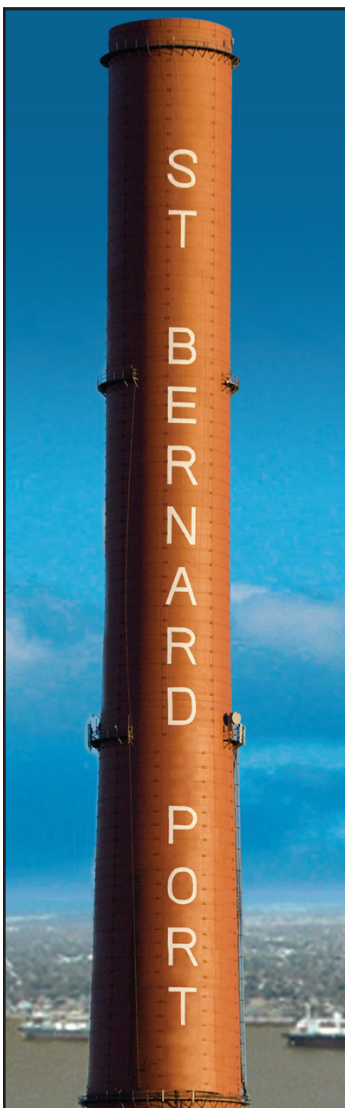
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# Intro

## Patti Elish is the heartbeat of the North Shore



Christian Moises  
News Editor

Patti Elish lives and breathes health care, making sure the patient comes first.

The CEO of St. Tammany Parish Hospital, who has been at the helm for slightly more than 10 years, has pulled from personal experience while leading with gusto to make the hospital a leader in health care — and business — in the New Orleans region.

After undergoing surgery that required her to stay at the hospital overnight, Elish realized the importance of visitors. After her recovery, she changed hospital policy and removed visiting hours. She took an extra step by creating a family zone at St. Tammany Parish Hospital that includes free Wi-Fi, sofas and beds so patients can keep their family members close.

Elish has also piped in soft music and installed ceiling art and fish tanks, while cutting out loudspeaker pages and instead setting up visual cues to remind staff members to keep down the noise.

But her work goes beyond patient care.

Elish was instrumental in establishing the first chapter of the United Way's Women's Leadership Initiative with a focus on early childhood development. And like many of the honorees this year, she does her job quietly, always making sure everyone knows her support staff is the reason for her success.

As overall Woman of the Year, Elish is one of 50 outstanding individuals who have been recognized for their

professional and community achievements. They shared their greatest challenges, professionally and personally, and how they overcame those difficulties to become leaders in their profession and in the region.

This year's honorees, who join 13 previous classes of Women of the Year recipients, have broken barriers across all spectrums of the business community — health care, construction, law, education, media and hospitality. Their forward thinking, determination and efforts beyond the workplace include contributions in the community that continue to shape and improve our region.

Simply put, they comprise the essential fabric of the metropolitan New Orleans area.

This year, CityBusiness welcomes Elish to its Women of the Year Hall of Fame. She joins an elite group whose members have been honored three times as Women of the Year.

These women — and all of the honorees — continue to drive our region and serve as outstanding representatives in the community.

CityBusiness thanks each of them for their professional and civic efforts and the difference they make.

Congratulations to the 2012 Women of the Year. •

*News Editor Christian Moises can be reached at 293-9249 or christian.moises@nopg.com.*

### Hall of Fame

*Women of the Year honorees are inducted in the Hall of Fame when they are honored for a third time.*

#### 2012

Patti Elish 2001, 2008, 2012

#### 2009

Debra Bowers 2006, 2007, 2009

Kim Boyle 2005, 2008, 2009

Mignon Faget 1999, 2006, 2009

Angela O'Byrne 2000, 2006, 2009

Kim Sport 1999, 2004, 2009

#### 2008

Julia Bland 2000, 2006, 2008

Donna Klein 2001, 2006, 2008

Priscilla Lawrence 2006, 2007, 2008

Carol Solomon 2004, 2006, 2008

#### 2006

P.K. Scheerle 1999, 2000, 2006

## ST. TAMMANY PARISH HOSPITAL CONGRATULATES

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### PATTI M. ELLISH, FACHE

President/CEO and *CityBusiness* Women of the Year Hall of Fame Honoree

The devoted team of professionals at St. Tammany Parish Hospital deliver world-class healthcare every day to our neighbors close to home. That kind of personal commitment permeates the organization, and it starts at the top.

Patti M. Elish, FACHE, leads by example and lives the mission every day.

The team of 1,720 compassionate individuals she works with congratulate her for this well deserved honor, and we thank *New Orleans CityBusiness* for recognizing our president's leadership and dedication to caring.



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*Patti  
Ellish*



Above right: St. Tammany Parish Hospital CEO Patti Elish visits with hospital guild volunteers Nancy Reed and Anna Bienvenu.

Right: St. Tammany Parish Hospital Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups, left, Board of Commissioners member Pizzie Romano and CEO Patti Elish lead staff members in a second line through the hospital.

Below right: St. Tammany Parish Hospital Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton walks and talks business with CEO Patti Elish.

PHOTO BY PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER



**Position:** St. Tammany Parish Hospital president and CEO

**Family:** husband, Gary; children, Melissa, 34, Michael, 31

**Education:** bachelor's degree in health care administration, College of St. Francis; master's degree in health administration, Tulane University

When Patti Elish underwent surgery in 2000 at the Texas hospital where she was chief operating officer, she said the worst part of her four-night stay was the end of visiting hours.

"I can't tell you what it felt like to see them leave my bedside, having to leave when I needed them most," Elish said.

That painful experience led her to do away with visiting hours and "open up" St. Tammany Parish Hospital when she became CEO in late 2000. The family zone at the facility includes free Wi-Fi, sofas and guest beds to keep patients' loved ones nearby.

"Patients are less likely to put on the call light if their family's there," Elish said.

As part of the hospital's healing arts philosophy, Elish has also piped in soft music and installed ceiling art and fish tanks.

In direct response to patient surveys, which cited "nights that were just as loud as days," Elish eliminated loudspeaker pages and placed visual cues throughout the hospital to remind staff members to tone down the noise. Sound meters with light displays were installed at nurses' stations.

"Healing takes place faster if the patients are happy," Elish said.

The correlation between patient happiness and the well-being of her staff isn't lost on Elish, who surveys staff members and physi-

cians. Their responses have led her to, among other things, approve extra sick day perks for senior personnel.

"We make sure we're valuing their tenure here with (targeted), not blanket, benefits," Elish said.

As a former nursing executive, Elish entered the health care administration field later in her career after finishing a graduate program that exposed her to the financial side of hospitals.

"Graduate school gave me confidence and skill-building," Elish said, "while my (nursing experience) defines who I am and my commitment to caring. I don't lose sight of why we're doing this."

She found a mentor in a hospital CEO, who helped her pursue — and earn — a fellowship with the American College of Health Care Executives.

When Elish reached St. Tammany Parish Hospital's top post, she made sure to formally pay it forward by implementing a residency program that brings in health care administration graduate students, pays them a stipend and gives them professional experience.

Elish personally helps select the residents.

"I train for skill, but I hire for attitude," she said. "I look for someone who wants to make a difference and who has passion." •

— Anne Berry

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI



# Rachelle Albright

**Position:** F.H. Myers Construction CEO

**Age:** 40

**Family:** husband, Norman; children: Patrick, 10, Ainsely, 5

**Education:** bachelor's degree in civil engineering, Louisiana State University

Rachelle Albright is one of roughly 30 members on Greater New Orleans Inc.'s NexGen Council, which consists of people economic development agency considers to be future business and community leaders in the region.

That she's in her second term should come as no surprise.

Already a leader in the male-dominated construction industry, Albright was named CEO of F.H. Myers Construction in July. She says one of her main goals is to continue the development and leadership training of the company's staff.

"As a leader, I think it's important to recognize that you grow your people within your company and focus on their talents that allow them and their business to be successful," said Albright, who intends to focus on management training.

Another accomplishment Albright celebrates is having served as the first female chair of the Associated Builders and Contractors' Bayou Chapter board of directors in 2006.

"I think what that highlights (is) our industry is not just a male-dominated industry," Albright

said, adding that being named chairwoman shows women with an interest in construction that it's a viable career path. "It recognizes, regardless of gender, when you show you're being a leader in the industry, you've become a professional in the industry. When you show your wherewithal and show your knowledge of your industry, you can be successful in the promotion of leadership."

In its 25th year, F.H. Myers is now in its second generation of leadership. The firm recently completed a rebuild of the third floor of the Old, U.S. Mint Exhibit and Performance Venue, 400 Esplanade Ave., and Albright served as project manager. The company also handled renovations of the Carousel Bar and Criollo Restaurant and Lounge at the Hotel Monteleone. Albright said the French Quarter hotel asked the firm to complete the bar renovations in 30 days — much shorter than it would normally take — because of its popularity and high traffic.

"That was a real big undertaking," Albright said, but the renovations were completed in that 30-day window. •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



# Rhonda Bagby

**Position:** Humana of Louisiana and South Mississippi commercial market president

**Age:** 43

**Family:** husband, Hugh; children, Sydney, 13, Dylan, 11

**Education:** bachelor's degree in accounting and master's degree in business administration, Delta State University

Rhonda Bagby is equal parts accounting whiz and health care industry guru.

As commercial market president for Humana of Louisiana and South Mississippi, she has helped sustain profits and growth among Humana's commercial lines of insurance, including medical, dental and vision benefits for businesses.

Bagby's knack for accounting and interest in health care formed early. She took an accounting class in high school, and the subject instantly clicked with her. When she was 17, she started working in the business office of a hospital where she learned to apply her finance skills to health care.

When Bagby joined Humana in 2005, she became the company's first finance vice president for its newly acquired commercial business in Louisiana. As finance vice president for Humana's Southeast region commercial operations, she was responsible for managing more than \$2 billion in revenues and overseeing Humana's commercial insurance markets in five states.

When Hurricane Katrina hit just three months into her new job, Bagby faced a new set of challenges in motivating her staff while

sustaining business in a devastated region.

"It showed me that when you've resolved to continue to do your job well, people can pull together as teams and get to different objectives," she said.

Bagby was promoted to her current position in 2010, a time when Humana of Louisiana had just lost a major account. She used the setback as an opportunity to rebuild the company's reputation and boost morale.

Bagby has had a hand in the company's philanthropic work. She helped spearhead last year's launch of the HumanaVitality wellness rewards program. She also helped Humana's Communities Benefit grant program award \$100,000 grants to the New Heights Therapeutic Riding Center, which provides horseback riding for individuals with disabilities, and to the Safe Harbor battered women's shelter.

Outside of Humana, Bagby has loaned her financial expertise to Goodwill Industries of Southeast Louisiana, where she served as treasurer this year. She also is involved with her children's sports teams and raised \$50,000 for new school basketball courts. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti





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# Dianne Baham

**Position:** Services, Training, Advocacy, Resources, and Community Connections executive director

**Age:** 64

**Family:** husband Jim; son, Mark, 36

**Education:** bachelor's degree in social work, Southeastern Louisiana University

In junior high school, a youth director asked Dianne Baham what she wanted her life to look like when she was older.

"I remember taking a pipe cleaner and fashioning it so that one end was reached out to people and the other end was reached out to the Lord," Baham said. "I feel like, even all through my life, the Lord was preparing me for what I'd be doing forever, through the nursing home and through other things our family got us involved in."

Baham, whose family owned and lived in a nursing home when she was a child, is executive director of Services, Training, Advocacy, Resources and Community Connections for people with disabilities, or STARC, a position she considers a ministry.

"We just spent all of our growing up days at the nursing home," she said. "And so I learned at a very early age to be sensitive to people with special needs. I grew very quickly to love that field of just helping, seeing a need and responding to it."

She has worked with STARC since its inception in 1972, when it served three children in a donated space as the St. Tammany Association for Retarded Children. She has grown STARC for 40 years into an agency that serves nearly 1,300 individuals of all ages with special

needs and is one of the largest employers in St. Tammany Parish.

Baham has worked to secure STARC's financial future, helping pass a 2-mill property tax the group shares with the St. Tammany Council on Aging, and positioning the organization to survive five budget cuts in an 18-month period.

She has worked to build communitywide support and, by doing so, has retained all 394 employees, 127 of whom are disabled.

This year, STARC completed its first residential facility for women with disabilities, a nearly \$500,000, 5,000-square-foot Mandeville home where eight women live while working in the community.

"One of the parents said to me, 'I can (lie) down and rest at night because my daughter lives in one of your residential community homes,' Baham said. "That's where all the joy comes, in seeing a parent help realize a dream for their child."

Baham's compassion is so deep that she has opened her own home to struggling citizens for months at a time. She spends her free time singing in the choir and teaching Sunday School at First Baptist Church in Slidell, where her husband is pastor. •

— Diana Chandler



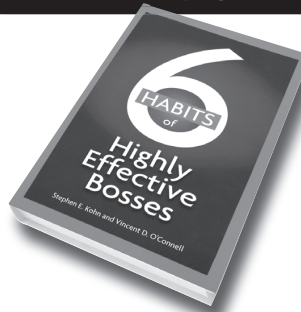
*Congratulations*  
Erin Cowser

- Member, New Orleans CityBusiness Women of the Year, Class of 2012
- Executive Director of Southeastern Louisiana University Public and Governmental Affairs
- Recipient, 2010 Edwin Crawford National Award for Leadership in State Relations and Institutional Advocacy
- Member, Northshore's Finest, Class of 2010
- Recipient, Hammond Chamber 2011 Chairman's Award and 2009 Community Service Award

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# Susan Bailey

**Position:** East Jefferson General Hospital pulmonary supervisor

**Age:** 42

**Family:** husband, Rhett; son, Gavin, 4

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Tulane University; bachelor's degree in cardiopulmonary science, Louisiana State University

East Jefferson General Hospital's Susan Bailey has turned her personal experience with health challenges into a vocation dedicated to helping those who suffer from similar ailments.

Bailey, pulmonary supervisor at EJGH, came to the profession by way of chronic health issues as a child.

"My personal medical issues led me to have an interest in medicine," Bailey said, adding, "I also watched my sister, who underwent numerous surgeries, be treated by a respiratory therapist when I was growing up."

As pulmonary supervisor, Bailey oversees EJGH's Sleep Lab, pulmonary diagnostics, pulmonary rehab, Jefferson Pulmonary Associates, the electroencephalography department and the hospital's blood gas lab.

Her duties include everything from instituting new policies and procedures and teaching staff about those new methods to making sure the departments remained accredited.

Her work with respiratory needs often puts her knee-deep in various community

events, including EJGH's Girls' Night Out, the American Lung Association's Lung Disease walk and various hospital-sponsored health fairs throughout the area.

"I really enjoy the teaching component to my job," she said. "It gives me a chance to help others."

Bailey remembers a time when her sister was having severe breathing problems, and her mother wasn't able to convince her to go to the hospital.

"I called her and listened to her symptoms and explained what could possibly be going on and how serious her situation was," she said. "I believe I helped save her life."

Whether she's helping to save lives or lending advice in her community, Bailey says the most rewarding part of her career is meeting people.

"I enjoy working with people and the clientele who come to the hospital," she said. "Unfortunately, in Louisiana we have a high rate of asthma and other respiratory issues that'll keep me busy for a long time."•

— Mason Harrison



*Congratulations to our colleague*  
**DENA L. OLIVIER**  
*for being named to CITYBUSINESS'*  
**WOMEN OF THE YEAR CLASS OF 2012.**



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# Barbara Beckman

**Position:** Tulane University School of Medicine associate dean of admissions and pharmacology department professor

**Age:** 66

**Family:** husband, Edwin; children, Kristin, 32, Nels, 30

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Tulane University; doctor of pharmacy, John Hopkins University School of Medicine

Barbara Beckman is helping rebuild the New Orleans health care community one medical student at a time. As associate dean of admissions for Tulane University School of Medicine, she recruits future physicians, hoping they will stay in Louisiana after they graduate.

"Louisiana has a shortage of doctors, so our goal is to recruit medical students that will possibly fall in love with the city and stay after they graduate to contribute to our health care system," Beckman said. "New Orleans is not for everyone, so it has to be people that fit."

To create more opportunities in Louisiana for medical students, Beckman said Tulane is expanding into the community and forming partnerships with different hospitals, including Baton Rouge General Hospital, University Hospital and the new Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which is scheduled to open in late 2014.

Tulane's plan also calls for trying to increase diversity and the number of Louisiana students.

"We're pushing for a more diverse community of students and more students that want to live here," Beckman said. "Even if they go to other cities for residency work, we hope they

come back after their training."

The other half of Beckman's job at Tulane is conducting breast cancer research and teaching medical and research students who want to be scientists. Her current research explores the use of ceramides, which are found in most beauty products, to attack and kill breast cancer cells. She has been conducting the study for 10 years and is working with the university to find partners who will help take her basic science discovery to the next level.

Although Beckman has maintained an intense career for more than 30 years, she said her greatest challenge was combining work with raising children.

"My daughter said I made it look easy, which shocked me," she said. "Maybe it looked that way because I'm organized and focused, but it wasn't that way at all."

Outside of work, Beckman has been involved with the New Orleans Rotary Club for 10 years, serving the past two on the committee that awards college scholarships to local high achieving seniors. •

— Kerry Duff



# Ashley Belleau

**Position:** Montgomery Barnett partner

**Age:** 54

**Family:** husband, Dr. Michael Kiernan; children, Patrick, 22, Elizabeth, 20

**Education:** bachelor's degree in American studies, Newcomb College; juris doctor, Tulane University Law School

As the 83rd president of the Federal Bar Association, Ashley Belleau spent much of 2010 and 2011 speaking throughout the country about what she described as a judicial crisis in vacancies and funding.

"We are getting to a point where there is not enough funding to handle all of the jury trials in the United States," Belleau said. "There are also 70 to 100 judge vacancies in any given year. When there are only about 800 judgeships on the federal and appellate level, that many vacancies can bog down the court system."

Before joining Montgomery Barnett in 2008, Belleau served as a managing partner of her own firm, Patrick, Miller, Burnside & Belleau. She said the experience helped her understand the business side of running a law firm.

"It was good for me to get the business side of it," she said. "I think it has helped me manage what I do for my clients."

Belleau handled a large number of cases for corporate and individual clients in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She also served as a member of the panel for the Louisiana Department of Insurance Hurricane Mediation Program,

which the American Arbitration Association administered. Belleau said she mediated more than 350 hurricane wind damage disputes between homeowners and insurance companies.

"It was some of the most rewarding work I have been able to do as an attorney," Belleau said. "I had the chance to help people restart their lives in the city."

Throughout her career, Belleau said family always came first, adding that she took a different route than most attorneys in switching firms a few times.

"But I saw it as a benefit," she said. "I learned quite a bit by having the chance to work with different people. My career might have been delayed a bit by balancing work with family, but it paid off for me."

Outside the courtroom, Belleau serves as director of the Mirabeau Family Learning Center, a charitable organization for people trying to reenter the workforce and get into better housing.

"It has been incredibly gratifying to know I am playing a small part in helping these people get their lives in shape," she said. •

— Robin Shannon



# 2,200 Women Strong... 88 Years and Counting

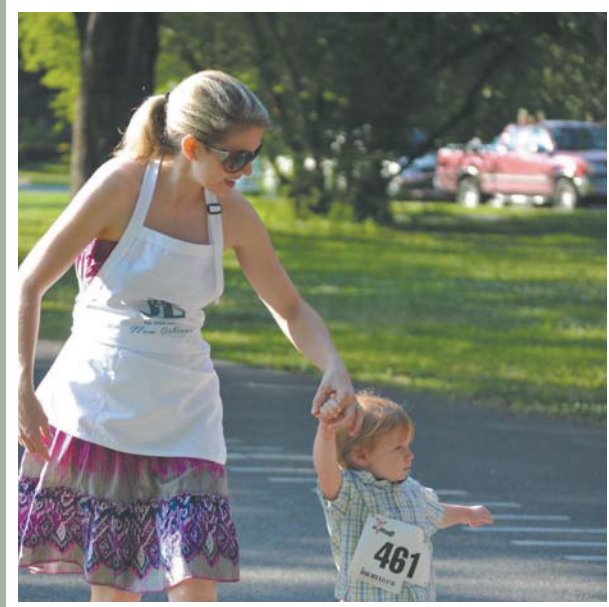
## The Junior League of New Orleans

The Junior League of New Orleans is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

Rebuilding New Orleans



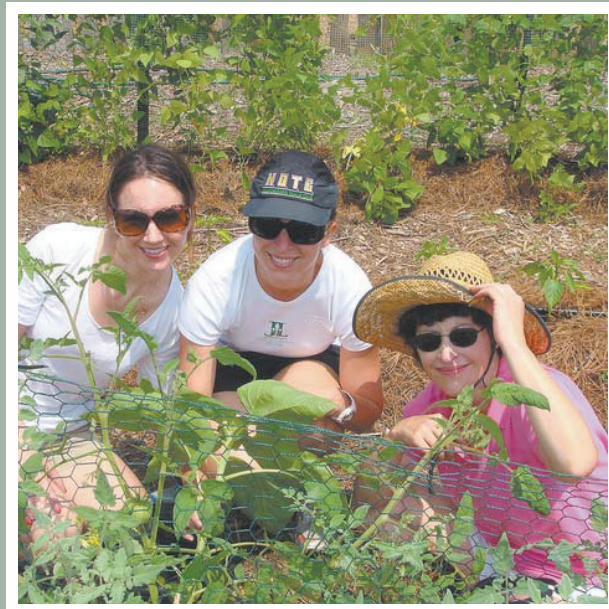
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Please visit [www.jlno.org](http://www.jlno.org) for more information.

Preferred Partner



# Charlotte Bollinger

**Position:** Bollinger Shipyards Inc. executive vice president

**Age:** 65

**Family:** children, Renee Gautreaux, 41, Benjamin Bordelon, 37, Robin Borne, 34

**Education:** bachelor's degree in English and speech, University of Southwestern Louisiana

Charlotte Bollinger knows how to be proactive.

As founding member of the Louisiana Highway 1 Coalition, she understands the importance of protecting the highway that connects the bulk of energy exploration in the Gulf of Mexico to the U.S. The group, founded 13 years ago, was designed to advocate for construction of an elevated Highway 1 and a new bridge at Leeville.

"It's one of those great works that's very exciting to me," Bollinger said. "What should have been a 40- to 60-year project has been up and running for two years. It happened in less than 15 years, and that's amazing. It's becoming a model of how a task force can get a job done."

Bollinger, executive vice president for Bollinger Shipyards, said many skeptics did not believe the Louisiana Highway 1 Coalition — made up of "ordinary people" — would be effective. But the group was prepared when it requested direction from the state.

"When we asked the governor for leadership, we had already done a lot of work to present the program," Bollinger said. "We defined the project and stayed with it the whole time. It's been terrific to have been a part of that from the very beginning."

Bollinger proudly boasts of the project's two completed phases — the bridge construction and connecting Fourchon to Leeville — and looks forward to seeing the next phase, an elevated highway from Leeville to Golden Meadow.

"I hope to see that third leg completed in my lifetime," Bollinger said.

In addition to numerous board appointments focused on education, environment and the arts, Bollinger is also a board member of Restore or Retreat, a nonprofit coastal advocacy group she helped start that's focused on the Barataria and Terrebonne basins. It's only coastal advocacy group not made up of bureaucrats, but of coastal residents and businesses, Bollinger said. Representatives of Restore or Retreat have been invited to Washington, D.C., to promote its agenda.

"We've gained a wonderful constituency group," Bollinger said, adding that she's also been named to the board of directors for the Water Institute of the Gulf. That group provides scientific research for all coastal restoration projects on the Gulf Coast of Louisiana.

"(It's) for the people who live here and care about it and love it — and aren't a bureaucrat," she said. •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



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**Women of the Year**  
 Congratulations, Charlotte, on being named one of the Women of the Year 2012 by CityBusiness!

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TWO-TIME HONOREE

# Valerie Cahill

**Position:** Port of New Orleans board of commissioners chairwoman

**Age:** 49

**Family:** single

**Education:** attended Newcomb College

For Valerie Cahill, chairwoman of the board of commissioners for the Port of New Orleans, job creation is more than just a catchphrase — it's a way of life.

"If you believe in job creation and bringing in opportunities that are new," Cahill said, "then zip, bam, boom, ports are for you."

Cahill spent a decade on the board of the New Orleans World Trade Center but became enthralled with maritime economics after attending a terminal christening at the Port of New Orleans.

"I was fascinated about all that went into maintaining this massive operation and all of the stakeholders involved," she said.

Cahill's fascination soon became part of her life's work following a gubernatorial appointment to the port's board of commissioners in 2007 as one of two Jefferson Parish representatives. She oversees the operations of the port and lends her ear to the needs of thousands of labor, business, political and community stakeholders. She was elected chairwoman in March 2012.

She has been instrumental in several port expansion projects, including the construction of two gantry cranes at the Napoleon Avenue Container Terminal and the approval of the

port's first design-build contract for a new refrigerated terminal on the river.

Cahill also was involved in the new Julia Street Cruise Terminal, the expansion of the marshalling yard for the Napoleon Avenue property and securing a federal grant for a new intermodal facility.

She spends her time away from the port as a private investment banker and is a licensed general contractor. She left Tulane University's Newcomb College after an 18 month-stint to care for her mother but later buttressed her liberal arts education with "a number" of professional certifications, including a certificate in international port management.

Cahill is also an enthusiast for the concept of New Urbanism, something "that will allow you to live inside of a city and not have a car if you don't want one," she said. "So often we think of density as something that is bad, but it really depends on what you have within the density, like grocery stores and pharmacies."

Cahill is devoted to turning Churchill Farms in Avondale into a model for sustainable living and a producer of products and jobs for area residents. She's also a member of the Junior League of New Orleans. •

— Mason Harrison



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# Karen Coaxum

**Position:** Coaxum Enterprises Inc. director of marketing  
**Age:** 56  
**Family:** husband, Henry; daughter, Alexis Ruiz, 29  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in journalism, Loyola University

Karen Coaxum sees a chance to help others through her own success. As director of marketing for Coaxum Enterprises, she has worked as a community philanthropist and cheerleader.

The company operates seven McDonald's restaurants in New Orleans.

"The local marketing activities and programs focus specifically on what you do in the community," she said. "The local marketing of a business like this really puts you front and center with the community. By opening up our own business, that gave us the resources to be able to help other people."

In the five months after Hurricane Katrina, Coaxum Enterprises reopened four McDonald's locations and helped stimulate the economy.

"I know a lot of people have Katrina stories, but this one wasn't about us," she said. "It wasn't just about a restaurant. It was about the hope that it brought. As we got our foothold, that allowed me to be able to work with United Way. We definitely know that you have to give back."

The New Orleans native, who coordinates marketing and community relations for the seven restaurants, has continued to help the city rebound. As executive director of the Gulf South Minority Supplier Development Council, she was responsible for certifying minority-

owned businesses in the region. The regional chapter served as host for the National Minority Supplier Development Council's national convention in New Orleans.

She fields all requests for assistance and seeks opportunities to help those in need. That includes the students the company employs at its restaurants.

"All the requests for any type of assistance from my organization come through me and ... then I evaluate what all we can do to assist the community," Coaxum said. "We give our employees book money and more money per hour if their grades improve."

Coaxum supported McDonogh 35 High School students by financing a 2007 encore production of "Dreamgirls," which helped students raise money for their annual theater trip to New York. The original cast of the McDonogh 35 production performed at the gala when the United Way for Southeast Louisiana awarded the Coaxums the 2011 Alexis de Tocqueville Award for their service to the community.

Part of that award was related to Karen's work leading the United Way's SuccessBy6 early childhood education program. She is a current member of the United Way board of directors. •

— Diana Chandler



# Jennifer Cooke

**Position:** Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans Arena and Champions Square director of sales and marketing  
**Age:** 46  
**Family:** single  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in marketing, Loyola University

Jennifer Cooke was walking around the Superdome on Sept. 24, 2006, surveying the facilities and making sure everything was in place for the Saints' game the next night.

What would seem like a routine task for the director of sales and marketing for the Superdome was anything but. This was the first game in the stadium more than a year after levee breaches during Hurricane Katrina had devastated New Orleans and caused more than \$100 million in damages to the facility.

The background music Cooke heard didn't help her hold back the tears.

"I remember hearing Green Day and U2 rehearse their special pre-game rendition of 'The Saints are Coming,'" Cooke said. "It was a watershed moment from then on — to think about what we have been through and how the night of the game would be a defining moment of return for us and for the city."

It turned out to be a very special moment that will be with her forever, said Cooke, who was instrumental in the creative design elements of the rebuilding process of the Superdome.

"We constantly work to put on events of the highest standards possible because many of

our events are in the national spotlight, and these events are a big driving force for our city's economic engine," said Cooke, the first and only female director at the Superdome. "One of the luxuries of being the only female director in the Dome is you get to pick out the furniture and carpet color for all of our venues."

Cooke's stint in hospitality and marketing began when she worked with the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation, where she was instrumental in the operations and planning of the 1992 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials at Tad Gormley Stadium.

In 2010, Cooke spearheaded the opening of Champions Square and the design of Club XLIV.

Cooke is on the nominating committee for the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau's 2012 board of directors. In 2008, she chaired the first Black and Gold Gala for the Play It Forward Foundation that raised money for Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation, Blaine Kern's First Responders Fund and the Dr. Phil Foundation, which helps Louisiana children in need. •

— Tommy Santora







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# Jennifer Couvillon

**Position:** Ochsner Health System director of system nursing professional development

**Age:** 38

**Family:** husband, Mason; children, Aiden, 8, Bryce, 6, Blake, 4

**Education:** bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing, Georgetown University; doctor of philosophy, Duquesne University

Jennifer Couvillon supports the professional development of more than 3,700 registered nurses in the Ochsner Health System. She also strengthens Ochsner's academic partnerships so patients benefit from the most competent and caring nurses in the community.

"Nursing can sometimes be a thankless job, so I provide support and help them understand they are valued," she said. "We train them to be skilled providers that focus on patient needs. We empower our caregivers with professionalism and help them develop into leaders. They are the unrecognized heroes."

Couvillon has been with Ochsner Health System for a year. As director of system nursing professional development, she is responsible for ensuring patients have a good experience and quality care. To achieve that, she works with 10 nurse educators and researchers who create professional development programs for all levels of nursing. She also forms strategic partnerships with academic, medical equipment and pharmaceutical partners.

"I enjoy helping nurses help themselves," she said. "I provide support and they provide endless numbers of patients with the same thing. I teach them to fish, and then they can

eat the rest of their lives."

Before joining Ochsner, Couvillon spent 14 years at Louisiana State University Health Science Center School of Nursing as a nurse instructor and program coordinator. She also started and directed its master's degree program in nursing education.

"Starting the master's degree program for nurse educators brought legitimacy to the nursing profession and empowered nursing students," she said. "It also shows other health care professionals that nurses are professionals, and it provides them greater opportunities."

Outside the hospital, Couvillon is active in community organizations that focus on children. She is serving as chairwoman of the board for the Louisiana Children's Museum and helping it prepare for a move from Julia Street to City Park in 2015. Part of her focus now is launching a capital campaign to raise money for the new facility, which will include an early learning village.

Couvillon also sits on the board of the Communities and Schools Organization, which focuses on retention of school-age children, and always seeks ways to expand the program. •

— Kerry Duff



# Erin Cowser

**Position:** Southeastern Louisiana University executive director of public and governmental affairs

**Age:** 39

**Family:** single; daughter, Eliza Kate, 2; stepdaughter, Kira, 8

**Education:** bachelor's degree in mass communications, Louisiana State University; pursuing master's degree in organizational communication, Southeastern Louisiana University

Some people have a gift for getting a message across. Erin Cowser is among that group.

She has been a newspaper reporter and editor, worked in local television and served as the communications director at the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce before becoming executive director of public and governmental affairs at Southeastern Louisiana University.

"Communications, governmental affairs and public relations are all based on relationships," Cowser said. "It's all about having those relationships established so that they trust you to give them fair and honest information."

Cowser said her most challenging experience professionally has been working with Southeastern while the university deals with the state budget cuts.

"When you are somewhere like Southeastern, that has such great momentum going, and you see things that cannot grow ... because the resources are not there, it's very frustrating," she said.

Cowser is the university liaison for the Reach Out, Advocate, Rally, (ROAR) Network, an online advocacy instrument that is funded and coordinated through the Southeastern Alumni Association. The program's

website tracks and monitors different pieces of legislation that potentially have an impact on Southeastern. It allows users to contact their legislators and encourages discussion.

Cowser is the founder and past chairwoman of the Tangipahoa Legislative Hobnob, a networking event in which all chambers of commerce in Tangipahoa Parish participate, as well as Leaders Impacting Tomorrow's Tangipahoa.

"A representative from each of those groups talks about their members' priorities so the legislators are not the ones talking about what they are going to do," she said.

Cowser also is a steering committee member with North Shore Focus, a collaborative event consisting of area parish organizations including chambers of commerce, economic development groups, tourist commissions, the Southeastern Alumni Association and Northshore Technical Community College.

"The idea was to bring the region's messages to Baton Rouge during the session," she said. "It has expanded over the years to include some more defined, sit-down briefings that are more topic-centric where we can actually bring specific pieces of legislation to their attention." •

— Jennifer Nall



# Lisa Crinel

**Position:** Abide Home Care Services Inc. owner; LACE Grand Ball Room owner

**Age:** 49

**Family:** daughter, Wilneisha Harrison, 25

**Education:** bachelor's degree in accounting, Georgia State University

Community comes first for Lisa Crinel. Crinel opened Abide Home Care in 1994 after having worked as the financial director of a similar home health agency.

"My father being 57 years older than me, I always had a passion for the elderly," said Crinel, who hopes to one day extend her enterprise to include a medical plaza in eastern New Orleans.

With 85 employees and more than 500 clients, 95 percent of whom are geriatric patients, Abide also specializes in pediatrics. But Crinel also helps children outside of health care.

At last year's Abide holiday toy drive, she made sure there was a donation center where parents could get the essentials their children needed. Families that attended the giveaway found a designated area set aside for coats, undergarments and socks.

Crinel, however, knows that children, particularly at Christmas, are not interested

in practicality.

"Every child that came in walked away with a bike and a toy," Crinel said, adding that 200 bicycles and 150 toys were distributed.

The bicycles and toys were paid for mostly by St. John the Baptist Parish President Natalie Robottom, Metro Disposal and 100 percent of Abide Home Care Services' then-60 employees.

The children receiving the donated gifts were from underprivileged families and related to Abide's clientele.

"I wanted to do something for the kids from Abide," Crinel said, referring to the families affected by her patients' illnesses.

In its second year, Abide set up its toy giveaway distribution center in the parking lots between Abide and LACE Grand Ball Room, another of Crinel's ventures that was slated to become an adult day care but was scrapped after state funding cuts. •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



# Pauline Dides

**Position:** Ecole Bilingue de la Nouvelle-Orléans principal

**Age:** 32

**Family:** husband, Carl Louis Leboeuf; stepson, Louis, 12; daughter, Amelie, 4

**Education:** bachelor's and master's degrees in chemical and pharmaceutical engineering, Science University of Toulouse

With children growing up in a world where Francophones are only a tap or click away, Pauline Dides believes in the importance of exploring different languages and cultures early in a child's development.

As principal of Ecole Bilingue de la Nouvelle Orleans and a native of France, Dides has made it her mission to maintain the academic excellence as a bilingual institution focusing on French immersion.

"The world today has never been so global, and it's good for students to be exposed to diversity from a young age," she said.

Before she took to the classroom, Dides' early career was in the laboratory. After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in chemical and pharmaceutical engineering near her hometown of Toulouse, France, Dides got a job with the pharmaceutical company Pierre Fabre. But Dides always had an interest in education. Her father is a school principal in France, and her aunts, uncles and grandfather were all teachers.

As her engineering career was getting off the ground, a friend encouraged her to try education. Not long after, Dides earned her teaching certification and became a teacher and eventually director of a preschool in Bordeaux.

In an effort to learn English, Dides started

coming to New Orleans in the summer of 2003. There she met Ecole Bilingue founder Julie Fabian, who offered her a position as director of the school's pre-kindergarten. Dides also met her future husband, Carl Louis Leboeuf.

In 2009, Dides was named director of Ecole Bilingue and she got the school accredited up to second grade in 2010 and through fifth-grade this year.

Ecole Bilingue continues to grow, adding a new grade each year. The school now has 200 students, compared with 72 in 2006.

Under Dides' leadership, Ecole Bilingue became the only private school in New Orleans accredited by France's Ministry of National Education.

Dides also helped develop Fête Française, a French street festival that attracts about 5,000 people every spring to raise money for Ecole Bilingue.

Outside the classroom, Dides and her family are involved with the Pablove Foundation, which raises money to help fight childhood cancer. In October, her husband participated in a six-day, 600-mile bicycle tour from Boston to Philadelphia, and she and her children helped him raise \$7,500. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti



# Melissa Elliott

**Position:** Express Employment Professionals franchise owner  
**Age:** 52  
**Family:** husband, Frederick; daughter, McKenzie Elliott, 19  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in finance, University of New Orleans

Melissa Elliott says she had gone as far as she could go 12 years ago when she served as vice president of commercial lending at a family-owned bank. At age 40, she believed it was time to open a small business where the glass ceiling was nonexistent.

"I just had to do it," Elliott said. "I was not part of the family that owned the bank, and I realized that I was not going to go any further. I kept admiring what my clients were doing. I realized that these people could run a good business, and I had the talent and skills that I could make it happen also."

With her savings and a second mortgage on her home, she opened an Express Employment Professionals franchise in 2001 that has survived two recessions without laying off employees.

"I didn't know this business when I bought it," she said, but admiring her sister who owned an Express franchise in Huntsville, Ala., Elliott studied the risks, called the company and wound up buying an Express franchise.

Elliott has set her franchise up for success through marketing and selling. When competitors chose to lay off their sales staff, Elliott chose to bring on another sales professional,

benefiting from a two-person sales team with hopes of overtaking the competition. She now has a 12-person staff.

"We just went for it," she says. "He (the sales professional) did extremely well and he is now our general manager. You take a chance every time you hire a person."

Elliott describes herself as a prudent risk taker.

"I do check out what's involved," she said. "I do analyze and we move forward if it makes sense. I'm not going to risk everything that I've already accomplished."

Elliott also is a designated training office for new Express franchise owners. Her staff provides temporary and long-term employment placement for clients in several business areas, including office services, law, accounting, banking, insurance, manufacturing and engineering.

She also offers her financial and business management knowledge to Christ Episcopal Church in Covington, where she has been a member for 20 years. She is serving a three-year term on the 12-member church vestry and served seven years on the board of Christ Episcopal School. She volunteers with the St. Tammany and Tangipahoa chambers of commerce. •

— Diana Chandler



# Elaine Fitzpatrick

**Position:** PricewaterhouseCoopers managing director  
**Age:** 40  
**Family:** husband, Steven  
**Degree:** undergraduate in law, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; post-graduate diploma in legal studies, College of Law in York; master's degree in liberal arts, Tulane University

Elaine Fitzpatrick was living in Los Angeles during Hurricane Katrina, but she visited New Orleans shortly thereafter and realized she wanted to do more with her life than work.

So she volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and returned to the city monthly to help the recovery. After traveling between the two cities for a year, she told herself she wanted to live in New Orleans and made the Big Easy home in the summer of 2007.

Fitzpatrick, who was born and raised in Northern Ireland, is managing director of PricewaterhouseCoopers' New Orleans office. She has more than 15 years of international public accounting experience in England and the United States, managing audit engagements for multinational public and private companies and education and research institutions. Her areas of expertise include transportation, chemical, engineering, construction, retail and utilities.

"I was working for PWC in Louisiana and figured I was going to be told 'good luck' and then we'd part ways," she said. "But it turned out differently and within two months of making my decision to move to New Orleans, I was living here."

After settling into new digs in 2007, Fitz-

patrick threw herself into work, volunteering and the community. She became a volunteer for Start the Adventure in Reading, or STAIR, and spent every Saturday morning for three years tutoring second graders in reading.

She also became a board member with Junior Achievement, through which she spent a day in July teaching 12 high school students about work opportunities, entrepreneurship and budgeting money. She also spent a day teaching third graders how different types of businesses operate in the community.

"No. 1 for me is the kids," Fitzpatrick said. "It's so rewarding to see the awakening moments in children. I loved working with STAIR because I have always been a reader, and it opened my eyes to what's out there in the world. Being from Northern Ireland and a small town of 2,000, I never would have contemplated the opportunities I've had unless I read about them."

Fitzpatrick also encourages the 50 employees in the New Orleans PricewaterhouseCoopers office to volunteer and arranged for five organizations to visit the office this year to talk about volunteer opportunities. •

— Kerry Duff



# Betsie Gambel

**Position:** Gambel Communications president

**Age:** 61

**Family:** sons, Gregory, 36, Meric, 31

**Education:** bachelor's degree in sociology, Sweet Briar College

Betsie Gambel says she has never met a stranger in her 30 years in marketing and public relations.

"I have spent a lifetime getting to know people," Gambel said. "Whether it was through volunteer work, mentoring or people who just need some advice in getting their name or brand out there. I've always had a love of networking."

Gambel originally was an English teacher at the Academy of the Sacred Heart and did a great deal of volunteer work for the school, which allowed her to get a hand in marketing and public relations. That evolved into more solid work at larger agencies. She said the thought of building her own firm was always there, but she never acted on it because it never felt like the right time.

In 2005, Gambel suffered a bit of a sea change as she was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma just months after Hurricane Katrina.

"All my plans were put on hold," Gambel said. "I had to fly out to Houston for treatment because there was still no medical care in the city. But when you go through something like that, it gives you a lot of time to determine what is important to you."

After six months of treatment in Houston,

Gambel returned home. She said the drive to form her own firm became more compelling.

"We opened our doors in the spring of 2009 and never looked back," she said. "We have grown fast and strong."

A sample of Gambel's clients is a regular who's who of New Orleans businesses: Entergy, Galatoire's, the Ogden Museum and Hotel Monteleone. She said much of what makes her job great is not only forging relationships between her firm and her clients, but also building connections among the businesses she represents.

"I love connecting the dots and tying two clients together for a collaboration that not only benefits them but also benefits the city," Gambel said. "It's always exciting to cross promote two groups working to improve the city."

In 2012, Gambel graduated from the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program, a program designed to help emerging businesses grow by offering access to various support services.

"I liken it to earning an MBA in four months," Gambel said. "It was so much work, but in the end you come out with a five-year business plan."•

— Robin Shannon



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# Johanna Gilligan

**Position:** Grow Dat Youth Farm founder and co-director

**Age:** 32

**Family:** single

**Education:** bachelor's degree in American studies, Tulane University

Johanna Gilligan was teaching ACT preparatory classes to students throughout the country when she realized many of them worked in the fast food industry.

"They did not have a lot of access to local produce or producers at all in a lot of communities," Gilligan said. "This gave them the message they were only capable of becoming cognitive machines."

In 2006, Gilligan became an educational programs manager with the New Orleans Food and Farm Network. Through Rethink New Orleans, an educational summer program that brings the students' voice to the redevelopment of the New Orleans public school system, Gilligan found students who identified school food as one thing they wanted to change.

She worked from 2008 to 2011 to develop policy goals and recommendations for school cafeterias and how to engage students in the conversation on school menus.

Through her work with Tulane University and Tulane City Center, and as a winner of the 2011 Urban Innovation Challenge at Tulane University for her proposal for improving the local food supply, Gilligan launched Grow Dat Youth Farm.

Run through her own business, Clean Plate Projects, the Tulane-supported venture gives high school students employment opportunities in growing fresh, organic food for the community.

"The great thing about us is we are an operating farm that also has a mission to develop and nurture the leadership skills of young adults," Gilligan said. "The key concept is that we have a goal to grow food for our community," 60 percent of which is sold and the remaining 40 percent donated. "That commitment drives (the students') own leadership development."

Operating on 1.5 acres of land on a four-acre tract at City Park, Grow Dat Youth Farm is expected to produce about 10,000 pounds of food this year and about 40,000 pounds of food by 2014.

Several of the students who graduated from Grow Dat in its first year in 2011 returned in 2012 to participate in tier management and leadership positions.

"My proudest moments are when I see the individual transformations of my students," Gilligan said. "I get to see this model we created as having its intended impact. It sounds basic, but (it is) very amazing."•

— Whitney Pierce Santora



# Jil Greene

**Position:** Harrah's New Orleans Casino and Hotel vice president of human resources and community relations

**Age:** 39

**Family:** husband, Carlton; children, Jordon, 8, Carlton Jr., 6

**Education:** bachelor's degree in telecommunications, Ball State University; master's degree in human resources management, Troy University

Watching her mother, Denise Jordan, who was a registered nurse, offer free inoculations to poor people in Fort Wayne, Ind., and talking to them about health issues gave a young Jil Greene an idea.

"I was only about 15 at the time, but I knew then that I wanted to be like my mother, changing things for the better," Greene said. "I never imagined it would be in a business environment."

Initially attracted to media, Greene had high hopes when she graduated from Ball State University in 1996.

"I wanted to become like Oprah," she said. "But then I realized they already had an Oprah, so why would they need me?"

Instead she turned to the business world, serving as director of human resources for Aramark and a human resources manager at Yum Brands Inc. before moving to Harrah's.

"When you lead a team or are the head of human resources, one of your most important functions is to motivate people," Greene said.

She started by launching "Career Days" to help employees realize their professional potential. One day later, Greene implemented an em-

ployee campaign to harness the spirit of New Orleans and inject it into the Harrah's property, creating a culture she calls "unstoppable."

"The end result was that we found out that people loved being here as much as they loved being in New Orleans," she said.

Employee feedback sessions followed.

Greene is most proud of her work overseeing the disbursement of up to \$500,000 in donations from Harrah's to community organizations while also championing the casino's Blessings in a Backpack program, which distributes backpacks of food to city schools.

The Harrah's Employees Reaching Out program, or HEROs, also has contributed 3,507 volunteer hours throughout the region under her watch.

In her off hours, Greene is a board member with the United Negro College Fund New Orleans and the Committee for a Better New Orleans. She's also on the advisory committee for the STEM Initiative, which is focused on bringing a program based in science, technology, engineering and math to New Orleans-area schools. •

— Garry Boulard



# Millie Harris

**Position:** Jefferson Chamber Foundation Academy executive director  
**Age:** 36  
**Family:** single  
**School:** bachelor's degree in general studies, University of New Orleans

Following in the footsteps of your parents is an old tradition. Like mother, like daughter, Millie Harris, executive director of the Jefferson Chamber Foundation Academy charter high school, chose education as a career path to make a difference in the lives of others.

Harris, who designed and wrote the proposal for the academy, said the thought of involving the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce in education was unusual at first, but the idea made perfect sense.

"What we realize is that it's very hard to recruit businesses to an area or even get them to stay if we don't have a well-educated workforce they can draw from," Harris said. "In Jefferson Parish, we have a very diverse group of students with different needs, and we work to address those needs, some of which are related to education and some are related to factors outside of the classroom."

The academy, which opened in August, is the result of local business leaders who wanted to do more than simply lament the state of education in Louisiana. They wanted to produce better academic results and be a part of the conversation about how to improve educational options for students.

But JCFA, Harris said, is not what most

people picture.

"Most people are surprised when they come to our campus and see the number of female and white students that we have," she said. "It changes their perceptions about education."

The school, catering to students with barriers to graduating high school, accepts enrollees from Jefferson Parish and nearby areas.

"We had one student who was homeless and living at the New Orleans Mission," Harris said.

Harris, 36, was an early adopter of the notion that the Jefferson Chamber should be involved in education. In 2007, she joined the Jefferson Chamber Foundation as coordinator of the Education Pathways program. She led a task force in developing the Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint for Jefferson Parish, which provided a needs assessment and highlighted best practices to address the high school dropout rate.

"It took two years to do the research, but we were able to examine the reasons behind the area's dropout rate and borrowed best practices from outside of the district," she said.

One of those best practices is the school's decision to adopt the corporate idea of flex-time for students who may need a little wiggle room for when they have to be in class. •

— Mason Harrison



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# Jan Hayden

**Position:** Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz shareholder

**Age:** 58

**Family:** husband, Nicholas (Jerry) Montalbano; son, Andrew, 16

**Education:** bachelor's degree in political science, Louisiana State University; juris doctor, LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center

When reorganizing a business, attorney Jan Hayden learns the industry and state laws that affect it so she can turn the company around, allow it to pay creditors and preserve jobs.

Hayden has been in private practice as a corporate reorganization attorney since 1980. She joined Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz a year ago and is a member of the firm's financial institutions group in addition to being a shareholder. Before Baker Donelson, she spent 31 years at Heller, Draper, Hayden, Patrick & Horn.

Hayden's specialty is representing trustees, debtors-in-possession, committees and creditors in industries such as manufacturing, real estate, hotels, gambling, nursing homes, airlines, convenience stores and retail.

"My strangest case to date was representing an alligator farm that filed for bankruptcy," she said. "The bank didn't want to feed the alligators, so I called and told them I'd be happy to bring them to the bank. Of course, we got the money, and then I created a plan and got them out of bankruptcy. Ten years later, they filed bankruptcy again."

Her most interesting case to date, she said,

was Babcock and Wilson, an asbestos case that lasted 10 years.

"I was on the debtor's side, and I worked with a team of 10 lawyers to figure out how to salvage the business and have sufficient funds to satisfy future holders of asbestos claims," Hayden said. "It was extremely litigious in the beginning, and it was challenging because it involved a number of complicated and interesting legal issues."

The challenge and intellectual aspects of the job are what drives Hayden.

"I also enjoy learning about different industries," she said. "No cases are typical, and they are all labor intensive. I believe when you like what you do, you're better at it."

For the past six years, Hayden has been a member of the board of Second Harvest Food Bank and currently serves as its chairwoman. She participates in fundraising events such as the annual Rubber Duck Derby and, most recently, helped raise money for its campaign to buy a new building.

She also is a member of the Pro Bono Project, a nonprofit that provides free legal services and mentors young lawyers handling cases. •

— Kerry Duff



# Patsy Kanter

**Position:** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing elementary math consultant and author; PK Consultants owner

**Age:** 63

**Family:** children, Julie, 36, Nathan, 31

**Education:** bachelor's degree in American studies, Tulane University

"Radical, fanatical, mathematical friend." That's the tagline Patsy Kanter uses to introduce herself when she speaks publicly about her mission to deliver math to the masses.

Through her work as a consultant and author for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing and owner of PK Consultants, Kanter has had a hand in elementary math education nationwide for the past two decades.

She has authored more than 50 elementary math instructional books, which schools in cities and states throughout the country have adopted into their curricula. She has also conducted more than 1,000 workshops on math education for parents, teachers and students, and visits with 7,000 teachers a year.

First published 22 years ago, her flagship series, "Every Day Counts," consists of 15-minute daily discussions teachers have with students about math, centered around a bulletin board with a calendar to help children visualize numbers.

The U.S. Department of Education published her book, "Helping Your Child Learn Math," in the 1990s.

Her curriculum targets children in pre-

kindergarten through fifth grade.

Before entering the publishing world, Kanter was head of the kindergarten through fifth-grade math program at Isidore Newman School. While there, she attended a conference for the National Council of Teachers in Mathematics where she met an editor who was looking for writers. When that same editor visited Newman a few months later, Kanter shared her idea for "Every Day Counts."

"She took it back to the company, and they agreed to publish it," she said. "From then on, I just kept writing."

After the book was published, Kanter said she felt as though she needed to go into the trenches and travel the country to explore and consult with school districts with a range of performance levels. She left Newman in 1996 to run her own consulting firm, PFK.

Kanter exclusively owned and ran the company until her husband, David Kanter, passed away five years ago. To be able to care for her husband and pay for his medical expenses, Kanter turned to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, which absorbed her company. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti





# Ellen Kempner

**Position:** Peter A. Mayer Advertising vice president and management supervisor

**Age:** 57

**Family:** husband, Lee Sucherman; daughters, Jamie, 27, Emily, 22

**Education:** bachelor's degree in communications, American University

Ellen Kempner's internal drive, type-A personality and creativity have kept her on top of her game in the advertising industry for 35 years. Whether it's improving public perception of a corporation, luring visitors to the zoo or attracting tourists to New Orleans, she helps clients flourish through achieving their marketing goals.

Kempner started out working in radio advertising in Washington, D.C., and Chicago. In the early 1980s, she moved to New Orleans to continue working in radio and sales management.

She started working the client side of the business in 1986 when she became advertising supervisor for Louisiana Power & Light and New Orleans Public Service. In that role, she managed a multimillion-dollar advertising and communication program.

Five years later, she joined Peter A. Mayer Advertising where she remains today as vice president and management supervisor.

Kempner manages a team of four professionals who work with tourism clients, non-profits agencies and corporate clients. A few of her most recognized clients include Entergy Louisiana, Harrah's New Orleans, Audubon Zoo, Entergy IMAX Theatre and the Super Bowl 2013 host committee.

"We work with a huge range of clients in-

cluding New Orleans-centric events like the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival," she said. "We do the strategy, creative and media development and execution. ... Whatever the client's goals are, we accomplish them through marketing programs."

Although Kempner and her team have won numerous awards and accolades over the past 21 years for their campaigns, she said she's most proud of her work to help rebuild tourism as the economic engine of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

"After Katrina, I worked with the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corp. to create and execute a marketing strategy that would help rebuild the number of visitors that come to the city, spend money and contribute to businesses in New Orleans," she said. "A third of the city's budget is based on tourism dollars, and over 75,000 people are employed in the hospitality industry. So creating a successful marketing plan that helped the city get back on its feet was a big accomplishment for me."

Kempner's greatest passion outside the advertising world is working for animal welfare. She serves as board chairwoman of the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. •

— Kerry Duff



# Sally Kenney

**Position:** Newcomb College Institute of Tulane University executive director; Newcomb College endowed chair and political science professor

**Age:** 53

**Family:** husband, Norman Foster; cats, Howard and Marbel

**Education:** bachelor's degree in politics, philosophy and economics, Magdalen College at Oxford University; bachelor's degree in political science, University of Iowa; master's degree in politics, Princeton University; Ph.D. in politics, Princeton University

In 1994, the University of Iowa awarded tenure for the first time to a female political science professor. The distinction went to professor Sally Kenney, who started at the college in 1988 as assistant professor in the political science department's women's studies program.

"It was a fight for six years, a fight for legitimacy in the political science department ... but it was a rewarding one to finally be recognized and rewarded," Kenney said.

She has been a university professor for more than 30 years and is now executive director of Newcomb College of Tulane University.

"There is still a gender gap in the leadership roles in those fields, and we are working with young women every day to close that gap," she said.

Kenney became executive director of the Newcomb College in 2010 after a 14-year stint with the University of Minnesota's Institute of Public Affairs and the Center on Women and Public Policy.

Kenney said she was intrigued by the opportunity to steer the early momentum of the Newcomb College Institute, which was created in

2006 to honor the legacy of the historic women's-only college that Tulane closed after Hurricane Katrina.

Kenney helped steer the institute's Newcomb Scholars program, in which 20 students per year take one class together. The courses include history of women in higher education, how different disciplines determine female leadership and a final research project.

At Tulane, she developed a course, "Law and Politics of Domestic Violence," with students having the opportunity to visit and meet with Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women inmates.

She works with a nonprofit to involve Tulane students in a "Read to Me, Mommy" program at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, where students record prisoners reading a book, then give the DVD and the book to their children.

Kenney recently published her fourth book, "Gender and Justice: Why Women in the Judiciary Really Matter," making the case for more women judges. •

— Tommy Santora



# Aundrea Kloor-Daly

**Position:** University of New Orleans Office of MBA and Health Care Programs director

**Age:** 44

**Family:** husband, Scott; daughter, Caroline, 2

**Education:** bachelor's degree in pre-law and government relations, McNeese State University; master's degree in urban and regional planning, University of New Orleans

Talking to regional businesses about job opportunities for University of New Orleans graduates and listening to the employment concerns of those same graduates has given Aundrea Kloor-Daly a feel for the local economy.

"Businesses want to hire students, (but) they are just not hiring as much as we would like them to," said Kloor-Daly, who began her career in 1995 working for the St. Tammany Parish Environmental Services Commission.

Even so, Kloor-Daly is usually upbeat with her business contacts.

"I tell them if they can just hire one student, that will be one less person who moves to Austin or Houston or Dallas upon graduation," she said. "I want to tell our students ... to stay in New Orleans and Louisiana because the job picture is going to improve, but I also understand that many of these students have families that they need to provide for and they need the work now."

When she's not trying to enhance graduate employment prospects, Kloor-Daly does what she can to make the UNO experience a good one for students.

"My most rewarding days come with pro-

viding them great customer service," she said, "trying to help them achieve their goals."

Kloor-Daly's understanding of the challenges confronting area businesses is one she comes to naturally. For seven years beginning in the late 1990s, she traveled to and from Southeast Asia trading antiques.

"I had a resale store and went everywhere — Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong."

She left the private sector in 2002 and joined UNO as the assistant director of development for the College of Business before becoming associate dean of the school's former Metropolitan College in 2008. She moved into her current position as director of the MBA and Health Care programs in 2010.

Kloor-Daly's professional interests spill over into her free time. She serves on several boards, including the international committee of the University Professional and Continuing Education Association as well as the education committee of the Louisiana Technology Council, which she describes as a "foot in the door to meeting new businesses that might need our students for employment or internships."•

— Garry Boulard



# Dawn Laborie

**Position:** LaPorte CPAs and Business Advisors vice president of assurance services

**Age:** 35

**Family:** husband, Jeffrey; daughter, Emma, 4 months

**Education:** bachelor's degree in accounting, University of New Orleans

Dawn Laborie has a simple philosophy when it comes to juggling work and family responsibilities with the desire to lend a helping hand to others in the community.

"We can all afford to give back a little," said Laborie, who serves as vice president of assurance services for LaPorte CPAs & Business Advisors and has been in the financial services industry for 12 years.

For nearly 10 years, she has been involved with a variety of projects, including those that help feed the hungry in New Orleans, support the performing arts and raise money for Children's Hospital.

Her passion for community service has earned her spots on the board of the East Jefferson YMCA, where she has served as treasurer since 2008, and with the Jefferson Performing Arts Society. Laborie is also a peer reviewer for the standards committee of the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations, where she helped to vet best practices for area nonprofits.

Her interest in charitable work shows up in her career, in which she works with more than 50 nonprofits in the New Orleans area. She also helped implement LaPorte's Nonprofit Industry Group in 2004.

Laborie has also launched a multiyear training and marketing program in the firm's Houston office to expand the nonprofit program there, in addition to growing the one at its Baton Rouge office.

Laborie has spearheaded workshops on nonprofits for the Louisiana Society for CPAs and helps lead LaPorte's recruitment efforts for new accountants in conjunction with Beta Alpha Psi, the national accounting fraternity.

"I was drawn to nonprofit accounting because it is so unique and different from other forms of corporate accounting because of all of the different requirements," she said. "But it doesn't hurt to be involved with groups that are doing things for the community."

Laborie is also helping expand a new division at LaPorte, its public sector industry group, to focus on governmental entities.

She also shares her financial knowledge outside of the office. With her husband, Jeffrey, she provides pre-marital advice to engaged couples through the Catholic church. She uses her expertise in accounting to teach couples about household finances, in addition to providing broader insight to make a marriage more successful. •

— Mason Harrison



# Diane Lyons

**Position:** Accent on Arrangements president and CEO

**Family:** husband, Jack; sons, John III, 36, Thomas, 33

**Education:** bachelor's degree in elementary education, Louisiana State University

Entrepreneur and business owner Diane Lyons realized a few years ago that New Orleans has festivals to celebrate everything from tomatoes to oysters but nothing to celebrate women. So the owner of Accent on Arrangements went to work creating FestiGals, a week-end-long nonprofit festival that celebrates women and the Crescent City experience.

Lyons' 25 years of experience in meeting and special events planning made her a natural at nailing down all the details to create FestiGals, which is endorsed by the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau and the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corp.

The 2012 installment marked the second annual event held at the Monteleone Hotel. More than 400 women from 15 states took part in a variety of empowerment seminars, workshops and cultural experiences designed to highlight the unique aspects of New Orleans.

Some of the offerings included tours of private homes in the French Quarter, a stiletto stroll on Bourbon Street, a cooking demonstration by Chef John Folse, diva discussions with movers and shakers in the business world and lunch with "Today" co-host Hoda Kotb.

Lyons said one of the biggest highlights of the June getaway was an auction of "bodacious

bras." It raised \$23,000, which was donated to the Cancer Association of Greater New Orleans.

"Over two dozen local artists and socialites created the bras specifically for the event," she said. "We had a bidding frenzy going on. It was crazy."

A bra that Kotb donated fetched \$5,000, and Zydeco musician Rockin' Dopsie's washboard bra went for a whopping \$7,200.

Lyons said it takes about nine months to plan FestiGals, sponsors, speakers and the right mix of fun and seriousness. Work on the 2013 event has already started.

"Right now we're focusing on growing FestiGals," she said. "I'd like to raise more money for the Cancer Association and maybe add another organization to help."

Outside of FestiGals, Lyons arranges professional conventions and events through her 10-year-old company. Her recent work includes organizing three big corporate meetings, a citywide convention and a medical convention for 15,000 doctors.

"The devil is in the details when you create events, and that's what I'm good at," she said. "I also have a lot of energy and a great memory. I'm blessed that way."•

— Kerry Duff



# Missie McGuire

**Position:** Tulane University assistant vice president for student affairs

**Age:** 55

**Family:** partner, Helen Siegel; children, Katie, 25, Ryan 23

**Education:** bachelor's degree in physical education and recreation, Loyola University; master's degree in education-recreation administration, Bowling Green State University

Missie McGuire's life-defining moment came during her freshman year of college when she lost her mother to colon cancer.

She said her mother always stressed the importance of getting an education, so when her mother passed away, the 18-year-old Loyola University student was determined to make her mother proud.

McGuire has been in higher education since 1979 and now serves as assistant vice president for student affairs at Tulane University, a job she has held for eight years after working nine years as Tulane's assistant director and director of campus recreation.

She oversees programming and facility management for the Reily Center, Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life, McAlister Auditorium and the Mayra Clare Rogers Memorial Chapel, in addition to fiscal management, capital and strategic planning and emergency preparedness for the Student Affairs Department.

McGuire was instrumental in building the \$38 million, 152,000-square-foot Lavin-Bernick Center, which opened in January 2007 and serves as Tulane's student union. She's also involved in \$250 million of capital projects ongoing at Tulane, including a \$22 million ex-

pansion of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library and a fundraising campaign to build a \$60 million, on-campus football stadium.

McGuire co-founded Girls First, a nonprofit that provides sports and exercise opportunities to underserved girls age 6 to 16. Girls First has provided weeklong, overnight sports camps on Tulane's campus and quarterly sports outings such as attending Tulane volleyball matches, canoeing on Bayou St. John, watching a Big Easy Roller Girls match and playing sports.

The program has grown from 39 girls in 1998 — its first year — to more than 125.

McGuire has twice been recognized by the NCAA as a "community connector" for her dedication and assistance to youth. She has also been recognized by Conference USA for outstanding contributions to the achievements of girls and women in sports.

"I consider Girls First of my greatest accomplishments outside of raising my kids," she said. "The girls have also experienced an increase in self-confidence allowing them to explore creative outlets, and the exposure to higher education has deeply affected the long-term goal setting of the girls."•

— Tommy Santora



# Mi Mi Montagnet

**Position:** M2 Brokerage sponsoring broker and owner

**Age:** 35

**Family:** single

**Education:** bachelor's degree in journalism and French, University of Mississippi

Knowing when to step back and refocus has been a theme of Mi Mi Montagnet's career. It's what helped guide her into the real estate profession and ultimately led her to start her own company, M2 Brokerage, specializing in commercial and residential properties in the Warehouse District, Central Business District and French Quarter.

"You are only as good as the deals you have done as well as the mistakes you have made and learned from," Montagnet said.

She has helped develop a section of Poydras Street to provide space for the Louisiana State University-HIV Outpatient Clinic, the Veterans Affairs temporary surgical center and Morris Jeff Elementary School. She also helped renovate a former Orleans Parish School Board building at Carondelet and Girod streets into 29 apartments and two commercial spaces.

But real estate wasn't Montagnet's original calling. She grew up in Pass Christian, Miss., and started as a newspaper reporter for the Sun Herald at age 13 and later The Daily Mississippian at the University of Mississippi.

Montagnet's father was a real estate developer and after winning bids on a few state office projects in Louisiana, he asked her for help.

Montagnet had just graduated college and accepted a summer internship with a publish-

ing firm in Manhattan. But before she left, she agreed to work with her father upon her return.

Over the ensuing two years, Montagnet cut her teeth on all phases of build-to-suit commercial development and helped construct several office buildings and a retail center.

Having refocused her career path, Montagnet moved to New Orleans in 2000 to work for her family's firm, Montagnet Properties. She later joined Talbot Realty Group, where she earned her real estate license and was part of the team that helped convert and sell the Bakery Condominiums and the Cotton Mill Condominiums in the Warehouse District.

After five years of putting in extra hours on evenings and weekends to sell condos, Montagnet decided to take a year off to travel.

"I wanted to open my eyes to new things," she said. "And I knew when I got back I'd want to do something different."

When she returned in 2007, Montagnet set out to launch M2 Brokerage.

Outside the office, Montagnet is the 2012 president of the Louisiana Certified Commercial Investment Member chapter and is working on a new nonprofit endeavor, Nola Voice Online, where citizens can post concerns and recommend government reforms. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti



# Dena Olivier

**Position:** Liskow & Lewis shareholder and partner

**Age:** 55

**Family:** husband: Sammy Spalitta; children, Meg, 25, Matthew, 23

**Education:** bachelor's degree in business administration in accounting, Loyola University; juris doctor, Tulane University

Former certified public accountant, Dena Olivier is a shareholder and partner with Liskow & Lewis, where her entire 25-year career has focused on commercial litigation, debtor-creditor rights, loan workouts, foreclosures and bankruptcy.

One of her more memorable cases was the bankruptcy of Entergy New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, but her work at Poydras Home defines Olivier's character.

When she was asked in 2006 to join the board for the nonprofit facility that focuses on providing in-house and residential care for the elderly, she knew it would be a good fit. Olivier was able to use her professional skills when she became the board's unofficial liaison with the facility's insurer.

"As a new member, I was just figuring out what my role might be," Olivier said. "It just so happened the talk in the early period in 2006 at the board level was about problems Poydras Home was having with its insurer after Katrina."

The insurer was refusing to reimburse the organization for property damages related to the storm as well as evacuation costs incurred after relocating its residents. After a weeklong trial in 2008, Poydras Home was completely

reimbursed.

Olivier has since held several roles on the board, including treasurer, secretary, vice president and currently president.

"During these two years I've been president, Poydras Home has commenced its largest capital expansion project in its history," Olivier said.

The \$15 million project will include the renovation of the historic home and a new building that will add 33 residential suites for assisted living and dementia care.

"We believe (the expansion) is going to ensure the vitality and success of the organization into the future," she said.

Olivier calls her contribution to Poydras Home a rewarding and personal experience.

"Being a lawyer, I've been able to build a career, contribute to the community and the commercial community and my firm with my practice," Olivier said. "But my work with Poydras Home has been individually fulfilling because I think they really needed me when I came on the board. I've learned a lot about it myself, and, now, with the capital expansion, I feel like I've been able to have a real role in seeing this ... very tremendous reputation go into the future." •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



# Willie Paretti

**Position:** Rare Find Design Center owner; Paretti Dealerships co-owner

**Age:** 63

**Family:** widowed; children, Stacey Paretti Rase, 40, Craig Paretti Jr., 37

Willie Paretti decided nearly two decades ago that she should get paid for what she had been doing for free.

"I was doing this kind of thing at home while my children were growing up," Paretti says of the Covington-based Rare Find Design Center, a residential and commercial interior design business she started in 1993 on the North Shore. "So when my children left, I decided it was time to turn it into my own business."

Rare Find Design Center was not Paretti's first foray into the business world. For decades, she advised her late husband, Craig Paretti, as he ran the auto dealership that today is Paretti Mazda, Jaguar and Range Rover.

"He valued my instincts so he would ask my opinion about different things," said Paretti, co-owner of the family business. "But I hardly ever went into the office, certainly not on a day-to-day basis. That was his job."

Fourth-generation family members run the business today.

"My son, Craig Paretti Jr., is in charge of the Metairie operations and my son-in-law, Michael Rase Jr., runs the Baton Rouge oper-

ations," Paretti said. "I come in and look at the books, but I do as little as I can. I also know when to walk away."

Instead, Paretti devotes most of her energy to charitable causes on the North Shore, most prominently a group she founded more than two years ago called Homeless Outreach for the Youth of St. Tammany.

"There are many reasons why kids end up homeless," Paretti said. "In recent years, the biggest reason has been the economy."

Among other things, the program helps children in need gain access to health care and proper clothing. Paretti and her group have secured senior rings and yearbooks for every high school student involved. They also worked to get dresses and tuxedos for all seniors who needed them for prom.

Having served as the board chairwoman of Lakeview Regional Medical Center and the Causeway Police Charitable Foundation, Paretti said her community involvement is centered on one theme.

"It's important to me to do something to make a difference," she said. •

— Garry Boulard



# Cindy Paulin

**Position:** Eagan Insurance Agency associate

**Age:** 62

**Family:** husband, Ron; daughters, Sherry, 42, Leslie, 40

**Education:** John McDonogh High School graduate

Cindy Paulin got her start in the insurance industry in high school when a friend asked her to work for his father. She filled in for a secretary who was on leave, but the secretary never came back.

Paulin has since worked her way up to become an associate with Metairie-based Eagan Insurance.

"I was planning on going to college," Paulin says, hoping to leverage a degree into a job but with no particular field in mind. When the chance to forge an insurance career landed in her lap, Paulin realized she liked the work and was already gaining experience, something she calls "a happy accident."

She earned her Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter and Certified Insurance Counselor designations and taught CIC classes for several years. She also served as president of the Society of CPCUs and has held several positions with the Insurance Professionals of Greater New Orleans.

Despite the stress it involves at times, Paulin said she enjoys her work because living in southeast Louisiana often puts her on the frontlines of helping area residents.

Recent claims from Hurricane Isaac have

kept her busy, but "helping someone to put a different look on their face than the one they had when you arrived" is what makes her work worthwhile, she said.

"It definitely raises your spirits," she said.

Paulin's urge to help local residents stems from her family's love for the New Orleans area. She and her family are dyed-in-the-wool Louisianians who, at one time, operated a concession stand during Saints' games when they still played at Tulane Stadium.

"I remember handing out the popcorn and peanuts to people and helping to make hamburgers for people going to watch the game," she said. "It was a great experience."

The tradition of being involved in the community has remained with Paulin, who serves as president of the Magnolia Foundation and as a member of the St. Elizabeth's Guild. The latter group raises money for the Padua Center for handicapped children and provides independent living skills for foster children throughout the state.

She's also president of the homeowners' association for Place Pontchartrain and a lecturer at Divine Mercy Church. •

— Mason Harrison



# Marian Pierre

**Position:** Crescent Guardian Inc. founder and CEO

**Age:** 65

**Family:** sons, Arthur, 46, Marcus, 43

**Education:** bachelor's degree in sociology, Southern University

After a successful career in New Orleans city government and with inspiration from her family, Marian Pierre combined 30 years of experience operating a small cab company and started Crescent Guardian Inc. in 1993.

Two decades later, the security firm is still expanding.

She ran the security business singlehandedly in the beginning, calling on new clients during the day and working nights as a security guard. Today, the company operates with 185 employees and more than 200 special event staff who provide security personnel at venues. The event staff is gearing up to provide security during the Super Bowl, Pierre said.

Veolia Transportation, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, French Market Corp. and First NBC Bank are some of the company's clients.

Although Crescent Guardian's specialty is armed and unarmed guard services, Pierre changed the company's profile in 2007 to include technology. Security integration, video surveillance, video analytics, electronic tracking, access control and asset management are also on the menu, in addition to creating custom security technology for various industries.

Three years ago, Pierre and her team de-

signed a special permission switch for buses that allows only the driver to start the bus. Crescent is currently demonstrating the technology throughout the region.

"We saw a need for this technology and developed the application ourselves," Pierre said. "We anticipate trends and utilize best practices to deliver first-rate solutions that can increase security while reducing overall cost."

She's also looking to buy a building so clients can see the technology in operation.

Since Crescent Guardian opened, it's provided security at no cost to local nonprofits that need assistance.

"We've been providing two security guards every week for 20 years during mass at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in New Orleans," Pierre said.

Outside of the office, Pierre devotes time to Women Inc., an organization she founded in 1999 to mentor young women in the community. She is now its vice president after serving as chairwoman for the past five years.

"Our mission is to mentor young women and teach them things like the importance of being a voter, personal hygiene, etiquette and how to present themselves in public," she said. •

— Kerry Duff



# Jan Ramsey

**Position:** OffBeat publisher and editor-in-chief

**Age:** 62

**Family:** husband, Joseph Irrera; daughter, Meredith, 42; granddaughter, Camille, 22

**Education:** bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant tourism administration, University of New Orleans

Jan Ramsey was at a funeral procession for jazz banjoist and guitarist Danny Barker in March 1994 when she saw a person in the midst of the second line hold up the cover of OffBeat magazine, which featured Barker playing a guitar and dressed in Elvis gear. The headline: "Still Rockin' After All These Years."

"Seeing our magazine cover raised in the crowd moved me," said Ramsey, OffBeat's publisher and editor-in-chief. "People read us. They care about what we do. We're a part of their lives and their culture."

Ramsey launched OffBeat in 1988 and for more than 20 years, the monthly magazine has promoted and marketed New Orleans music, arts, culture and cuisine.

"We had a reader from Greece call us after Hurricane Katrina, and he made a donation of several thousand dollars to help get us back on our feet after the storm, just so he can keep receiving our magazine in the mail," Ramsey said. "I knew then we were promoting our city's music and musicians to an even larger audience."

From a post-Katrina article about Fats Domino returning to his 9th Ward home when no media outlet could find him after the storm to an editorial about DJ Davis Rogan leading to the

inspiration of the HBO series "Treme" character, DJ Davis McAlary, OffBeat has helped promote the New Orleans music community.

And for 19 years, OffBeat has presented "The Best of the Beat Awards" to celebrate the local music and musicians, Ramsey said.

More than 20 years ago, Ramsey found her motivation to launch OffBeat when she co-authored the first economic impact study regarding music and the New Orleans economy and helped with the first New Orleans Mayor's Forum on Music and Economic Development.

"When I saw how much of an economic impact our music had on the local economy, it got my entrepreneurial juices flowing to expose our music in an organized way through the platform of media," she said.

Ramsey runs the magazine with managing editor and business manager, Joseph Irrera, who also is her husband.

In the community, Ramsey serves on the French Quarter Festival board of directors, the UNO Alumni Association's executive committee and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra's advisory board. She also persuaded UNO to offer a class on festival productions. •

— Tommy Santora



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# Jan Robert

**Position:** Northshore Healthcare Alliance executive director

**Age:** 58

**Family:** husband, Gayden; children, Walker, 25, Maggie, 21

**Education:** bachelor's degree in speech-language pathology, Dominican College; master's degree in communications disorders, Louisiana State University

Jan Robert has spent more than 25 years helping the city of Covington grow and prosper. The 58-year-old resident served the city in various community development roles for more than a decade and then spent four years on the Covington City Council.

During that time, she created public-private partnerships to achieve comprehensive community improvements, including the coordination and organization of a dozen annual events. She also received more than \$2.7 million in grants for the city to complete capital improvement projects, implement low-interest loan programs, enhance the arts, and encourage entrepreneurship and historic preservation.

Robert was the downtown development director for Covington in the early 1990s when the district's revitalization began.

"Over the course of four years, I watched it rejuvenate and become a vibrant community with events such as the Farmers Market, the Columbia Street Landing concert series and the Three Rivers Art Festival," she said. "It's extremely fulfilling ... knowing I helped start them and will be going to them another 20 years."

For the past seven years, Robert has served as the executive director of the Northshore Healthcare Alliance, a 25-member collabora-

tive representing the East and West St. Tammany chambers of commerce, seven area hospitals, medical clinics, training providers and home health agencies. NHA's mission is to address work force shortages in the health care industry and develop solutions.

Under Robert's leadership, NHA has collaborated with the technical college system and economic development and health care agencies to bring more than \$7 million into the region. The money has been used to develop and expand capacity of health care training programs to meet employer needs.

The alliance also joined forces with the regional community and technical colleges and universities to provide tuition assistance and training to more than 800 students in the region, including 215 on the North Shore, who are interested in becoming surgical or pharmacy technicians, sonographers, ophthalmic or respiratory technicians and nurses.

"Last year, we reached out to more than 2,000 local high school students to inspire the next generation about opportunities and health-care careers," Robert said. "We have to make sure people get trained to work in the community and maintain our high level of health care." •

— Kerry Duff



# Michele Robert

**Position:** Fidelis Residential Care Homes owner and administrator

**Age:** 45

**Family:** children, Caitlin, 17, Hunter, 15, Zachary, 14, Austin, 10

**Education:** associate's degree in nursing, California State University Fullerton; bachelor's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University

Michele Robert gained an understanding of the unique needs of elderly patients through her experiences as a registered nurse in the emergency room and as an in-home care provider. Patients didn't want to leave their homes, but they also needed a caring person to look after them.

"So many of my patients were in their homes that I felt should not have been there by themselves," Robert said. "They didn't have anyone to supervise them and make sure they were getting their medicine. They had a form of dementia, and the family didn't realize or understand what it was."

That's why, in 2004, she decided to open Fidelis Residential Care Homes, which runs facilities for the elderly at six locations in Southeast Louisiana — three in Metairie, two in Baton Rouge and one in Denham Springs. Robert is also working to open Lakeshore Adult Day Healthcare in Mandeville and has plans for a similar facility in Metairie.

Residential care homes operate in large houses that have been rezoned for assisted care. They are in the middle of neighborhoods, so they feel more like a home than a nursing facility.

"I wanted to be able to give elderly people

the quality of care that they truly deserve," Robert said.

Robert's sister-in-law, Judy Robert, who is also a nurse, became her business partner. In most nursing homes, the staff-to-resident ratio is 1-to-17. The Fidelis ratio is 1-to-4.

"I knew it would be something families and residents would love to have, compared to that higher ratio," Robert said.

The facilities provide 24-hour care, and Robert and her sister-in-law take turns visiting each site daily to check on the residents.

Robert has become involved in health care organizations such as the New Orleans Association of Healthcare Communities and New Orleans Continuity of Care, where she held the position of vice president. She has also served as a board member and president of the local Alzheimer's Association chapter.

Robert also represents health care organizations on Capitol Hill and in Baton Rouge to defend the rights of elderly patients.

In addition to the challenges that come with her work, Robert is a single mother of four children. All of her children are athletes, and she takes turns traveling with each one to different sporting events. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti



# Melissa Sawyer

**Position:** Youth Empowerment Project co-founder and executive director

**Age:** 36

**Family:** single

**Education:** bachelor's degree in sociology, McGill University; master's degree in education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Melissa Sawyer was transfixed by the problems of poverty and a lack of educational and employment opportunities in central city New Orleans when she taught at the former Booker T. Washington High School in the late 1990s.

"I fell in love with the community and working with the kids and got involved with after-school activities ... and spent a lot of time in the community," said Sawyer, who came to the high school by way of Teach for America. "Building the relationships that I did with the kids and families turned out to be a transformative experience for me."

Sawyer determined she would return to New Orleans after graduating from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

When she got back, she went to work with the Juvenile Justice System of Louisiana. She witnessed first-hand what she describes as the "devastating cycle of kids getting caught up in the juvenile justice system, and then going back to school where they would be less educated than their fellow students and more angry and more behind in school."

It led her to create the Youth Empowerment Project in 2004, a first-of-its-kind reintegration program for youth in Louisiana.

Starting with only about \$235,000, YEP now has an operating budget in excess of \$2.6 million and provided services to nearly 800 young people last year.

"I thought we would be lucky if we had even 20 students when we started out, but within two weeks we were up to 40 students," said Sawyer, adding that the program has had 162 GED graduates since.

YEP, housed on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard across the street from a youth center building the group also runs, has spawned six other programs devoted to empowering young people.

Sawyer says her background is vastly different from that of the teenagers she interacts with every day, but she was raised by parents dedicated to the idea of giving something back to the community.

Her mother, Jan Sawyer, worked as an English as a Second Language instructor for adult students, while her father, Don Sawyer, has done development work in western Africa.

"I feel good about that work and know that we are making a difference," Sawyer said, "but I also know that there remains much work to be done."•

— Garry Boulard



# Amy Scafidel

**Position:** Jones, Walker, Waechter, Poitevent, Carrere & Denegre partner

**Age:** 36

**Family:** husband, Ryan; daughters, Elodie, 4, Elise, 2

**Education:** bachelor's degree in finance, Louisiana State University; juris doctor, LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center

Attorney Amy Scafidel is known for closing financial deals while sitting along the Endymion parade route guarding her spot. Her work ethic and passion for Carnival embody her connection and dedication to the New Orleans area.

Scafidel is a partner at Jones, Walker, Waechter, Poitevent, Carrere & Denegre, which she joined in 2001. Seven years later, she became a partner in the firm's business and commercial transactions practice group.

In the past year, Scafidel has closed more than a dozen commercial finance transactions totaling several billion dollars. Her clients include Freeport-McMoRan, Stewart Enterprises, Tidewater Inc. and Cal Dive International.

"I work for companies that borrow \$10 million to \$20 million, but more often it's over \$100 million and it's been crazy busy since 2010," she said. "There was a big financing boom in 2007, and most companies had five-year deals and need to refinance before time is up. There's a lot of acquisition activity, too, which is market driven and unpredictable."

Her focus is commercial lending, financial transactions and real estate matters. She repre-

sents borrowers and commercial banks in structuring financial and lending transactions.

Scafidel also has experience with secured asset-based debt financing, acquisition and working capital facilities, various hedging arrangements and oil and gas secured financing.

Despite the rewards of her career, the young attorney said she's challenged every day to meet the needs of clients, manage their expectations and make it home for dinner.

"For a woman in this field, it's hard to do this level of work, represent clients and have a family," she said. "It's a juggling act every day, but I make it a priority to attend all my kids events, be home at night for dinner and put my daughters to bed."

In addition to legal work, Scafidel co-chairs the Jones Walker hiring and recruiting committee, where she recruits law students for the firm's six-week summer program. During the program, she participates in community service activities, which last year involved planting trees and shrubs throughout City Park. Other years the firm worked with Habitat for Humanity to help build houses. •

— Kerry Duff



# Karen Shipman

**Position:** Kean Miller partner

**Age:** 41

**Family:** husband, Otis; children, Ruby, 4, Olive, 2

**Education:** bachelor's degree in anthropology and human and natural ecology, Emory University; juris doctor, Tulane University Law School

With many of her local, regional and national clients involved in the oil and gas industry, it is not uncommon for Karen Shipman to don a pair of steel-toed boots and a hard hat.

"When you are working with people in the offshore energy industry, you have to be the type of woman who can be comfortable doing that sort of thing," Shipman said. "I've been in helicopters flying out to wells. It is just part of the job."

Much of Shipman's practice is devoted to admiralty and maritime issues, areas that Shipman said are normally seen as "all boys clubs."

"When I graduated from Tulane Law School, I earned a certificate of specialization in admiralty law," she said. "It's starting to become more common to see women going into those fields now."

Shipman recently served as counsel for Chesapeake Energy, the second largest natural gas producer in the United States, in a case arising from a blowout at one of its land wells in Louisiana. She successfully prosecuted

breach of contract and gross negligence claims against the wellhead contractor.

"There was a two-week trial, and the court awarded a nearly \$10 million judgment to the client," Shipman said. "It was probably one of the more higher stakes cases I've handled."

At Kean Miller, Shipman is an equity partner — or owner — in the firm, something she said is not common in New Orleans law firms.

"I'm the only female partner at Kean Miller, but about 40 percent of the lawyers on the staff are women," she said. "More and more women are getting into law."

Shipman said she also devotes a great deal of time mentoring female attorneys at the firm and helping to create networking opportunities for women in the industry.

"I help young lawyers in figuring out what they want to do with their law careers," she said. "Many new attorneys need that kind of guidance. Many don't realize that you can have a life outside of the courtroom." •

— Robin Shannon



# Christina Sistrunk

**Position:** Shell Upstream Americas-deepwater vice president of production assets in the Gulf of Mexico

**Age:** 52

**Family:** husband, John; daughter, Nicole, 25

**Education:** bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, Ohio State University

While the bottom line is important to Christina Sistrunk, the number "zero" is also a priority, as in zero accidents, zero significant incidents and zero fatalities.

The vice president of production assets for Shell's deepwater exploration in the Gulf of Mexico takes pride in the company's goal to be proactive in safety measures and minimize incidents as part of the company's Goal Zero program. She works to promote safety for the roughly 2,000 employees at the 10 sites she's responsible for in the Gulf of Mexico.

It's also personal for Sistrunk. Her husband, John Sistrunk, works offshore as a senior well site leader for BP.

"I am always addressing concerns to deliver production both efficiently and safely," she said, adding that when she started in the field, the focus was on drilling in 1,000 feet of water. "Now we're dealing with technology and a work environment of drilling in 10,000 feet of water," she said. "We're constantly being challenged in this field to be safe, responsible, efficient and produce at effective volumes."

Since joining Shell in 1998, she has worked in the Deepwater Engineering Projects organization as operations manager, operations skill pool manager, health safety security environ-

ment manager for the Americas region and Gulf of Mexico east asset manager.

She also spent time in the Netherlands as Shell's asset integrity program manager, where she coordinated and implemented an \$8 billion integrity improvement campaign.

Sistrunk also helped start Shell's Front Line Leaders, a three-year program that has trained more than 500 employees since 2001 to become project and administrative leaders.

Sistrunk began her career in engineering at age 20 when she landed an internship with Amoco in Jennings, working in field operations. A year later, she worked a second internship for Amoco in Lake Charles before going to work for the company for 16 years.

"I remember troubleshooting a gas plant when I was 20 years old, and I said, 'Yeah, I want to be in this field,'" she said.

Sistrunk is a member of the 12-person National Campaign Committee to raise funds for Ohio State University's new chemical and biomolecular engineering building, a \$126 million facility projected to open in 2014. It will provide intensive research and laboratory space for students of chemistry, biochemistry and chemical biomolecular engineering. •

— Tommy Santora



# Danielle Sutton

**Position:** St. James Cheese Co. co-owner

**Age:** 39

**Family:** husband, Richard; children, Finn, 6, Madeleine, 2

**Education:** bachelor's degree in political science, Tulane University

For Danielle Sutton and her husband, Richard, both Tulane University graduates and living in London at the time when Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans was the only choice to open their new business.

"We were confident that there was going to be a recovery, and we wanted to be a part of it," Sutton said. "We could not stop thinking about moving back here, despite the storm."

While living in London, Sutton and her husband entered the cheese industry. They worked at the 200-year-old Paxton & Whitfield cheese shop, which provides cheese for the royal family and parliament in the St. James neighborhood of London.

She knew New Orleans would be the perfect place to open their own version of the store. So they opened St. James Cheese Co. in November 2006.

"New Orleans is the type of place that likes local business," she said. "It is a town that has a lot of specialty shops. Everybody likes food and talks about food."

Sutton says her most challenging experience professionally was starting a new business from scratch.

"I did a good two years of research and legwork and trying to figure how we were going to make it work," Sutton said. "Then, actually get-

ting the shop built, hiring employees, getting products in, getting the word out and publicizing it and getting our name out to the restaurants."

Sutton says her biggest accomplishment has been getting New Orleans restaurants on board as customers. More than 150 throughout the region buy cheese from their shop.

She also devotes her time to local organizations, volunteering at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the Preservation Resource Center.

Sutton is also a member of the Junior League of New Orleans, where she works with Edible Schoolyard gardens where children grow and harvest vegetables.

She has also volunteered at Lafayette Academy Charter School and the Samuel J. Green Charter School's community garden days through the Junior League and the program's annual fundraiser, An Edible Evening.

"It exposes children who grew up in an urban area to where their food is coming from," she said. "If they have grown something themselves, they are more likely to eat it."

She has also worked with the Junior League's Kids in the Kitchen, a nutrition clinic held at Lafayette Academy Charter School and the Southern Food and Beverage Museum. •

— Jennifer Nall



# Lynn Swanson

**Position:** Jones, Swanson, Huddell and Garrison managing member

**Age:** 45

**Family:** husband, Joseph Barras III; children, Grace Barras, 4, Peter Barras, 3

**Education:** bachelor's degree in psychology, Bryn Mawr College; juris doctor, Loyola University College of Law

Commercial litigator Lynn Swanson often defends clients who have sued powerhouse companies, including global software and financial services firms, big-name beer distributors and casinos — even BP.

Swanson is the firm's lead attorney on claims related to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and was also appointed to co-coordinate the multidistrict Gulf Coast community Fund Outreach Group.

This area of law tends to be male-dominated, and Swanson said she's opposed women attorneys in only one case since joining her current firm.

Jones, Swanson, Huddell and Garrison recruited her to develop its commercial litigation practice and lead complex negotiations, though at least one other firm initially resisted, Swanson said.

"Why would you let a woman do that?" Swanson recalls one opposing lawyer asking her colleague.

"Because she can do it and I won't," she said the male colleague replied.

Swanson said the key to her success is

her opponents.

"It serves me well in a field where communication is so important," she said. "And I often make dear friends of my opponents. I've been invited to their weddings, and they've referred cases to me."

Her poise might come from having played the violin on stage as a toddler. By age 5, Swanson was first chair in an orchestra, and at 11, she soloed with the Baton Rouge Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

She gained confidence, too, so much that by the time she took a college job as a paralegal, "I thought I could do what the lawyers were doing, and thought I could do it as well," she said.

Soon after she took her current position, she and her husband were ready to expand their family. Through Volunteers of America, they adopted a girl and, a year later, a boy.

"I adore Volunteers of America," said Swanson, who raises money for VOA through its annual golf tournament. "They've changed our lives." •

— Anne Berry



# Lauren Thom

**Position:** Fleurty Girl CEO

**Age:** 30

**Family:** children, Austin, 10, twins Parker and Maddie, 7

**Education:** attended Louisiana State University

A passion for her hometown combined with clever ideas for New Orleans-themed T-shirts motivated Lauren Thom to put everything on the line and go for her dream. Today, she's sitting on a business valued at nearly \$1 million.

Three years ago, Thom was a news reporter for the Louisiana Farm Bureau's weekly statewide television program. But her vision was to move home where she would design New Orleans-inspired T-shirts for women. She had been in Baton Rouge since college and was living paycheck to paycheck as a single mom with three children.

In 2009, she designed a website and used her \$2,000 income tax return to print her first batch of T-shirts, which sold out immediately. Thom had to print another \$4,000 worth of shirts to keep up with demand.

She was able to move to New Orleans and live on her income from Fleurty Girl, opting to keep her job in Baton Rouge as long as she could. Thom found a shotgun house on Oak Street, where she set up Fleurty Girl's first retail shop in the front and lived in the back with her children.

But the move wasn't easy.

"I loved what I was doing, but I hated life," Thom said. "I'd get up at 5 a.m., get myself and the kids dressed, drive to Baton Rouge, drive back to New Orleans, then get them in bed and

fill orders."

Then, things got crazier. Two months after moving to Oak Street, Thom received a cease-and-desist letter from the NFL, demanding that she stop selling T-shirts with the phrase "Who Dat" because the league claimed exclusive rights.

The event unfolded just as the Saints were marching to the Super Bowl, and a Twitter exchange with a customer who explained the cease-and-desist letter was all it took.

"In one hour, I had every news station at my shop," she said. "I had ESPN coming. I had NPR coming. And I was still at work in Baton Rouge. That was the day I decided I would quit my job, and I haven't missed a beat since."

Today, Fleurty Girl has locations in the French Quarter, Uptown, Metairie and Mandeville.

Thom believes it's important to give back to the community. Fleurty Girl has donated \$75,000 from T-shirt sales to causes such as the Louisiana Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Rescue Program after the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and Hubbig's Pies after a fire destroyed its bakery.

Thom has also been helping promote local tourism by hosting video segments for GoNOLA.com, the travel blog produced by the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corp. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti



TWO-TIME HONOREE

# Mary Von Kurnatowski

**Position:** Tipitina's co-owner; Tipitina's Foundation founding member

**Age:** 51

**Family:** husband, Roland; daughter, Mary Grace, 8

**Education:** bachelor's degrees in history and English, Louisiana Tech University

More than 4,000 students in 75 schools throughout south Louisiana have received musical instruments from Tipitina's Foundation over the past decade. Founding member Mary Von Kurnatowski started the nonprofit in 1999 with her husband, Roland, to help young, up-and-coming musicians and support Louisiana's music community.

"We believe music can make a difference in a child's life and keep the world going in a better direction," said Von Kurnatowski, who also co-owns Tipitina's in New Orleans.

"We're formed by where we live, so we have to preserve the music culture in south Louisiana," she said.

Tipitina's Foundation supports the regional music community through four programs.

Instruments A' Comin is an annual fundraising program that brings in more than \$100,000 a year to help provide new, high-quality musical instruments to Louisiana public, charter and parochial schools. The event has raised more than \$2.5 million to buy instruments for students since it was started 11 years ago.

"Our foundation is one of the main sources for school music and band programs," Von Kurnatowski said. "Watching kids work together and

learn to play music is an amazing experience."

The foundation offers the free Sunday Youth Music Workshop for students of all ages interested in learning and playing music with some of the region's best musicians. The workshop is held every other Sunday at Tipitina's on Napoleon Avenue. The venue also offers an internship program, which is an after-school jazz and digital recording program that teaches students the business side of music. About 20 students meet three times a week to participate in the internship program.

The fourth program, Tipitina's music office co-op, is a statewide network of work force development and job skills training centers for musicians, filmmakers and other media workers. The co-op has offices in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Alexandria, Lafayette, Shreveport, Lake Charles and Monroe.

More than 3,300 musicians participate in the music office co-op, Von Kurnatowski said.

Based on a survey of musicians who visit the co-op, there's been a 33 percent increase in music-related income because artists have a place to network, make fliers and use office space, she said. •

— Kerry Duff



# Penny Walker

**Position:** UnitedHealthcare senior medical director, Southeast region

**Age:** 48

**Family:** single; children, Paul Awa, 22, Grant Awa, 20, Harrison Gerber, 10

**Education:** associate's degree in nursing, Purdue University; bachelor's degree in biology, Purdue University; doctor of medicine, Loyola University-Stritch School of Medicine; master's degree in business administration, University of Phoenix

Penny Walker's career has covered a wide spectrum of the health care industry.

The senior medical director for UnitedHealthcare's Southeast region started as a nurse and worked in Chicago as an emergency room physician for 14 years before getting into insurance.

She served as medical director at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois and as market medical officer and vice president at Humana of Louisiana before joining UnitedHealthcare in 2008.

Walker oversees five markets covering three different lines of business including commercial, Medicare and Medicaid. She's responsible for clinical excellence, medical affordability, relationship development and growing health plans for nearly 3 million people in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North and South Carolina.

One program she developed for Louisiana is an initiative that identifies members as early as possible when their kidneys are failing and tries to prevent them from becoming dialysis patients.

"We reach out to them when we identify them through blood tests, and as soon as we identify that they are having some problems with their kidneys, we put them in a program

called Kidney Resource Services," she said.

It is one of the most successful programs she has developed for Louisiana, said Walker, who also is host of "Community Health Heroes," a health care program that airs four times a week on New Orleans Access Television.

"It is a wonderful public health education show about a variety of topics," she said. "I have interviewed a man who gave up his car to ride a bicycle in all sorts of charity events and donates his money to children's cancer and a woman who had four different types of cancer and was a survivor."

Walker discusses topics that are happening in the local community, such as bicycle and pedestrian safety and cancer awareness.

In addition to her duties as host and her other speaking engagements, Walker takes her therapy dog, Butterscotch, to a nursing home on the North Shore every weekend.

"When I bring my dog in, people will tell me stories about when they had to give their dog up when they got to the nursing home," she said. "They get that warm, fuzzy feeling when they pet her. It takes us quite a while to get through."•

— Jennifer Nall



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# Judy Weitz

**Position:** Compucast Web Media owner

**Age:** 58

**Family:** husband, Marc; sons, Matthew, 33, Michael, 28

**Education:** attended Louisiana State University

“So you’re the poster child for business preparedness,” Michael Chertoff said as he greeted Judy Weitz, owner of Compucast Web Media in 2006.

The former homeland security secretary, who was in New Orleans for Hurricane Preparedness Month, requested a meeting with Weitz when he heard about Compucast’s efforts to help businesses and individuals during and after Hurricane Katrina.

“I was very honored to receive such a high compliment,” she said. “We worked hard to make sure our clients maintained open communication after the storm.”

Compucast came to the aid of the New Orleans Bar Association, helping it reach out to attorneys and keeping the Louisiana court system running when all other websites, including the Louisiana’s Supreme Court’s, were down. Weitz’s company also developed a job database for the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Lodging Association to post available positions and employee benefits, while allowing visitors to search jobs and submit résumés.

Weitz has owned Compucast, a full-service web company, since 1994, when she launched [experienceneworleans.com](http://experienceneworleans.com) to showcase the positive attributes of the city after hearing from many people who saw it in a negative light.

As New Orleans businesses needed help creating a web presence at the onset of the Internet, they began contacting Weitz. Compucast grew out of that need, including portals such as [bestneworleanshotels.com](http://bestneworleanshotels.com), [neworleansrestaurants.com](http://neworleansrestaurants.com) and [weddingsinneworleans.com](http://weddingsinneworleans.com).

The company expanded when part of the 1995 Carnival season was streamed online through [mardigrasneworleans.com](http://mardigrasneworleans.com), including interviews from Anne Rice, Delta Burke and Francis Ford Coppola.

Weitz remembers the general manager of a French Quarter hotel reading about her company and asking her to promote his hotel online. Weitz agreed to create a site for the hotel and link to it during a Carnival ball webcast event.

“He offered us a bathroom pass for Mardi Gras as payment and we accepted,” she said.

Weitz is a sought-after speaker on Internet marketing and web design at universities and conventions. She was appointed to the Computer Information Systems Occupational Advisory Board of Unitech Training Academy.

“The reason we started this business is the same reason we are doing it today. New Orleans has a lot to offer, and it’s our job to show people all the amazing attributes in this city,” Weitz said. •

— Tommy Santora



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## Lisa Winningkoff

**Position:** Stewart Enterprises senior vice president, corporate secretary and senior administrative officer

**Age:** 45

**Family:** husband, Darren; children, Madeleine, 16, Nicholas, 13

**Education:** bachelor's degree in accounting, University of New Orleans

When Stewart Enterprises wanted to develop standard operating procedures for its funeral and cemetery facilities several years ago, Lisa Winningkoff raised her hand for the challenge.

She worked with a team of death care experts for nine months to create two 400-page documents that outlined the entire funeral and cemetery process start to finish.

"We worked tirelessly for nine months to produce the Stewart way of doing things," she said. "We now have consistency among our funeral homes and cemeteries, and we deliver quality service.

"This project was an eye-opening experience. ... When you work in a corporate office, you're not exposed to what happens in the field, and you don't get to hear from the people sitting across the table from grieving families."

Stewart Enterprises Inc. is the second largest provider of funeral and cemetery products and services in the United States.

Winningkoff joined Stewart Enterprises in 1991 as a financial accountant. Today, she serves as senior vice president, corporate secretary and senior administrative officer. The positions require that she oversee human re-

sources, compensation and benefits, compliance and safety, risk and claims management, and payroll and employee development.

She encourages her co-workers to take control of their careers to advance.

"You have to raise your hand and ask for what you want and not be afraid to do something different and challenging," she said. "Advanced planning and being prepared is also critical. You can't accomplish goals without a plan."

As a United Way supporter, Winningkoff encourages employee involvement in charitable causes. She helped kick off Stewart's "Days of Caring" at the corporate office last year. She lined up four United Way agencies to visit the office and encouraged employees to volunteer for an eight-hour day. In all, more than 120 employees spent 960 hours volunteering with organizations of their choice.

After learning the Association of Retarded Citizens had a soup kitchen, Winningkoff arranged a special soup tasting for employees. Afterward, hundreds of employees placed orders for soup to be delivered the following week. They called the event Souper Wednesday. •

— Kerry Duff



# Jane Wolfe

**Position:** former Wagner's Meat Market owner

**Age:** 48

**Family:** husband, Scott Wolfe; children, Scott Jr., 31, Jennifer, 26

**Education:** bachelor's degree in history and religious studies, Tulane University; pursuing master's degree in theological studies, Harvard University

Jane Wolfe spent the better part of 25 years propagating New Orleans with T-shirts and bumper stickers bearing the catch phrase "You Can't Beat Wagner's Meat," the slogan for the meat market chain she and her husband owned until 2005.

These days, Wolfe is living in a world that's about as different from butcher paper and bumper stickers as you can get.

In August, she began her pursuit of a master's degree in theological studies from Harvard Divinity School.

"After 25 years in the retail world, you start to feel like a hamster on a wheel," Wolfe said. "The world of academia was just new and exciting. To learn things I never knew about has been refreshing."

Four years ago, Wolfe registered for her first college class at Tulane University and fell in love with academia; she hadn't set foot in a classroom for 26 years. She received her GED when she was 16 years old, and when she was 17, Wolfe and her husband, Scott, started Wagner's Meat Market. The chain became a New Orleans institution.

In 2005, the Wolfes decided to retire from retail and sold all 10 of their stores, but not before levee failures during Hurricane Katrina

flooded eight of the locations.

Scott ventured into the construction industry to rebuild the flooded markets and meet the demand for services throughout the rest of the city.

Jane, however, found herself at a crossroads.

In 2008, she served as vice president and director of client relationships at Zlien, the legal document filing company her son, attorney Scott Wolfe Jr., founded. With his urging, she decided she didn't want to be 50 years old without a college degree.

So at age 43, Wolfe enrolled at Tulane and pursued a double major in religious studies and history. Wolfe wanted to teach religion or social entrepreneurship at a university. To do that, she needed a master's degree. One of her professors suggested Harvard Divinity School.

Being able to switch from business to academia is Wolfe's biggest professional accomplishment, she said.

"The business world is fast acting," she said. "The academic world is more reflective. You're thinking about the world instead of running in it."

When in New Orleans, Wolfe is involved with Basket of Hope, which brings baskets of toys, games, movies and other items to patients at Children's Hospital. •

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti



# Laurie Young

**Position:** Adams and Reese partner

**Age:** 53

**Family:** husband, Jeff; stepson, Brandon, 30; children, Mallory, 18, Griffin, 17

**Education:** bachelor's degree in business administration, University of Miami; juris doctor, Loyola University College of Law

Representing a clientele that includes hotels, such as Marriott International and the Ritz-Carlton, and business such as DHL Worldwide and WD-40, attorney Laurie Young approaches every case with one goal in mind.

"I want to make the other side see that their position is not a winning one and that it would not be in their interest to put more time into it," she said. "You have to do everything you can think of to eliminate the unpredictability factor."

That's why Young goes the extra mile in preparing for trial, down to researching the previous rulings of the judge she will be arguing in front of to taking witnesses to the courtroom before the trial so they get a feel for the place and can be more comfortable giving testimony.

Young joined Adams and Reese right out of law school and now serves as a partner. She ended up in law circuitously.

She ran a sno-ball stand on the Alabama Gulf Coast after receiving her undergraduate degree from the University of Miami. After realizing she needed something more secure, she went to work for a law firm and had the pri-

mary task of handling case documents. She fell in love with the atmosphere.

"I liked the people I was around, the level of motivation and intelligence," Young said.

She was also attracted by "constantly being put into new fact situations," a precursor of her varied Adams and Reese practice.

As one of the few female civil law attorneys in New Orleans in the early 1990s, Young said there were initial challenges that transcended her gender.

"I am 5-foot-2 with a Southern accent from Mississippi, so I thought that placed me at even more of a disadvantage," she says. "The key to my success was constantly being underestimated. I just don't think anyone thought I would be up to the task at hand."

In her free hours, Young has served on the Pro Bono Mentoring Committee of the Louisiana State Bar Association. She is a volunteer at St. Martin's Episcopal School in Metairie as well as the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church. •

— Garry Boulard



# Past honorees

Names in bold were overall Woman of the Year award winners



## 1999

Phyllis Adams  
Jan Boatright  
Patricia Denechaud  
Maura Donahue  
Betsy Dresser  
Lana Duke  
Nanci Easterling  
Midge Epstein  
Mignon Faget  
Donna Fraiche  
Patricia Habeeb  
Connie Jacobs  
Leslie Rosenthal Jacobs  
Alice Kennedy  
Ti Martin  
Judy Perry Martinez  
Elise McCullough  
Ruth Ann Menutis  
Siomonias Edwards Milton  
Phala Mire  
Margaret Montgomery-Richard  
Karyn Noles  
Ruth Owens  
Sharon Perlis  
Nellie Stokes Perry  
Leaudria Polk  
Kay Priestly  
Jan Ramsey  
Marguerite Redwine  
P.K. Scheerle  
Flo Schornstein  
Janet Shea  
Kim Sport  
Carroll Suggs  
Barbara Turner Windhorst

## 2000

Tonia Aiken  
Lauren Anderson  
Carol Asher  
Judy Barrasso  
Diane Barrilleaux  
Suzette Becker  
Elodia Blanco  
Julia Bland  
Cindy Brennan  
Maureen Clary  
Sally Clausen  
Dr. Elizabeth Terrell  
Hobgood Fontham  
Joni Friedmann  
Joanne Gallinghouse  
Brenda Garibaldi Hatfield  
Paulette Hurdlick  
Maureen Larkins  
Gay LeBreton  
Saundra Levy  
Londa Martin McCullough  
Linda Mintz  
Judith Miranti  
Angela O'Byrne  
Rajender "Raj" Pannu  
Kay Priestly  
Kat Rice  
P.K. Scheerle  
Eileen Skinner  
Bettye Parker Smith  
Sherry Walters

## 2001

Julie Condy  
Sherie Conrad  
Sheila Danzey  
Judy Dawson  
Ann Duplessis  
Patti Elish  
Jean Felts  
Patricia Gray  
Beverly Gianna  
Sheilah Auderer Goodson  
Norma Grace  
Deborah Ducote Keller  
Donna Guinn Klein

Roselyn Koretzky  
Corvette Kowalski  
Jennifer Magee  
Barbara Major  
Laurie Vignaud Marshall  
Suzanne Mestayer  
Nancy Morovich  
Barbara Motley  
Robertta Musa  
Iona Myers  
Rickie Nutik  
Tina Owen  
Sharon Rodi  
Wanda Sigur  
ChiQuita Simms  
Katherine Harlan Sippola  
Julie Skinner Stokes  
Ruby Sumler  
Nancy Bissinger Timm  
Ollie Tyler  
Pam Wegmann  
Ann Wills

## 2002

Ann Cassagne Anderson  
Annie Avery  
Trilby Barnes  
Ginger Berrigan  
Dianne Boazman  
Donnie Marie Booth  
Christine Briede  
Kay Brief  
Stephanie Bruno  
Kimberly Williamson Butler  
Jane Cooper  
Shirley Trusty Corey  
Kay Dee  
Eugenie Jones Encalarde  
Alethia Gauthier  
Clem Goldberger  
Patricia Green  
Judith Halverson  
Barbara Johnson  
Barbara Kaplinsky  
Ruth Kullman  
Sharon Litwin  
Ana Lopez  
Barbara MacPhee  
Deborah Mavis  
Marguerite McDonald  
Cheryl Nickerson  
Danette O'Neal  
Jimmie Phillips  
Catherine Pierson  
Jane Raiford  
Rhonda Robichaux  
Julie Rodriguez  
Judy Shano  
Sandy Shilstone  
Susan Spicer  
Suzanne Thomas  
Deborah Villio  
Kay Wilkins  
Elizabeth Williams

## 2003

Donna Alley  
Dianne Baham  
Gaynell Bellizan  
Ruth Berggren  
Lolita Burrell  
Jeanette Butler  
Vanessa Claiborne  
Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson  
Elaine Coleman  
Katherine Conklin  
Lisa Crinel  
Susan D'Antoni  
M. Christine D'Antonio  
Sandra Dartus  
Camilla Davis  
Catherine Dunn  
Carol Etter  
Peggy Feldmann

Susan Fielkow  
Deborah Duplechin Harkins  
Deborah Keel  
Patricia Krebs  
Mary Landrieu  
Janet Leigh  
A. Kelton Longwell  
Charlotte Connick Mabry  
Laura Maloney  
Eve Barrie Masinter  
Elsie Mendez  
Eileen Powers  
Tonnette "Toni" Rice  
Deborah Rouen  
Dionne Rousseau  
Diane Roussel  
Kim Ryan  
Grace Sheehan  
Andrea Thornton  
Keeley Williams Verrett  
Dawn Wesson  
Charlee Williamson

## 2004

**Philomene "Missy" Allain**  
Rita Benson LeBlanc  
Barbara Booth  
Lally Brennan  
Valerie Cahill  
Karen Carter  
Audrey Cerise  
Hallema Sharif Clyburn  
Dorothy Clyne  
Sandra Corrigan  
Elizabeth Coulon  
Virginia Davis  
Stephanie Dupuy  
Anita Gilford  
Dana Meeks Hansel  
Lane Hindermann  
Andrea Huseman  
Ellen Kempner  
Laura Lee Killeen  
Janice Kishner  
Dr. Susan Krantz  
Angelique LaCour  
Janet Larson  
Diane Lyons  
Carla Major  
Marilyn Maloney  
Lisa Maurer  
Mary Meyer  
Kathleen Mix  
Michelle Montz  
Carole Cukell Neff  
Dr. Collier Ochsner  
Stephanie Prunty  
Dr. Felicia Rabito  
Ann Rogers  
Gail Roussel  
Peggy Scott  
Tara Shaw  
Jaye Berard Smith  
Kathryn Smith  
Carol Solomon  
Kim Sport  
Liz Tahir  
Donna Taylor  
Fran Villere  
Ann Wallace  
Barbara Waller  
Bonnie Wibel  
Carol Wise  
Ellen Yellin

## 2005

**Laura Maloney**  
Danica Ansardi  
Anne Babin  
Margarita Bergen  
Amy Reimer  
Elizabeth Boh  
Jennifer Bollinger  
Tracie Boutte

Delisha Boyd  
Kim Boyle  
Jaye Calhoun  
Anne Cochran  
Beth Cristina  
Tina Dandry-Mayes  
Gayle Dellinger  
Rosemary James DeSalvo  
Margo DuBos  
Kim Dudek  
Kirsten Early  
Donna Fraiche  
Carol Gniady  
Ruby Bridges Hall  
Dr. Jodie Holloway  
Kathy Lynn Honaker  
Tonja Koob  
Mary von Kurnatowski  
Michele Shane L'Hoste  
Angelle LaBorde  
Mary Helen Lagasse  
Susan Laudeman  
Belinda Little-Wood  
Babs Mollere  
Joan Mollohan  
Leann Moses  
Beverly Nichols  
Julie Noto  
Vera O'Brien  
Rajender Pannu  
Lisa Roth  
Diane Roussel  
Martha Ann Samuel  
Miriam Schulingkamp  
Lynda Nugent Smith  
Raylyn Stevens  
Phyllis Taylor  
Cheryl Teamer  
Polly Thomas  
Sharon Touns  
Nancy Trosclair  
Anne Witmer

## 2006

**Doris Voitier**  
Donna Alley  
Theresa Anderson  
Florence André  
Terry Birkhoff  
Julia Bland  
Virginia Boulet  
Debra Bowers  
Bonnie Boyd  
Katie Brasted  
Betsy Brien  
Sister Camille Anne Campbell  
Karen Troyer Caraway  
Tiffany Chase  
Nancy Claypool  
Virginia "Ginger" Crawford  
Katherine Crosby  
Klara Cvitanovich  
Karen DeSalvo  
Mary Ehret  
Mignon Faget  
Regina Hall  
Yvette Jones  
Donna Klein  
Kathleen Laborde  
Priscilla Lawrence  
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Lynn Luker  
Sandie McNamara  
Suzanne Mestayer  
Kerry Milton  
Cindy Nuesslein  
Angela O'Byrne  
Diana Pinckley  
Patricia Prechter  
Kelly Ranum  
Amy Reimer  
Patricia Riddlebarger  
Sally-Ann Roberts  
Judge Karen Roby

Sandra Rosenthal  
Pamela Schafer  
P.K. Scheerle  
Florence Schornstein  
Holly Sharp  
Adrienne Slack  
Carol Solomon  
Becky Spinnato  
Stacey Stemke  
Carol Wise

## 2007

**Ilone "Toni" Wendel**  
Naydja Domingue Bynum  
Carmen Baham  
Debra Bowers  
Jane Brooks  
Simone Bruni  
Naydja Domingue Bynum  
Caitlin Cain  
Sharon Latten Clark  
Gina Cortez  
Darlene Cusanza  
Nancy Davis  
Gayle Dellinger  
Maura Donahue  
Laura Drumm  
Melanie Ehrlich  
Jane Ann Frosch  
Michelle Gobert  
Jenny Hamilton  
Paula Hartley  
Marvalene Hughes  
Natalie Jayroe  
Jacqueline Carroll Jones-Soule'  
Christy Kane  
Molly Kimball  
Rachel Kincaid  
Stacy Horn Koch  
Phyllis Landrieu  
Priscilla Lawrence  
Maureen Lichtveld  
Rebecca Mackie  
Elizabeth Magner  
Sandy Ha Nguyen  
Kristin Gisleson Palmer  
Marian Pierre  
Brenda Reine-Bertus  
Ann Rogers  
Denise Shinn  
Dolly Simpson  
Lisa Stockton  
Shelly Stubbs  
Michele Kidd Sutton  
Elizabeth M. Teague  
Cecile Tebo  
Karen Troyer Caraway  
Denise Thornton  
Sarah Newell Usdin  
Laurie White  
Catherine Wilbert  
Sara Woodard

## 2008

**Carol Solomon**  
Jacqueline Alexander  
Heather Alleman  
Sandra Andrieu  
Therese Badon  
Jesyka Bartlett  
Lauren Baum  
Penny Baumer  
Dottie Belletto  
C. Lynn Besch  
Julia Bland  
Kim Boyle  
Cindy Brennan  
Christine Briede  
Debbie Brockley  
Nancy Cassagne  
Jacquelyn Clarkson  
Michelle Craig  
Bernie Cullen  
Elizabeth Dannewald

Nancy Scott Degan  
Dell Dempsey  
Johnette Downing  
Patti Elish  
Cathi Fontenot  
Elizabeth Futrell  
Jocelyn Greely  
Samantha Griffin  
Jayne Gurtler  
Kristine Hatfield  
Laura Held  
Donna Klein  
Priscilla Lawrence  
Deborah Lea  
Nancy Marshall  
Anne Milling  
Cheryl Mintz  
Beverly Nichols  
Michelle Nugent  
Beth Payton  
Tara Richard  
Jade Russell  
Elizabeth Scheer  
Rachael Schorr  
Stacy Seamon  
Pamela Senatore  
Kristin Shannon  
Jessica Soileau  
Charlee Williamson  
Rachel Wisdom  
Ellen Zakris

**2009**

**Kim Boyle**

Carol Asher  
Magdalen Bickford  
Debra Bowers  
Caitlin Cain

Mary Len Costa  
Angela Daliet  
DeAnna Davis  
Lori Dean  
Renette DeJoie-Hall  
Marguerite Doyle-Johnston  
Mignon Faget  
Mary Genovese  
Megan Guy  
Deborah Harkins  
Nakia Jones  
Sun Kim  
Amy Kirk  
Ann Koppel  
Susan Krinsky  
Angela Lacour  
Annie LaRock  
Rose LeBreton  
Kathy Lowrey  
Carla Major  
Eve Masinter  
Grasshopper Mendoza  
Kristi Mirambell  
Tess Monaghan  
Marie Moore  
Jeanne Nathan  
Kathy Nieland  
Angela O'Byrne  
Kira Orange-Jones  
Patricia Powell  
Eboni Price  
Mary Beth Romig  
Cheri Saltaformaggio  
Monica Sanchez  
LaVerne Saulny  
Aimee Smallwood  
Kim Sport  
Dana Stumpf

Lizette Terral  
Mignhon Tourne  
Colleen Toye  
Wendy Waren  
Denise Williams  
Ellen Yellin  
Ana Zorrilla

**2010**

**Rita Benson-LeBlanc**

Charmaine Allesandro  
Jennifer Bordes  
Dawn Brackett  
Susan Brennan  
Patricia Brister  
Holly Callia  
Brenda Case  
Phyllis Cassidy  
Martha Castillo  
Andrea Chen  
Lucy Chun  
Ann Cohen  
Kelly Commander  
Lisa Conescu  
Christine Ebrahim  
Valerie Englade  
June Fallo  
Kathleen Finnerty  
Debra Fischman  
Shari Fisher  
Monica Frois  
Yvelyne Germain-McCarthy  
Kathy Hebert  
Angela Hill  
Kathy Lynn Honaker  
Liljana Johnson  
Yvette Jones  
Darlene Kattan

Leslie Keen  
C J Ladner  
Marie Lamb  
Mary Landrieu  
Phyllis Landrieu  
Annette LeBlanc  
Patricia LeBlanc  
Laurie McCants  
Marjorie McKeithen  
Deborah Moench  
Alina Olteanu  
Carol Osborne  
Yvette Pacaccio  
Sonia Perez  
Debbie Rouen  
Gayle Sloan  
Dottie Stephenson  
Lizette Terral  
Lacey Toledano  
Nicole Tygier  
Lara White

**2011**

**Ti Martin**

Peggy Adams  
Glenda Allen-Jones  
Stephanie Barksdale  
Janet Bean  
Jennifer Bechet  
Haley Bittermann  
Christe Brewton  
Dominique Bright-Wheeler  
Carolyn Chandler  
Vivien Chen  
Jaimme Collins  
Belinda Constant  
Marsha Crowle  
Karen DeBileux

Monique Gougisha Doucette  
Bernadette D'Souza  
Lisa Easterling  
Heather Evans  
Melissa Gibbs  
Christine Guillory  
Leslie Hepting  
Alicia Irmscher  
Kathy Keene  
Karen Kersting  
Katie LeGardeur  
Saundra Levy  
Carol Luttrell  
Debbie Maniglia  
Rhonda McMilan  
Peggy Mendoza  
Rebecca Metzinger  
Anna Monhartova  
Pauline Patterson  
Rachel Piercey  
Lisa Plunkett  
Rita Reed  
Patty Riddlebarger  
Cheryl Rodrigue  
Elizabeth Roussel  
Norma Jane Sabiston  
Marci Schramm  
Kelly Schulz  
Helen Siegel  
Kathryn Smith  
Susan Talley  
T.J. Thom  
Jacqui Vines  
Sharonda Williams  
Bonnie Wyllie

**Names in bold were individual Woman of the Year award winners**

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ADAMS AND REESE LLP



OUT IN FRONT



**LAURIE BRIGGS YOUNG**  
2012 "Women of the Year" Honoree

## CONGRATULATIONS

to our partner, Laurie Briggs Young, on being honored among the  
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