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Contact Brennon Crist, San Diego Market Manager, Middle Market Banking at (619) 358-6361 or visit chase.com/commercialbanking for more information.
Welcome to the San Diego Business Journal’s seventh annual Most Admired CEO publication. In the following pages we are pleased to present a repertoire of San Diego’s most dynamic and innovative business leaders. These individuals have guided their organizations to exceptional success through their vision, foresight, and tenacity. They are our region’s economic generators, financial guardians and community champions.

This year’s field of winners and finalists was the largest in our history with a total of 116. We celebrated these “C-Level” leaders in a special awards event on Thursday, Dec. 5, at the Paradise Point Resort and Spa. Highlighting the event was an appearance by Ken Blanchard—internationally renowned leadership management pioneer, award-winning speaker and best-selling author—who was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, United Way of San Diego County’s Doug Sawyer was given an Exemplary Service Award and ViaSat Inc.’s Mark Dankberg received the Founder’s Award. Our sincere thanks go to our panel of judges—Vicky Carlson, Rod Lanthorne, Bill Pollakow, Greg Rogers, Ed Sternagle, and Greg Wells—for their time and diligent evaluations.

We’d like to thank our title sponsor, Chase Bank, and our gold sponsors, CBIZ and Mayer Hoffman McCann, Donovan’s and ESET; along with partnership sponsors LEAD San Diego and Paradise Point Resort and Spa for their support of this popular program.

We proudly profile our winners, finalists, awards of distinction recipients and judges in the following pages. They represent San Diego’s divergent and robust industries from health care to defense to our budding biotech sector. Their stories are unique and motivational and represent the true spirit of San Diego’s expanding influence on the region, the nation and the world.

Dr. Ken Blanchard has spent a lifetime inspiring global corporate presidents and ordinary people with now famous motivational quotes such as “don’t quack like a duck, soar like an eagle.” Few people have influenced the day-to-day management of people and companies more than Blanchard. A prominent, sought-after author, speaker, and business consultant, he is one of the most influential leadership experts in the world and is respected for his years of groundbreaking work in the fields of leadership and management.

Blanchard is the co-founder and chief spiritual officer of The Ken Blanchard Companies, an international management training and consulting firm that he and his wife, Margie Blanchard, began in 1979 in San Diego. In addition to being a renowned speaker and consultant, he also spends time as a visiting lecturer at his alma mater, Cornell University. Starting with his phenomenal best-selling book, “The One Minute Manager,” co-authored with Spencer Johnson, which has sold more than 13 million copies and remains on best-seller lists, his books have a combined sales of more than 18 million copies in more than 25 languages.

He has received many awards and honors for his contributions in the fields of management, leadership, and speaking. The National Speakers Association awarded him his highest honor, the “Council of Peers Award of Excellence.” He was inducted into the HRD Hall of Fame by Training magazine and Lake-wood Conferences, and he received the Golden Gavel Award from Toastmasters International. He has been inducted into Amazon’s Hall of Fame as one of the top 25 best-selling authors of all time. The business school at Grand Canyon University bears his name. In addition, he teaches students in the master of science in Executive Leadership Program at the University of San Diego.

Mark Dankberg co-founded ViaSat Inc. in 1986 and has led the company’s rapid growth, holding the positions of chairman of the board and chief executive officer since the company’s inception. He is considered an industry expert in aero-space, defense, and satellite communications, and is the leading visionary for a new generation of high-capacity satellite systems that stretch the boundaries of what satellites can do. Under his leadership, ViaSat has consistently been one of America’s fastest-growing technology companies. As a start-up, ViaSat has been recognized multiple times by leading business and industry publications including BusinessWeek, Forbes, Fortune, Red Herring, Space News, and DefenseNews for its exceptional performance and growth. He has co-authored several military standards on satellite networking, and holds a number of patents in communications and satellite network-technologies. He has participated on Department of Defense advisory panels and was invited to testify before a Congressional committee on high technology growth companies and IPOs.

Dankberg was named Entrepreneur of the Year in San Diego in 2000, Satellite Industry Executive of the Year in 2003, and received the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Aerospace International Communications Award in 2008. In October, he was presented with the Innovator Award by the Arthur C. Clarke Foundation for his leadership in transforming satellite communications. He also is a member of the Rice University Electrical and Computer Engineering Hall of Fame.

A 28-year veteran of the banking industry, Doug Sawyer assumed the leadership of United Way of San Diego County in July 2005 as president and CEO. With a desire to give back to the community, he decided to leave the banking industry to take on this new venture. The organization has thrived under his leadership and recently was only one of six United Ways to be funded in a nationwide “Collective Impact” program as a strong example of leadership and significant community progress. Prior to joining United Way of San Diego, Sawyer held senior executive positions in a number of the region’s financial institutions.

Sawyer’s vast community involvement includes board memberships in The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, The Children’s Initiative, and San Diego Grantmakers. He is past chairman of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce where he continues to serve on the board of directors. In addition, he served as president of the board of directors of the Holiday Bowl in 2006 and continues to serve on the board and national strategy committee.

His past community activities included board memberships at the United Way of San Diego, American Red Cross San Diego/Imperial Counties Chapter, LEAD San Diego, Children’s Hospital Foundation, San Diego Opera, and Leadership Trust (as a founding member). He also served as a member of the Ad Hoc Citizens Advisory Committee to the Audit Committee of the City of San Diego, as well as the City’s Permanent Homeless Facility Task Force.
Bill Pollakov  
President & CEO  
The Pollakov Financial Group, Inc.  

Bill Pollakov is the president and CEO of The Pollakov Financial Group Inc. He took the helm of a small failing firm and built it into a large full service financial planning firm which now consists of 16 different divisions. Pollakov is a sought after speaker, and has spoken throughout the North America and Asia. Additionally, he is regularly called as an expert witness for industry legal issues and is a consultant for the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. An active community supporter, Pollakov is the founder of Bikes for Kids Foundation, a charitable organization that has given away more than 250,000 new bikes to disadvantaged children.

Greg Rogers  
CEO  
Pacific Building Group  

Greg Rogers, CEO of Pacific Building Group, a commercial general contracting firm based in San Diego, has more than 40 years’ experience in every level of commercial construction. Rogers concentrates on the strategic long-range planning for Pacific Building Group and, what began as a one-man operation out of the back of a pick-up truck, has today become a company with projected revenues of $70 million and a staff of nearly 150. He is very active in community and philanthropic organizations. Professionally, he is a member of the Associated General Contractors, and the Associated Builders and Contractors, serving as a past board member and chairman. He also is a board member emeritus of San Diego Rescue Mission.

Vicky Carlson  
President & CEO  
LEAD San Diego  

Vicky Carlson was appointed president and chief executive officer of LEAD San Diego in August, 2010. Carlson joined the LEAD board in 2002 and served in many capacities before leaving to assume her current position. Carlson has nearly two decades of business experience and was president and owner of Office Pavilion San Diego, a Herman Miller furniture dealership. She has served on the board of Voices for Children and on the board of The Woman’s Conference, serving at the pleasure of California’s First Lady Maria Shriver.

Ed Sternagle  
Principal  
Creative Professional Services  

Ed Sternagle provides business management consulting services to small companies stressing practical, strategic approaches for optimizing business operations. Sternagle has more than 30 years of management experience. He has started several high-tech businesses and has held key senior management positions with a number of companies, including Xerox, Computer Sciences Corporation, Mitchell International, and Sullivan International. In addition, he served as the first executive director of UC Riverside CONNECT, and has consulted extensively with the City of San Diego and other municipalities.

Rod Lanthorne  
Advisor/Retired Chairman & President  
Kyocera International, Inc.  

Rodney N. Lanthorne retired from Kyocera in June 2012 after 33 years of service. Lanthorne served as director of Kyoto, Japan-based Kyocera Corporation, parent company of the worldwide Kyocera group, and, additionally, he served on the board of directors of affiliate AVX Corp. Lanthorne was named as a director of Kyocera Corporation in 1988, becoming one of the first Americans to serve on the board of a publicly traded Japanese corporation. Under his responsibility, Kyocera developed a divers, highly accountable, decentralized enterprise within the Americas. Lanthorne is a current director of the nonprofit Kyoto Symposium Organization. He is a past chairman of the YMCA of San Diego County and is involved in various other community organizations.

Ed Sternagle  
Corporate Alliance International  

Greg Wells is the CEO of Corporate Alliance International, a premier business relationship organization with more than 2,000 members. In addition to his work at Corporate Alliance, Wells is involved in several other businesses including interests in Big Fogg, a misting and heating company serving the NFL and NCAAs; and Crowd Converge Inc., a lifestyle and hospitality company focused on enhancing the fan experience at sporting events. Wells also is a member of the board of directors for Monrovia Growers, the leading grower of premium plants and shrubs in the United States. Wells is involved with a number of San Diego-based community service organizations, including serving on the board of Southern California Special Olympics.

Bill Pollakov  
President & CEO  
The Pollakov Financial Group, Inc.  

Rod Lanthorne  
Advisor/Retired Chairman & President  
Kyocera International, Inc.  

Greg Wells is the CEO of Pacific Building Group, a commercial general contracting firm based in San Diego, has more than 40 years’ experience in every level of commercial construction. Rogers concentrates on the strategic long-range planning for Pacific Building Group and, what began as a one-man operation out of the back of a pick-up truck, has today become a company with projected revenues of $70 million and a staff of nearly 150. He is very active in community and philanthropic organizations. Professionally, he is a member of the Associated General Contractors, and the Associated Builders and Contractors, serving as a past board member and chairman. He also is a board member emeritus of San Diego Rescue Mission.

Greg Wells  
CEO  
Corporate Alliance International  

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2013 Winners Profiles

Nonprofit Category
SMALL NONPROFIT – TIE WINNER
Sheryl Reichert
President & CEO
BBB San Diego & Imperial Counties
www.bbb.org

As President/CEO of BBB San Diego & Imperial Counties, Sheryl Reichert and BBB San Diego celebrated the end of 2012 as another hallmark year. Organizational success was met with even greater individual success, as Reichert brought in record numbers of consumers to the BBB website (more than 1.6 million) and she was asked to chair the national operating committee of BBB organizations. Appearing 491 times in 2012, Reichert solidified herself as the face of BBB and of consumer affairs in San Diego. BBB San Diego, under Reichert’s guidance, added 1,115 new accredited member businesses, totaling more than $620,000 in revenue for the organization, resulting in a national sales contest award among North American BBBS. Sales growth was also accompanied by an average 82 percent retention rate, a new record for the organization. In her nine years as CEO, Reichert has always encouraged a family-friendly, flexible workplace and has built a culture of trust, teamwork and strong professional bonds. She is constantly striving to strengthen the organization by growing talent from within. Before joining the San Diego BBB, Reichert was in charge of advertising sales at the two largest cable TV systems in San Diego County, serving as vice president and general manager of CableRep San Diego, now called Cox Media. She also served as general manager of advertising sales at Time Warner Cable San Diego. Early in her career, Reichert decided to switch from working in front of the microphone to behind it. The cable TV industry was in its early development at the time, and she decided to focus on advertising sales. She got a job selling radio advertising in Omaha, and then at age 25, she was hired by Cox Communications as their general manager of Advertising Sales. Reichert is currently a member of the Executive Association of San Diego as well as Rotary Club 53.

SMALL NONPROFIT – TIE WINNER
Christopher Yanov
Founder & Executive Director
Reality Changers
www.RealityChangers.org

Christopher Yanov was tired of local kids living in poverty, admiring gang members rather than aspiring college students, so he set about to change that norm. In his 12 years as founder and executive director of Reality Changers, which he started with $300 of his own money, the difference he has made can be felt in numbers but also lives helped. Yanov’s afterschool intensive tutoring and college prep program has helped 485 disadvantaged students become first generation college students. He has raised and awarded $4 million in scholarships and has helped the youth earn nearly $400,000 in scholarships from all sources to attend institutions that range from small liberal art colleges to prestigious universities such as Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, UC Berkeley, and UCLA. His awards include the The Center for Wealth & Legacy’s 2012 Inspiration Award and Point Loma Nazarene University’s Presidential Community Service Award. Yanov was a featured speaker at Tijuana’s Innovadora and his work was highlighted in a nationwide PBS documentary entitled “The Graduates,” that aired in early November.

MEDIUM NONPROFIT WINNER
John Ohanian
Chief Executive Officer
2-1-1 San Diego
www.211sandiego.org

Since 2007, John Ohanian has led 2-1-1 San Diego as its CEO, rapidly growing it into the county’s central resource for information on community, health and disaster services. As a recovering CPA, Ohanian is all about the numbers and so 2-1-1 San Diego’s social enterprise model of fee-for-service contracts covers 90 percent of its operating costs requiring fundraising for only 10 percent of the $7 million annual budget. During his tenure, 2-1-1 San Diego has grown to 100 employees helping 400,000 clients annually. And yet, his “summer camp counselor” leadership style allows for staff to feel comfortable and supported in their work. Ohanian quite literally experienced a “trial by fire” when he joined 2-1-1 San Diego, the non-emergency health and disaster community resource service, as CEO in October 2007. Just three weeks later, Firestorm 2007, the devastating wildfires that burned 500,000 acres and destroyed 1,500 homes in San Diego County occurred, increasing 2-1-1’s volume by more than 700 percent. With the fires launching 2-1-1 into the public eye, Ohanian achieved both the immediate goal of providing valuable resources for the stricken community, but also leveraged the awareness to attract talented and experienced individuals to the organization’s staff. Ohanian is civic-minded, serving as a San Diego Downtown Club 33 Rotarian and as a board member of REBOOT and as a board member of the U.S. Committee and the 2-1-1 California Alliance of Information and Referral Services. He is also on the 2-1-1 U.S. Committee and the 2-1-1 California Leadership Team, working diligently with his colleagues across the nation to raise awareness around 2-1-1’s critical services. continued on page A20
Dr. Gary Weitzman is a great communicator with a humble approach, and although president and CEO of MRC, he remains a San Diego Humane Society and SPCA volunteer. He started his career at a small animal hospital in the San Diego area, where he learned about the importance of spaying and neutering pets. He founded PETS Plus, an organization that provides low-cost spay and neuter services to pet owners, and worked to expand the organization's reach throughout California. As CEO, he has worked to increase the organization's focus on prevention and wellness programs, and has led efforts to improve the organization's financial sustainability. Under his leadership, MRC has continued to grow and expand its services, acquiring another Xerox core, and currently boasts more than 200 employees and 17 managers. In addition to his work at MRC, Dr. Weitzman is also a strong advocate for animal welfare issues, and has been involved in numerous civic and charitable boards. He is a strong believer in "healthy body, healthy mind," and encourages his employees to find work-life balance. In 2012, he and his wife purchased a home in a neighborhood where nearly 3,000 animals were spayed and neutered for free, which has had a profound impact on the community. Under his leadership, MRC has continued to grow and expand its services, and has become a leader in the animal welfare field.
employees such as no-interest loans and offers many non-traditional benefits to its almost 1,200 person workforce and company is responsible for the well-being of San Diego hotel rooms in San Diego sink to historic lows. She firmly believes that the company regularly offer their services pro bono for those in need, assisting an 86 year old senior in need of a new heater conditioning to keep her salon operating.

LARGE FAMILY OWNED WINNER
Grace Cherashore
President & CEO
Evans Hotels
www.evanshotels.com

As the long-serving CEO of an iconic San Diego company, Grace Cherashore has served as a leader in the city’s second-largest industry sectors and its civic life. She joined Evans Hotels in 1984 following the sudden death of her father who founded the company in 1953, and has offered domestic partner benefits for more than 30 years. More than half the workforce has been employed with Evans Hotels more than five years and its longest-serving employee just retired after serving 52 years. The company purchased the former Torrey Pines Inn in 1995, almost entirely demolished it in 2000, and opened an expanded and reconstructed luxury resort—The Lodge at Torrey Pines—in 2002. That hotel was the first in San Diego to receive the coveted AAA Five-Diamond Award in its first year of operation and has received it in each of the 10 years since. Under her guidance, Evans has been at the forefront of the “Green Hotel” movement, starting the early 1990s. Today, the company’s three hotels are engaged in significant waste reduction and recycling efforts. Outside the demands of managing the hotels, Cherashore is an active member of the San Diego community, particularly in areas concerning job training, education, and economic development. She is finishing her second term on the board of the California Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles Branch, where she previously served as chair. She is a director of the California Chamber of Commerce, and previously served on the boards of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation, the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, San Diego State University School of Business, and the UC San Diego Economics Roundtable.

PRIVATELY HELD COMPANY CATEGORY

Kevin Lustig
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Assay Depot
www.assaydepot.com

Kevin Lustig has spent the past 30 years managing research and development organizations and running his own experiments in the laboratory. He is a scientist-entrepreneur who has dedicated his life to improving how biomedical research is done. Lustig founded Assay Depot in 2007 to democratize access to research services and products. In his role as CEO, Lustig is directly responsible for business development and fundraising to support future innovation and expansion. He has executed multi-year agreements with four major pharmaceutical companies, including household names like Pfizer and AstraZeneca, as well as major research institutes such as the National Cancer Institute. These revenue-generating activities allow Assay Depot to continue its mission of empowering scientists. Often referred to as the “Amazon.com for scientists,” Assay Depot is the first and only cloud-based drug research platform that allows any researcher, professional or citizen, to access research services and experts quickly, efficiently and at no cost. Lustig was one of the three main architects of the software platform. To date Assay Depot’s public Research Exchange has users in 126 different countries and handles tens of thousands of requests annually. More than 1,200 vendors have joined the Assay Depot network. Internally, Lustig has created a virtual organizational structure that empowers its employees and creates a positive, healthy working environment. Assay Depot employees are free to work from home and set their own hours, providing the work-life balance that most companies only boast about. Lustig has been recognized as an industry innovator and has been named one of the pharmaceutical industry’s 100 Most Inspiring People by PharmaVoice Magazine and Assay Depot was named as a finalist for America’s Most Innovative Companies by Red Herring.

CONGRATULATIONS, DOUG!
On receiving the San Diego Business Journal’s Exemplary Service Award For 40-plus years of dedication to the San Diego nonprofit community

Doug Sawyer, President & CEO

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LIVE UNITED
United Way
2013 Winners Profiles

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MEDIUM PRIVATELY HELD WINNER

Daniel Sullivan
Founder & CEO
Sullivan Solar Power
www.sullivansolarpower.com

As the founder and president of Sullivan Solar Power, Daniel Sullivan is an American rags-to-riches story. A master electrician by trade, he was inspired by the birth of his son to make the world a better place. In 2004, at only 27, he took a leap of faith with an old beat up Ford Ranger and only $2,500 in the bank. Today, Sullivan Solar Power is an industry leader and has been ranked one of the fastest growing energy companies in the nation for four consecutive years by Inc. Magazine. Sullivan has grown his profitable company organically, without taking a single outside investment dollar. He continues to be a visionary leader. In 2011, the company launched an electric vehicle charging infrastructure team and began installing electric car charging stations. Sullivan understands the value of motivated employees and supports a family environment that includes taking employees on paid cruise vacations if the company meets its internal annual sales goal. A San Diego native, Sullivan is involved with the community and the growth of alternative energies. He has been the primary voice in Sacramento to protect solar energy producers, jobs and companies in California. In 2013, he created a partnership with the nonprofit organization GRID Alternatives that provides on-the-job training for volunteers to install solar panels for low-income property owners. He also is one of five founding board members for the California Solar Energy Industries Association, San Diego Chapter. Sullivan Solar Power has been repeatedly honored for its work and was recently given the Community Leadership Award by the San Diego North Chamber of Commerce.

LARGE PRIVATELY HELD WINNER

Georgia Griffiths
President & CEO
G2 Software Systems, Inc.
www.g2ss.com

Georgia Griffiths has been a trail blazer for women in the defense software industry. In the 1970s when Griffiths entered the field there was a great deal of prejudice in the “old boys’ network,” but she has worked tirelessly for more than three decades to establish women in the industry. She leads her company, G2 Software Systems, Inc., to improve communication systems among military leaders, strategists and soldiers in the field. She is an active member of Women in Defense (WID) since the San Diego Chapter’s inception and has long served as chair for the WID-San Diego State University scholarship award, designed to encourage young women to pursue careers in applied sciences. Griffiths also has endowed a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) scholarship at her undergraduate alma mater, California State University Long Beach, where she funded a lecture hall and computer lab in CSULB’s new STEM facility. As a private pilot, Griffiths volunteers her time, her aircraft and all expenses to ferry passengers to and from medical procedures as an Angel Flight West volunteer.

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Nonprofit Category

Mark Berger
CEO
Partnerships With Industry
www.partnerswithindustry.org

Partnership With Industry (PWI) was one of the pioneer organizations in California to offer adults with disabilities “supported employment” opportunities in the community, and, as its CEO, Mark Berger is a champion of growing those opportunities for its clients. Helping more than 500 people annually, Berger’s goal for last year was to diversify PWI’s revenue streams to reduce dependence on state funding. As a result, PWI successfully launched a document destruction service, which will ultimately employ 30 people. Also, through employee empowerment and his open communication style, Berger reduced employee turnover by more than 50 percent at a time when he also reduced expenses and added $119,000 to the bottom line. Under Berger’s leadership, PWI has received many awards and recognitions from the community, including Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism and Brilliance in Business Award from the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce.

Lisa Cohen
CEO
Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, Lisa Cohen helps to put Chula Vista on the map.

As CEO of the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, Lisa Cohen helps to put Chula Vista on the map. She successfully advocated before the California Public Utilities Commission in 2005 saving money for San Diegans and in 2010, Cohen staged a signature event in Chula Vista, the Parade Band Review and Festival. This event now includes 30 marching bands, a tribute to veterans, and grants that create opportunities for instrumental music programs for schoolchildren. The Chamber and Convention and Visitors Bureau became one of Chula Vista’s first “clean” businesses and subsequently helped more than 100 businesses become “clean” in less than one year—helping them save on energy costs. Chula Vista’s Chamber and Convention and Visitors Bureau worked with other groups to gain the 2012 California Coastal Award for the unanimous approval of the Chula Vista Bayfront Master Plan, a 556-acre waterfront site that will balance economic drivers, public access, and the protection of natural resources.

Matt D’Arrigo
Founder and CEO
ARTS | A Reason To Survive
www.areasontosurvive.org

After a troubled past marked by alcohol and drug abuse and the trauma of his mother and sister being diagnosed with cancer, Matt D’Arrigo turned to painting as a refuge. As founder and CEO of ARTS (A Reason To Survive), D’Arrigo provides that refuge for San Diego’s youth. In 12 years, ARTS has grown to a million dollar budget with its 20,000 feet of creative space secured through an innovative partnership in the City of San Diego. ARTS provides therapeutic arts programs, arts education, and college and career preparation. This year it was the first to receive the Academy Award winning documentary “Inocente” about a girl who was homeless for nearly half of her 18 years. Portland-based “Inocente” found peace and a path to success through ARTS. D’Arrigo’s work also was featured in the New York Times’ bestselling book, “Decisive” by Chip and Dan Heath. During the past year, D’Arrigo presented at more than 50 events about ARTS. He also is a nonprofit leadership coach for the Fieldstone Foundation. He is a member of the National Network of Arts and Culture committee member for the San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.

Darragh DiGiorgio Johnson
President & CEO
Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest
www.ppsw.org

In the seven years that Darragh DiGiorgio Johnson has served as president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest (PPSW), the organization has consistently grown in its ability to provide health services and education to San Diegans. Through the collaborative work of PPSW, the agency was the most successful, providing 304,690 patient visits to women and men who might not otherwise have access to care. Since DiGiorgio Johnson began, PPSW has seen a 39 percent increase in patient visits, including life-saving cervical screenings, breast cancer screening, contraception, STD testing and treatment, and more. In 2012, DiGiorgio Johnson was a national leader in the effort to protect Title X, the federal family planning program. 2012 was a financial turnaround year for PPSW. DiGiorgio Johnson made tough decisions about how to run the organization and, as a result, PPSW doubled its productivity, and increased patient and staff satisfaction. Under her leadership, the organization introduced the Planned Parenthood Experience, a customer service initiative which aims to provide excellent care not only for patients, but for staff as well. As a result, staff satisfaction has never been higher. DiGiorgio Johnson has introduced several measures to gauge staff satisfaction, including quarterly “pulse checks,” which have shown that her leadership has resulted in a positive work environment with high employee satisfaction.

Laura Mustari
Chief Executive Officer
Home Start, Inc.
www.homestart.org

During the past six years as CEO of Home Start, Inc., Laura Mustari transformed the financial picture of the nonprofit from one relying on a line of credit to having a fund balance of more than $2 million and an endowment of $1 million. At Home Start, Mustari transformed transitional living programs for older homeless women (ages 55-74) who are pregnant or parenting. Mustari has garnered many awards over the years, including from the city, the California State Assembly, and the YMCA. She also has transitioned the workplace, turning it into a caring and respectful environment. As a nonprofit leader, she believes in giving back with her time and talent. She serves on the boards of the Indigo Village Educational Foundation and the California Coalition for Youth, and on the steering committees of the non-profit National Council of Care Council, the National City Collaborative, and the El Cajon Collaborative. She also is the lead for San Diego’s Unaccompanied Youth Task Force.

Erie Spiewak
Executive Director
Monarch School Project
www.monarchschools.org

In the two years that Erie Spiewak has been CEO of Monarch School Project, she has worked hard to turn around its financial fortunes. She streamlined staffing, outsourced management of its after school programs, switched IT support services to a less expensive nonprofit that specializes in it, converted the development manager into a revenue producing grant writer, and obtained a $1 million donation for partial completion of the unfinished second floor of Monarch’s new building, which can then be an annual revenue source when leased to a third party tenant. Spiewak also shifted the nonprofit’s fundraising strategy from hosting in-house events to having third parties host and execute events, saving staff time and widening fundraising opportunities. Spiewak serves on the United Way Education Advisory Committee and is chair of the Education Leadership Team of Women Give, San Diego. She is also a fellow of the Aspen Institute’s Sector Skills Academy.

Teresa Stivers
Executive Director
Walden Family Services
www.waldenfamily.org

In the two years that Teresa Stivers, its executive director, helped manage, the organization has recovered from a financial crisis it was in before she assumed leadership in 2010. The nonprofit foster care and adoption agency aided 600 youth, many with developmental disabili- ties and special health care needs. Stivers exceeded her fundraising goals resulting in 89 percent of every dollar raised being spent directly on serving foster and adoptive families while also lowering overhead. Walden opened satellite offices in Riverside and San Fernando Valley for foster youth who aged out of the system but still need assistance. Walden’s work preparing and training adoptive parents who hear daily stories of heartbreaking child neglect and abuse.
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Tonya Torosian
Chief Executive Officer
Promises2Kids
www.promises2kids.org

Promises2Kids’ Executive Director, Tanya Torosian, has a passion for helping foster children. Torosian expanded the nonprofit’s Guardian Scholars program by 30 percent so now 50 former foster youth receive scholarships for college. Torosian also launched a Junior Guardian Scholars program where participating foster youth in high school receive mentoring and SAT preparation, and attend college planning, financial aid, and college application workshops. Promises2Kids also pairs foster youth with UC San Diego students for “STEAM” (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) tutoring better preparing them for college and the job market. Another recent highlight for the organization, the June 2013 fundraising concert gala, “Dream On,” netted more than $300,000. Torosian fosters a team environment where she wants everyone to be proud of the work they do and feel rewarded. Torosian helps other fundraising professionals as well. She currently serves as the president of the San Diego Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Wendy Urushima-Conn
President & CEO
Asian Business Association of San Diego
www.abasd.org

Thanks to Wendy Urushima-Conn, the Asian Business Association (ABA) of San Diego’s profile is rising. In the fiscal year 2012-2013, as ABA’s president & CEO, she earned an array of accolades, including 2013 Most Powerful and Influential Women in California by the National Diversity Council, Entrepreneur of the Year by Asia Media, Women Who Move the Torosian fosters a team environment where she wants everyone to be proud of the work they do and feel rewarded. Torosian helps other fundraising professionals as well. She currently serves as the president of the San Diego Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

URASHIMA-CONN, Asian Business Association of San Diego
www.abasd.org

Thanks to Wendy Urushima-Conn, the Asian Business Association (ABA) of San Diego’s profile is rising. In the fiscal year 2012-2013, as ABA’s president & CEO, she earned an array of accolades, including 2013 Most Powerful and Influential Women in California by the National Diversity Council, Entrepreneur of the Year by Asia Media, Women Who Move the City by “San Diego Magazine,” and 2012 Women Who Mean Business by “San Diego Business Journal.” In her three years at ABA, she helped establish the group’s corporate member- ships, sponsors, and event revenue and partnered with the California Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce to co-host the second annual California Asian Business Summit. Urushima-Conn’s energetic attitude and passion motivate others at work, as well as where she volunteers, including The San Diego Foundation’s Scholarship Committee, The Jenna Druck Foundation, and The San Diego Public Library Foundation.

John Valencia
CEO
San Diego Oceans Foundation
www.sdoceans.org

San Diego Oceans Foundation’s CEO John Valencia has established new guidelines and key strategic priorities to improve the organization’s financial and operational status. Valencia has increased revenue by 250 percent, annual membership by 400 percent, and built San Diego’s first sustainable seafood initiative, including the annual Sustainable Seafood Week and Sustainable Seafood Gala. Valencia has been instrumental in creating programs that inspire and motivate community members to take action. He is deeply committed in helping the environment, drawing in 7,500 volunteers annually. Valencia’s approach includes building lasting connections to support programs for the long haul, leveraging marketing endeavors in return for financial support, and having focused programing that cover costs. Valencia also finds time to volunteer with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and California Women Lead.

Public Company Category

Farzin Alavi
CEO
Laptops Plus
www.laptopsplus.com

Prior to Gregory Garrabrant’s arrival, Boll Federal Bank earned approximately a 5 percent return on equity and was not one of the top 2,000 highest performing banks in the country. Under his guidance, the institution has routinely been ranked in the top five highest performing financial institutions in the country and now employs more than 400 people in San Diego and 200 around the country. None of the varied business that the Bank is currently involved in existed before Garrabrant joined the organization. He oversaw the growth of the single family and multi-family lending businesses, the C&I lending business, the business banking group, and the specialty finance group. For the fifth year in a row, the bank’s 2013 financial performance, growth, and asset quality earned Boll a top three finish in SNL Financial’s ranking of the nation’s best performing large thrifts. Garrabrant also is active in the community, coaching youth soccer. He has brought bank employees voluntary opportunities joining with Habitat for Humanity and Rady Children’s Hospital.

Greg Garrabrant
President & Chief Executive Officer
Boll Federal Bank
www.bollfederalbank.com

Coming into a new business can be a challenge, but since Farzin Alavi has taken over ownership of Laptops Plus, he has helped each store to learn new tricks and tips and ensure a faster turnaround time for computer repair. He also has promoted the company in new ways to increase Laptops Plus’ visibility. Alavi has revamped the look of each of the stores, remodeling to better show products. It is a community supporter and regularly gives away computers and computer accessories to local schools. He also gives discounted repair to seniors and military as well as free pickup and delivery of computers for repair for seniors.

Linde Hotchkiss
Managing Partner
Willis
www.willis.com

Linde Hotchkiss is responsible for developing and implementing growth strategies, being highly client centric and service oriented, recruiting new talent into the organization, and staff development for Willis. This is an integral part of the company’s strategy to drive business results while serving the San Diego business community in dynamic and innovative ways. Before she joined the San Diego office, the executive officer experience perceptive of consecutive years of shrinking results and turnaround and associated costs. As a direct result, the office financial results are now telling the story of a successful turn-around, showing that the budgeted growth target will be exceeded for 2013. Hotchkiss’ greatest strength is her ability to forge relationships and inspire those around her to collaborate and leverage strengths to the greatest outcome. She has been in the insurance industry for 24 years having worked for Marsha McLean (and acquired companies) for more than 20 years and now Willis for four years. Her leadership, financial, operational and growth accomplishments were recognized in 2011 as she was the second woman in the U.S. to be appointed to the position of “Managing Partner” for Willis.

Chris Shimojima
CEO
Provide Commerce
www.providescommerce.com

In 2012 Chris Shimojima became Provide Commerce’s first new CEO in 13 years. One of his first priorities was to work with the senior leadership team to develop a new mission, vision and values for the organization. This was a significant step that helped define Provide’s priorities and direction. He takes a very proactive approach to enhancing the workplace environment and his relationships with his employees and each month meets with a group of 10 to 12 employees from across the company for a CEO breakfast. During the “peak weeks” that include Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day—key holidays for floral and gift brands—Shimojima helps employees to find their way to support one another and keep morale high, sponsoring coffee, sweet treats, child care days, and other events throughout the year. His oversight and employee support has paid off with its well-known online floral company, ProFlowers, being recognized for achieving the highest ranking for customer satisfaction as J.D. Power and Associates Online Flower Retailer Satisfaction Report. Shimojima also champions philanthropic efforts on supporting homeless, military, women, care critical children, education, and employee causes. Provide Commerce received Rumen Foundation’s First “Million Dollar Council” Mentor and the Suzie Award in April 2013.

Darren Solomon
CEO, Co-founder
Kid Ventures
www.kidventuresplay.com

Darren Solomon doesn’t just tell his team of employees at Kid Ventures what he expects from them, he goes the extra mile to lead by example. He doesn’t run his company behind a desk or through email, but he is always working directly with staff and clients to ensure their mission of bringing fun, educational, interactive programs to growing kids. His company has boomed in the last few years, while many competitors in the field are struggling to compete. The firm’s revenue has increased 400 percent, and built San Diego’s first home for Play and Based public companies, Tanz has strived for more than 13 years as CEO of two San Diego-based public companies, Tanz has strived to maintain a positive and desirable work environment through team enthusiasm including all-staff/all-hands meetings, regular staff evaluations and fun events from half-marathons to office retreats and take your pet to work days. Under Tanz’s leadership, ROIC achieved record financial growth during 2012.

Darren Solomon
CEO
Kid Ventures
www.kidventuresplay.com

John Sommatino
CEO
Wombo Inc.
www.wombo.com

John Sommatino is always branching out to new sources of business relations, maintaining two companies and keeping revenue high in both. In 2012, Sommatino acquired Nike as a major client. He maintained all of the IT equipment for the Nike Women’s Marathon, including building a complex networking bridge for Internet access, with towers placed strategic to provide the best signals. He also set up and maintained more than 50 check-in stations for the marathon runners. He also offers his services free and or discounted to nonprofits, organizing events for causes such as teen drug abuse assistance.

Stuart Tanz
CEO
ROIC
www.roireit.net

During 2012 as CEO Stuart Tanz led Retail Opportunity Investments Corporation (ROIC) in its third consecutive year (since commencing operations as a shopping center and investment trust) in achieving record growth and performance. The office relocated its corporate headquarters from New York to San Diego, and announced a change in date from the San Diego workforce. For more than 13 years as CEO of two San Diego-based public companies, Tanz has strived to maintain a positive and desirable work environment through team enthusiasm including all-staff/all-hands meetings, regular staff evaluations and fun events from half-marathons to office retreats and take your pet to work days. Under Tanz’s leadership, ROIC achieved record financial growth during 2012.
2013 Finalist Profiles

Lee Goodman
President & CEO
Jerome’s Furniture
www.jeromes.com

Jerome’s is one of San Diego’s famed family owned and operated businesses. Under Lee Goodman’s guidance, the “family” has continued to grow and encompasses the entire organization. As president and CEO, Goodman creates an environment of excellence. He has created a culture of execution and believes everyone can and should grow every day, and provides the resources, training, and incentives to make it happen. He established a 401k savings program for employees and has created a wellness program. Goodman’s oversight also has resulted in steady growth for the San Diego institution bringing innovations not seen in the retail and furniture business including their “No Sales” policy. Jerome’s hasn’t had a “Sale” since 2007 but maintains a thriving business with consistent pricing. In today’s world many consumers want instant gratification. Goodman instituted the popular “same day” furniture delivery giving customers the ability to receive an entire house full of furniture the same day it is purchased. This is faster than FedEx, with much larger packages.

Ross Jurewitz
Personal Injury Attorney
Jurewitz Law Group
www.jurewitz.com

Ross Jurewitz prioritizes community action as well as a successful law practice. In only two weeks, he gathered a “Jurewitz Law Group” race team of more than 50 participants to participate in the Race for the Cure: San Diego 5k, raising more than $8,000. He led the entire office be a part of the 5th Annual Walk for Thought to support the Brain Injury Association of California, and led his staff on a Surfrider Foundation Beach Cleanup. Jurewitz has been featured in “Newsweek” magazine’s 2012 Leaders in Auto Accident Law Showcase. Internally, he has helped the office become much better at tracking incoming traffic and is currently putting more focus on testimonials to improve the firm’s website.

Keith Michael
CEO
GTC Systems, Inc.
www.gtcsystems.com

GTC Systems was created from the ground up to be different, embracing the idea of servant leadership—a process to empower leaders to value and improve services.

New ideas to strengthen my business are always welcome

Financial services for small businesses

If you’re looking for more efficient ways to manage your business, look no further than Wells Fargo. From business checking accounts to credit cards or loans, Wells Fargo offers a variety of products and services to help you succeed. As proof of our commitment, Wells Fargo has loaned more money to small businesses than any other bank for ten consecutive years.* Yet another reason why millions of business owners choose us as the bank for their business. Call us at 1-800-359-3557, visit wellsfargo.com/biz or stop by a store to start a conversation about your business needs.

*2002 – 2011 Community Reinvestment Act government data
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Michelle Weinstein
CEO/President
FITzee Foods
www.fitzeefoods.com

Michelle Weinstein is a driven successful woman, who is constantly elevating those around her. Not only has she started her own successful company, FITzee Foods, she also founded a San Diego nonprofit organization called The Live Well Project. The Project’s focus is to help at-risk teenage girls, many of who have gone through the foster system, homelessness and other tribulations. The company has grown steadily with FITzee Foods team holds the annual “Live Well Project” event each year—a free event for girls ages 12 to 19 and is an inspirational day of fun and fitness.

Family Owned Category

Gregg Cantor
President/CEO
Murray Lampert Design, Build, Remodel
www.murraylampert.com

Gregg Cantor has sustained Murray Lampert Design through a challenging economy and a highly competitive remodeling environment. He has kept the business in the public eye as a regular expert on the 600 KOGO Home Improvement show and always stays on the cutting edge of electronic media through website, social and digital media. Under Cantor’s guidance the company has been named RUDZU Small Business of the Month and ranked number 126 nationally in Remodeling Magazine. In the community Cantor has partnered with Make-A-Wish Foundation and is the executive director, board member and sponsor of BBB San Diego.

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While Tanzania Telekom has been actively involved... 40 years, Tanz has been actively involved of the San Diego community for the past... continued from page A24

FITzee Foods’ 10 “healthy vending kiosks” in Southern California... national in Re-modeling Magazine. In the community Cantor has partnered with Make-A-Wish Foundation and is the executive director, board member and sponsor of BBB San Diego.

FITzee Foods’ FITzee Bars are like a vending machine and are stocked with fresh, pre-portioned meals. FITzee Foods team holds the annual “Live Well Project” event each year—a free event for girls ages 12 to 19 and is an inspirational day of fun and fitness.
the lives of their employees, vendors and clients. GTC has been building and servicing public and private clouds since 1995. As CEO, Rich with Michaels encouraging, teaches and mentors each of his sales people without getting in their way. He has a proven track record in sales, dating back to the late 80's. Over the past decade, Michaels has been the driver behind the exploration of new markets and services for the company. He has encouraged the GTC team to work together to support community events such as winning the "Finstest City Food Fight" to raise funds for the nonprofit Feeding America.

Ryan Shortill
Founder
Positive Adventures, LLC
www.positiveadventures.com

Ryan Shortill has named community involvement and philanthropic contributions as fundamental pillars of Positive Adventures.

The organization would not exist without the dedication and drive. Shortill has chosen to work with organizations and youth to develop in them a passion to energize themselves physically, mentally and spiritually. In hiring staff to work with the various youth organization clients, he is meticulously careful to hire those that are not only highly qualified, but also a good "cultural fit." Shortill's support of community efforts can be seen in his organizing such things as drumming with the local youth from ARTN (A Reason to Survive) on his birthday every year.

Privately Held Category

Jenny Amaraneni
CEO
SOLO Eyewear
www.soloeyswear.com

In 2009, Jenny Amaraneni, a recent transplant of faith and moved from Louisiana and the campus of LSU to San Diego with no connections or support network.

But her vision to launch a company that would give back to the global community was unwavering. At 26, Amaraneni, along with business partner Dana Holliday, started SOLO Eyewear with little capital and resources, producing handcrafted sunglasses made with recycled bamboo with each pair purchased funding eye care for people in need. The concept was developed in a classroom at San Diego State University where Amaraneni was enrolled in the MBA Program. While completing an international entrepreneurship course she discovered there was a great need for eye care around the world. Amaraneni, who has poor vision herself, encountered two startling statistics: approximately 1 billion people do not have access to eye care and nearly 80 percent of the world's blindness is preventable. Since the company's launch in 2011, funds have helped restored vision for 6,500+ people in need across 19 countries.

Brian Arrington
Founding Partner, CEO
Pacific Sotheby's International Realty
www.pacificsothebysrealty.com

As founding partner and CEO of Pacific Sotheby's International Realty, Brian Arrington leads one of San Diego's fastest growing real estate companies. Arrington has implemented key local, national and international marketing programs to increase awareness of the firm's brand in San Diego and negotiated strong partnershps to bring industry leaders to the company, hired key management personnel and support staff for the agents. Additionally, he has created cross-platform and accreditation programs for DoD strategic partnerships to develop within San Diego and overseas in China and Mexico. Arrington is a firm believer in the power of technology and the benefits it offers in the real estate industry. Pacific Sotheby's International Realty's 2012/2013 presentation and marketing program, entitled "Anthology" is a web-based, tablet-based program. This is a new innovation in what has traditionally been a paper-based industry.

Arrington and his family are active in many of San Diego's nonprofit institutions and he most recently became involved supporting SEAL-SW Family Foundation that raises awareness and funds these military families on a local, national and global scale.

Eric Basu
CEO
Sentek Global
www.sentekglobal.com

Sentek is thriving because of CEO Eric Basu's ability to offer a wide range of solutions for technology services for federal, state and local government support, as well as management consulting. The company has doubled its workforce in just over a year thanks to securing long-term government contracts including most recently Sentek Global's Advanced Defilement Information Assurance Certification and Accreditation Process (DIA-CAP) validator training. The five-day, intensive, hands-on technical workshop teaches Department of Defense (DoD) and Defense contractors the basic principles for accomplishing the certification and validation of DoD's innovative security system. Basu has been named one of five Entrepreneur of the Year finalists for "Entrepreneur" magazine. He personally knows the struggles of transitioning from active military to civilian life and is looking to develop a program to train transitioning warriors in the science of cyber security.

Darian Bregman
CEO
Vuka Energy Drink
www.vuka.com

It's hard to find shelf space in the competitive business of energy drinks, but Darian Bregman has created a product and a successful marketing plan that has grown Vuka Energy Drink into a nationally distributed product. By honing in on what is important to take the business to the next level and put all the teams' efforts into national grocery chains, Bergman has established the company as a major player in the field. Bergman is instrumental in all aspects of the company from conception to distribution and oversees all aspects of the process personally. In the community, Bergman works closely with the Rancho Santa Fe Community Center, Voices for Children, and Rancho Santa Fe Education Foundation. He is also an avid aviator.

Gabriel Bristol
CEO
Desert Call Connection
www.desertcallconnection.com

When Gabriel Bristol first came to the call center that is now Desert Call Connection in 1999, he had just a handful of employees making calls from an auto body shop. In 2012, Bristol opened a second location in San Diego from his original Las Vegas office which now serves as the company headquarters. He created a flexible corporate culture to ensure employee retention and satisfaction. DCC's employee-centric policies are unheard of in the customer service and call center industry. DCC is a child and pet friendly workplace, the company has a "fun committee" and holds weekly employee appreciation events. There is also an employee fitness program. Bristol has first-hand experience working full-time while caring for his two children and he knows how difficult it is. He is a self-made entrepreneur with an insightful, forward thinking approach that results in customer service excellence. DCC continues to grow year after year and has increased net profitability by $2.6 million for calendar year 2013. Bristol built and maintains a strong and supportive company culture. He has been a long-time supporter of Habitat for Humanity and the Human Rights Campaign Fund.

Bobbye Brooks
President/CEO
Media 4 Women Enterprises, Inc.
www.Media4Women.com

Bobbye Brooks speaks and teaches women throughout San Diego County, helping them start their own businesses, through their company, Media 4 Women. She founded Media 4 Women Enterprises at the height of the recession in 2009 and it grew from $50,000 to more than $200,000 in the first year. Brooks has a passion for technology innovation in the areas of marketing and media. She also co-founded one of the largest nonprofit Christian women's groups in San Diego and has hosted an annual women's conference for 1000 women in attendance. Brooks partners with several San Diego nonprofits including the San Diego Rescue Mission Foundation, San Diego Children's Discovery Museum, the San Diego Symphony, and the Navy League to help raise funds for these important organizations. Brooks is a published author and has been written about in the San Diego Reader, San Diego Magazine, among many other publications.

Andrew Canter
CEO
Canter Companies
www.cantercompanies.com

When recent SDSU grad Andrew Canter established Canter Companies in 2006, it began as a boutique real estate firm. Seven years later, under Andrew's careful leadership, the company has become a vertically-integrated real estate firm which handles everything from development, portfolio and capital management, brokerage as well as private equity stakes in a variety of sectors. In his capacity as president and CEO of the organization, Canter always strives to give back to San Diego. When Canter Companies acquired three homes in Little Italy to determine what the future location of a development project, he invited the San Diego Fire Department to use those homes as a practice environment for training purposes.
Eric Casazza
CEO
FMT Consultants
www.fmtconsultants.com

Eric Casazza took on a challenge when he became CEO of FMT Consultants. In a short time he stabilized and returned the company to profitability and a revenue growth of 25 percent year over year. As result of this growth, FMT won Microsoft’s President Award for 2012. As part of Casazza’s vision, FMT has expanded its IT offerings in both products and services. In early 2012, FMT began offering managed IT services, also signing a partnership with Dell Computers, which allows customers to take advantage of FMT’s system knowledge and volume pricing, and ultimately allows FMT to provide better service. Casazza is committed to community efforts and serves on the board of Father Joe’s Villages and serves as the president of the San Diego International Association of Microsoft Channel Partners. He also spends time and resources supporting other worthy causes including Big Brothers Big Sisters, Junior Achievement, and the Challenged Athletes Foundation.

Martin Cassell
CEO & Chief Investment Officer
Chandler Asset Management
www.chandlerasset.com

Since 2008, when Martin Cassell took over as CEO of Chandler Asset Management, revenues and assets have doubled, allowing the firm to add team members, new resources and expanded services to clients. Cassell himself designed and implemented the primary quantitative process that Chandler employs in portfolio management, and has made sure that team members have state-of-the-art tools, including web-based trading platforms, instantaneous data feeds and analytic programs. Cassell also has developed a program for Chandler team members to support charities that are close to their hearts. He introduced a program for the firm to match a percentage of charitable contributions made by employees. In 2013, employee and firm gifts supported, among others, The Burned Children Foundation, Charcot-Marie Tooth Association, The Breast Cancer Research Foundation, and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

Gina Champion-Cain
Owner
American National Investments/Luv Surf
San Diego
www.luv-surf.com

Long standing San Diego real estate developer Gina Champion-Cain has been predominantly known for her contributions to San Diego’s Downtown Gaslamp Quarter for the past 20 years, but she is now dedicating her passion for real estate, San Diego and pets with a premier destination restaurant. Champion-Cain is the owner of Luv Surf, a cross-market, pet-friendly tourism and hospitality brand. It has become a great success. She was recently highlighted by San Diego Woman Magazine, along with longtime friend Ingrid Croce and honored as one of “two women of distinction for 2013” by the magazine. Champion-Cain is the owner of Luv Surf, a cross-market, pet-friendly tourism and hospitality brand.

Daniel Chang
CEO / President
AEM (Holdings), Inc., AEM Electronics (USA), Inc., AEM Components Co. Ltd.
www.aem-usa.com; www.aemcomponents.com

Daniel Chang grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution and was among the first foreign students who came to study in the US in 1980’s. Chang founded American Electronic Materials, Inc. (AEM, Inc.) in San Diego in 1986 to redefine the standards of quality and value in the electronic components industry with its leading edge technologies. The company grew rapidly and was listed three times on the Inc. 500 list of America’s Fastest-Growing Private Companies. For its outstanding achievement, Daniel Chang received a presidential commendation letter from then President Bill Clinton. AEM now holds a dominant position in the circuit protection market in the aerospace industry. Chang and his R&D team successfully commercialized an invention of Multilayer Ceramic Capacitors with base metal electrode and termination materials and turned it into mass production. This technology breakthrough was voted in 1998 by the Ceramic Industry magazine as one of the greatest milestones in the past 100 years in the Electrical and Electronic Ceramics industry.

Congratulations
To Grace Cherashore
Winner for Most Admired CEO Award

BAHIA RESORT HOTEL
www.evanshotels.com | SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

CATAMARAN RESORT HOTEL
Conde Group, Inc.
CEO & Co-founder
Suja Juice Co.
www.sujajuice.com

Since its 2012 launch, innovation has been the key foundation of Suja Juice Company’s success. CEO and Co-founder Jeff Conde has been at the forefront of this, leading a groundbreaking launch of Suja Whole Foods Market and building two in-house production facilities on each coast, totaling 46,000 combined square feet. With the launch of Suja’s new Elements, each flavor is tied to a cause. Twenty cents of each bottle purchased is donated to a select charity with a mission to support health and healing from Suja donating $1 million collectively.

Dr. Ann Clark
CEO & Co-founder
ACI Specialty Benefits
www.acispecialtybenefits.com

Dr. Ann Clark has overcome incredible odds to build ACI Specialty Benefits’ first specialty benefits corporation. ACI Specialty Benefits, from the ground up, is truly hitting her stride as a 501(c)3 “never-never” in 2013. This year alone, Clark celebrates the company’s 30th anniversary and her personal 20th anniversary of sobriety marked by a book release, “Women & Recovery: Sex, Sobriety & Stepping Up.” Clark continuously has led ACI Specialty Benefits into the nation’s top ten rankings of the largest EAP provider and expanded the company to include a full spectrum of specialty benefit services including wellness, concierge, and student assistance. She also has tackled major community and national challenges including launching ACTs Veteran Assistance Module in November 2012 to provide specialty assistance to veteran employees, students and military family members. Under her guidance, ACI has received many acknowledgements including the recent 2013 Hot List for EAPs by Workforce Magazine. Clark also is the creator of the popular “Get Fit Cell Phone Diet,” which came long before modern e-challenges as she has always been enthusiastic about utilizing QR Code, apps, and social media technology long before it became trendy. ACTs social media practices have even helped one employee locate lost family members during the Japanese tsunami in 2011.

Karen Conde
President & CEO
Conde Group, Inc.
www.condegroupllc.com

At the entrance of Conde Group offices there is a sign that reads “This is My Happy Place” and Karen Conde incorporates that spirit in all she does. She started Conde Group more than 10 years ago with the idea that she wanted to provide a “different and better experience” to clients in a very commoditized industry. She realized that being all things to all people was not a value to clients so she created a niche boutique staffing business focused purely on project management resources. Within three months of starting the company, she was profitable and doing business with high profile companies all around the United States. In 2005, Conde has started her own 501(c)3 nonprofit, Forgotten Victims, to provide a platform for those who have been the cause of vehicular accidents (where no drugs or alcohol were involved) and there were catastrophic injuries or death.

Joseph Conduoro
President & CEO
PatientSafe Solutions
www.patientefoundations.com

Joseph Conduoro was appointed president and CEO of PatientSafe in April 2012. The San Diego-based health IT company is on the cutting edge of converging consumer mobile technologies and enterprise clinical systems. Its flagship product PatientTouch, released in March 2012, is an iTablet and iPhone-based platform that enables doctors and nurses to access/edit patient data. The technology is now implemented at 70 hospitals nationally. In 2011, PatientSafe ranked No. 2 in The Wall Street Journal’s Top 10 Venture-Backed Healthcare Companies in November 2012, and was also rated by Forbes as one of the top three technology companies to watch in 2013. In addition to guiding the success of PatientSafe, Conduoro is a volunteer guest lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, for his graduate-level class “Social Media: Increase, Brand, Influence.” He also has organized a philanthropy program in which PatientSafe employees volunteer at the San Diego Food Bank with Feeding America.

BJ Cook
CEO & Co-founder
Digital Operative
www.digitaloperative.com

BJ Cook is always looking for ways to grow Digital Operative to the next level by continuously looking to build relationships and re-searching new platforms. In order to stay ahead of and always be in the know about applications that potential clients may want to use, he has pushed to make the firm a Magnetoo Silver Partner, which has opened new opportunities for partnerships with new clients and in the past year the company has tripled in size. Along with looking for new platforms in which Digital Operative can compete and have success, Cook also instituted the “incubator” internship program, which acts as an incubator for mentoring students looking to get an immersion in agency life and culture. The company motto is “Provision/Planet/Profit” and Cook encourages that by having a volunteer day off benefit, which seeks to promote philanthropy throughout the organization, by giving employees one day off a year to volunteer at an organization of their choice.

Steven Cox
CEO
Service Scout dba TakeLessons
www.takelssons.com

A musician himself, Steven Cox believes that music lesson students benefit from a teacher who is also a musician. He founded TakeLessons, a service that pairs teachers with students and the organization has grown to global proportions. Under his guidance, the company recently grew its core music lesson revenue, but also expanded into two new verticals this year—performing arts and tutoring. Its student and teacher base has grown tremendously, which is shared by increased numbers of lessons and ability to cross-sell verticals. The launch of an open toolset and new website design has driven this success for the company as it allows users greater independence to access information and track lessons within their own accounts. Cox is involved with all aspects of the business and is truly passionate about its success. He also has been part of hiring key positions with creative experienced, great leaders that have supported his ideas and have brought the company to where it is today. They have worked alongside Cox to develop and launch an online presence by entering into a video platform partnership, thus expanding the TakeLessons name, and becoming part of a cutting edge arena.

Charles Curbbun
Chief Executive Officer
www.ddstuds.com

Charles Curbbun’s drive to mold complex concepts into simple, efficient, and fun to use products is shared by every employee at DDSTUDIO. He strategically directs and positioned the company as a leader in their category. The agency’s business is innovation, and Curbbun is both inspirational leader and design principal. The turnover at DDSTUDIO is next to zero, because of its team-oriented atmosphere. DDSTUDIO also promotes a culture of being present and active in the community. Curbbun’s main focus in giving back to the community is through the education of design students. He guides future generations of design thinkers by teaching and lecturing at SDSU, UC San Diego, CSU-Long Beach, UCLA, and UC-Irvine. He values the people in this community and 90 percent of DDSTUDIO’s work is dedicated to nonprofits and startups.

David Davis
President/CEO
StarPoint Advantage, Inc.
www.starpointadvantage.com

David Davis has guided the growth of StarPoint Advantage to its success today. He oversaw the acquisition of The Business Services Group and successfully transitioned their customers to StarPoint Advantage Suite—a comprehensive and proactive IT Network management platform. In 2011, he supervised the creation of a new service called StarPoint Essential that provides clients a way to save money while having more control over their IT spending but guarantees them the reliability they demand from the IT services. Davis’s drive for continual improvement makes StarPoint Advantage a challenging and rewarding place to work. The team environment that is fostered means that the staff is motivated. Davis developed and implemented a bonus system and even rearranged the office to create a more collaborative environment. Additionally, he has instituted a daily huddle, allowing staff to share their successes and challenges openly, offering praise and support in a team atmosphere.

Melinda Diaherry
CEO
Paradigm Mechanical Corp.
www.paradigmmechanical.com

Melinda Diaherry launched Paradigm Mechanical Corp. in 2010. She is the founder as well as CEO of Paradigm Mechanical Corp., a cutting edge arena. Paradigm specializes in working with project teams to design and build mechanical systems for medical, laboratory, government, and industrial facilities in the Southern California region. As a Certified Construction Industry Financial Professional (CCIFP), she has led Paradigm Mechanical Corp. to achieve 1990 percent growth over its first three years in business. Diaherry served as a participant in the SB&A’s (a) Business Development Program. She is a supporter of a number of community efforts including the Boys and Girls Clubs of East San Diego, City of Hope and Make-a-Wish Foundation. Diaherry currently serves as the 2013-2014 president-elect of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), San Diego Chapter. With NAWIC she heads up the Block Kids Committee—an event for elementary school children in which they build with Legos building blocks, foil, string and rocks.

Ozzie Divinere
President, CEO
ForwardMetrics
www.forwardmetrics.com

Ozzie Divinere is the heart and soul of ForwardMetrics. As president and CEO he secured the company’s second round of funding with private investors, acquiring $1 million to bring the investment total to $1.75 million. His determination and drive creates an environment that keeps employees engaged. Divinere is in the office every morning and engages with every employee as if they are a family and all employees see the respect he prioritizes for his staff. Divinere envisions that his organization has teamed up with CS&D (Computer & San Diego) Kids) to assist in acquiring the computer equipment the organization needs.

Laurie Edwards-Tate, MS
President
At Your Home FamEly
www.atyourhomenannycompany.com

Since 1984, Laurie Edwards-Tate has been the president of both a nonprofit and currently for-profit premier non-medical, home care

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2013 Finalist Profiles

Hossein Esilambolchi
CEO
CyberFlow Analytics
www.cyberflowanalytics.com

Statistics on cybercrime are frightening. Current security solutions have allowed 90 percent of organizations to be compromised with a growth of 700 percent in malware attacks. Dr. Hossein Esilambolchi, CEO of CyberFlow Analytics, has created a solution to this problem with an innovative approach that uses big data security analytics. A former CTO of AT&T, Esilambolchi is recognized worldwide in the scientific community as one of the foremost thought leaders and technological scientists and is well known for his expertise in IP network design and reliability, security, IP technologies, services and IP applications. In 2012, Esilambolchi became inspired to solve the rapidly growing issue of cyber security and revolutionize the industry in the same way he did to telecommunications. From this vision of a better way to protect intellectual property, his new company, CyberFlow Analytics, was born. Esilambolchi shared his vision with investors from Toshiba and demonstrated his revolutionary approach to solving the huge issue of cyber security, leading to a $2 million strategic investment in CyberFlow Analytics and completing their seed round of funding. Esilambolchi is a philanthropist as well as a businessman, having recently won the Thomas Edison Patent award for his technology that allows individuals to donate to charities via text message. In 2010, Esilambolchi's technology inspired and encouraged the philanthropic community when individuals donated more than $30 million to the Haiti Relief Fund via his text donation technology in the wake of the Haiti earthquake.

Sean Ferrel
CEO
Managed Solution
www.managedsolution.com

Working in the technology industry isn’t easy. Every single day a new product or idea comes out and if you don’t stay on top of the latest trends you’ll soon be out of the game all together. Managed Solution, under the direction of CEO Sean Ferrel has continued to serve the San Diego community and support organizations in their IT needs for more than 11 years. He started the organization in the garage in his house and has built it to the size it is today by always continually investing in the company. Not just his time but financially as well. Though it is a company filled with engineers, tech gurus and a geek or two, Ferrel has built Managed Solution to function, act and work together as a baseball team with a “team anthem” (what it means to work at Managed Solution), a “game plan” (company mission), and the “bottom of the 9th” (core values). All of these were built by Ferrel to get all Managed Solution employees working together.

Annie Finch
CEO
Katherine Cosmetics
www.katherinescosmetics.com

Annie Finch successfully launched her new product line almost single handedly. She not only runs a successful business, but also gives back to the community in which she lives. She is a woman that exudes drive and motivation. Finch started opening boxes in the back of department stores at Macy’s for Estee Lauder. She continued working hard until she eventually ended up as the head of sales and marketing for North America for Estee Lauder. Now the head of her own cosmetic company, she continues to create her own path to success. She also supports community efforts and was recently a sponsor of the 5th Annual Ladies Luncheon to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Leslie Fishlock
CEO & Founder
Geek Girl
www.geekgirlcamp.com

Leslie Fishlock and Geek Girl are all about education—empowering women in technology through education and training. There is a definite shortage of women in the technology and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Fishlock is a former software developer and she now runs Geek Girl, a non-profit tech education and training organization for women, aimed at getting more girls interested in technology and STEM disciplines. Fishlock started Geek Girl in 2013 and has raised more than $550,000 to date; they have provided training for 200+ students and worked with 200+ organizations in their IT needs for more than 11 years. She started the organization in the garage in his house and has built it to the size it is today by always continually investing in the company. Not just his time but financially as well. Though it is a company filled with engineers, tech gurus and a geek or two, Ferrel has built Managed Solution to function, act and work together as a baseball team with a “team anthem” (what it means to work at Managed Solution), a “game plan” (company mission), and the “bottom of the 9th” (core values). All of these were built by Ferrel to get all Managed Solution employees working together.
women leading companies in tech, but Fishlock is known throughout the indus-try, and in startup and entrepreneurial circles as one of their biggest support-ers, as a volunteer, mentor and financial contributor. She is involved with Startup Weekend throughout the country, from Cape Cod to San Diego. She started Geek Girl in 2006 when no one else understood that women and men learn technology differently and it was all about education. She attempted to rectify this by creating technology conferences across the coun-try that were geared to women from eight to 88, and she runs the only conference where all the instructors are women. She also has created a women in tech meet up group in San Diego that now boasts at least 500 women who attend regularly.

Brandon Fishman
CEO
Internet Marketing Inc.

Brandon Fishman’s career in marketing began after college, but in fishman’s own words, “The Price is Right” show. Ice skating trips, tramponic park trips, and company BBQs are also part of the perks working for Internet Marketing Inc., along with a comprehensive wellness plan and an employee bonus compensation package. Fishman manages all aspects of the firm and has personally obtained more than $4 million in new sales himself in the past year. He has brought on new analyt-ics technologies to the company. He also has recruited and hired more than 20 new talented employees who are all experts in their specific areas. He encourages com-munity involvement and the company has volunteered for the San Diego Food Bank with all employees helping to pack food. Fishman is also an entrepreneur and CEO of Breakwater Equity Partners more than doubled its sales volume in 2012, working with hundreds of new and existing clients in electronic manufacturing, automakers, and healthcare industries. It serves a wide diversity of businesses. In his leadership of the company, Fishman has helped major corporations such as Walmart and Autozone, to develop android-based smart phones and tablet PCs. Under his direction, in less than three months the company’s ability to provide cutting edge Android phones was improved and in just 10 months Fishlock reached a major milestone, winning a contract to provide an innovative StopTechPoint during a very tumultuous time for the company. He has also been recognized for his perseverance and leadership, the company may not have turned around at all, let alone so quickly. Prior to becoming CEO, Fishlock was the organization’s CFO. While at the finan-cial helm, he has deep understanding of the financial workings of the industry and the organization’s strategic and financial direction. Under his leadership, the company launched in 2010 and has continued to grow revenue each year consecutively.

David Gilbert
CEO
National Funding

David Gilbert is the CEO of privately held National Funding, a San Diego-based full service financial services company for small to medium-sized businesses nationwide. The company provides working capital loans, equipment lease, merchant cash advances and credit card processing. It serves a wide diversity of businesses that entail a healthy life balance. At his helm, Gilbert has won numerous awards, and he is recommended as one of the most influential people in the industry. In 2013 National Funding was ranked No. 3724 in the prestigious Inc. 5000 list of America’s Fastest Growing Private Companies. It achieved its No. 3724 rank with a three-year sales growth of 78 percent. The company since has gone from 65 to 97 employees in just seven months. In the area of community involvement, Gilbert was named to the board of trustees of the Seacrest Village Retirement Communities. In addition he supports a number of local and national charities as a private individual and through his company.

Stephan Goss
CEO
Zetto Media

After college Stephan Goss quickly became fasci-nated with the innovations happening in the online marketing space. He joined Zetto Media, where his passion for building a long-term, sus-tainable company and legitimizing the online marketing field were put to the test. Zetto was instrumental in starting and develop-ing the agency’s media buying department. He set the foundation for the agency’s award winning system of optimizing lead ads to drive traffic to the company’s web-site and Facebook pages. He oversees the various departments as well as managing budget and HR responsibilities. Goss came to the United States from Switzerland on a student visa, attending the University of Albany. He had little money and after graduating became a skydiving instructor in Wisconsin. At times he lived in a tent adjacent to the runway. While working as an instructor he developed his online skills by purchasing internet ads for compa-nies trying to draw traffic to their web-sites. Now established in the community, Goss has become a very active member of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and the San Diego Area Partnership. He is extremely motivated to make downtown San Diego the next giant tech hub in California.

Raj Ganti
CEO
Spectracore Technologies Inc.

Raj Ganti is a serial entrepreneur and CEO of tech startups in the broad-based mobile software indus-try. Spectracore Technologies Inc. was started in February 2010 under Ganti’s leadership, developing “MediaAces,” a personalized media cloud providing profile-based content storage and seamless playback over multi-screens. MediaBox was selected as a finalist for the Most Innovative New Product Awards in 2013. Ganti raised substantial capital to fuel the growth of the organization with new relationships with banking institutions and angel in-vestors. The company has helped multi-tple clients in electronic manufacturing to develop android-based smart phones and tablet PCs. Ganti leads his company in conducting food drives during holiday season for the San Diego Food Bank. He also is heavily involved in a foundation that provides schooling, education mate-rials, and after-school tuition programs to about 200 well deserving unfortu-nated children in southern India.

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Kai Hankinson
CEO
EPMG

Kai Hankinson became CEO of EPMG during a very tumultuous time for the company. He had just had a massive 50 percent layoff. Under his direction, in less than three months the company’s ability to provide cutting edge Android phones was improved and in just 10 months Fishlock reached a major milestone, winning a contract to provide an innovative StopTechPoint during a very tumultuous time for the company. He has also been recognized for his perseverance and leadership, the company may not have turned around at all, let alone so quickly. Prior to becoming CEO, Hankinson was the organization’s CFO. While at the financial helm, he has deep understanding of the financial workings of the industry and the organization’s strategic and financial direction. Under his leadership, the company launched in 2010 and has continued to grow revenue each year consecutively.

Trevor Hansen
CEO
EPMG

With Trevor Hansen as CEO EPMG has carved a niche in the online media world. EPMG was awarded Portada’s Top Hispanic Digital Media Innovation award in October 2012 for creating a robust online publisher group in less than a year. It launched LIONHEART Digital Latino in April of 2012 and by September 2012, the platform received an audience hit of 1 million unique visits. By the end of 2012, EPMG had established partnerships with 14 publishers, including major brand entities such as LA Times-Hop, Houston Chronicle-La Voz, and Washington Post-El Tiempo Latino. To date, there are now 18 partnerships and more in the pipeline. Hansen supports young ambitious talent by encouraging his employees to be part of local marketing and advertising clubs such as Ad 2 San Diego.

Lars Helgeson
CEO & Founder
GreenRope

Lars Helgeson is seen as a leader, not a boss. His commitment to GreenRope inspires his employees to do the same. He believes in collaboration with the en-
new clients on dozens of new properties worth more than $1.2 billion in loan volume. Under his leadership Breakwater added almost 80 new employees to the staff in 2012. Jemmet not only is generous with himself, establishing relationships with even the interns and contract employees, but also is generous with the company’s resources. Employees are treated to a catered lunch every day and Jemmet ensures that the everyone takes the time to celebrate milestone accomplishments.

Kris Kibak
CEO & Co-founder
The Control Group, Inc.
www.thecontroigrp.com

Thad Kahlow is considered an authority on online marketing. As CEO of BusinessOnline he has presented at numerous industry and executive conferences including the DMA, HTMA, AMT and Online Marketing Summit. He has been published in leading trade and business publications like iMedia, ERA and B2B Magazine, and was one of the original founding members of the SEMPO Institute. His passion for the industry drives everything he does. He sets a great example for setting goals, monitoring those goals and asking the right questions regarding how those goals are being met.

Kibak is a passionate supporter of 10x10 which created the award winning “Girl Rising” movie. He is on the board of 10x10 and has traveled to see first-hand the impact that education can make when you educate girls worldwide.

Kris Kibak, co-founder of The Control Group, one of the fastest-growing technology start-ups with headquarters in San Diego.

A web development and online marketing agency that builds and markets its own products and services, the company’s flagship product, Instant-Checkmate.com, compiles reports from millions of public records to help people get in touch with long lost family members; protect individuals from would-be predators; and help online dater’s research people before meeting them in-person. It has become one of the largest people-search engines in the world and has been ranked as the 310th most trafficked website in the United States. Kibak has embodied the entrepreneurial spirit since he was a child. When he was 10, he woke up at 5 a.m. every morning to run a newspaper route. At 18, as a freshman in the dorms, Kibak started a drop-shipping company called YourBestDeals.net using his knowledge of HTML (taught to him by his father), and teaching himself PHP and SEO. In his first year, Kibak made more than $100,000 in profit. Today, one of Kibak’s major priorities is giving back to the community and supporting the initiatives that helped him get where he is today. The company works with I Love A Clean San Diego to adopt the beach outside The Control Group’s office with a commitment to protect marine wildlife and keep trash off the beaches. They are also supporters of Together We Bake, a comprehensive workforce training and personal development program for women recently released from the corrections system.

Les Kollegian
CEO
Jacob Tyler Creative Group
www.jacobtyler.com

Les Kollegian and Jacob Tyler Creative Group had many achievements in 2012. Under his leadership, the company has doubled revenues since 2009 and tenfold since its inception in 2006. The agency now possesses an enviable client base that includes The Ken Blanchard Companies, Downtown San Diego Partnership, (Tan, NuVasive, Sony and Bridgepoint Education). Kollegian has been instrumental in helping his agency achieve more than 75 industry awards in the past five years. In addition, he currently lectures MBA students at UC San Diego’s Rady School of Management and also teaches advanced design and marketing principles as adjunct professor at the Art Institute of California’s San Diego campus. In 2013, he also achieved the status of renowned expert source, with his work published in more than 15 graphic design and marketing books. In the community, Kollegian is on the Platt College advisory board and a member and forum leader for the San Diego chapter of Entrepreneurs Organization. He also participated on the judging panel for the Summit Media Awards and International Creativity Awards.

Danna Korn
CEO
Sonic Boom Wellness
www.sonicboomwellness.com

There is a reason that Danna Korn is the chief "energizer" officer above and beyond being Sonic Boom Wellness’s co-founder. This woman on a mission wellness guru and seven-time author of gluten-free cook books is the booster rocket at Sonic Boom, doubling its revenue since 2010 to just over $2 million. Korn led the development of Sonic Boom’s innovative Wellness Incentive Management System (WIMS), adding high-level administrative value to clients’ comprehensive wellness platforms through secure data exchanges, seamless integration, and customizable reporting. Awards have been forthcoming as well. San Diego Business Journal finalist for the “Most admired CEO”; U.S. Small Business Administration San

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Diego District award winner for “Woman-Owned Small Business of the Year”, and finalist and top-5 winner in the Business Journal’s “San Diego’s Healthiest Compa- nies Award” for three years running. Korn also founded ROCK (Raising Our Celiac Kids), the largest support group of its kind, with more than 100 chapters in three countries, and thousands of members worldwide. Korn personally funds ROCK so that no one will ever have to pay dues to access the helpful resources she wishes to share.

Jason Kulpa
Chief Executive Officer
Underground Elephant
www.undergroundelephant.com

The year 2012 marked significant professional achievements for Jason Kulpa and his creatively named company, Underground Elephant agency. In 2012, Under- ground Elephant made the “National 101 Best Places to Work” list and was named “The Work” for list and Kulpa was named a semi-fi- nalist for Ernst & Young’s Entrepreneur of the Year award. Underground Ele-phant fosters an environment of coop- eration and teamwork with Kulpa imple-menting a variety of performance-based bonus incentives, team-building activities and recognition programs. Kulpa founded Underground Elephant in 2008 and has grown revenues over $2.5 million since its inception. Underground Elephant has quickly become the premier provider of customer acquisitions solutions in the online marketing space. While other tech start-ups were receiving angel fund- ing and VC backing, Kulpa bootstrapped Underground Elephant, stretching every dollar and fine-tuning marketing opera- tions. His drive for efficiency lead to the creation of the company’s proprietary technology platform, NeoKee, which en-abled automation of marketing processes, decreasing labor and production costs and increasing the volume of leads pro-duced, validated and distributed.

Kevin Landry
CEO
New Horizons Computer Learning Centers of Southern California
www.nhocal.com

Under Kevin Landry’s watch as CEO, New Horizons of Southern California was named Microsoft’s Western Region Learning Partner of the Year and Red Hat Ready’s North American Training Partner of the Year. Under his leadership, New Horizons of Southern California’s revenue has steadily grown. Landry believes that financial success is directly tied to the people within the or- ganization and has worked hard to cre- ate an environment where employees are comfortable, happy and most importantly, growing personally and professionally. All New Horizons of Southern Califor- nia’s trainers have a collective average of 10 years’ experience in New Horizons’ training offerings, and are en-couraged to take advantage of them to develop themselves. Landry have been a large part of the real estate professionals of Southern California has been recognized as a Best Place to Work in San Diego in 2012 and 2013, as well as in Los Angeles and Orange County.

Brook Larios
Founder & CEO
PlainClarity Communications
www.plainclarity.com

Brook Larios, founder and CEO, has grown Plain-Clarity into a preeminent public relations firm special- izing in the hospitality industry. Larios has guided the firm to be one that is respected by the local food community from restaurateurs to caterers. The firm supports socially responsible businesses, with a focus on artisans food and chefs and restaurateurs who practice sustainability. Larios has opened her network to those who want to transition to this model and is helping to change the tenor of the food system through this work. She strives to lead a united team through a consistent and un- waving work environment filled with collaboration, positive brainstorming and respect. Larios also is involved in commu-nity efforts and sits on the board for Girls Think Tank.

Mark Laska
CEO & President
Great Ecology
www.greatecology.com

Dr. Mark Laska’s professional achievements are directly reflected by the success and growth of his firm, Great Ecology. As president and CEO, he has developed Great Ecology into one of the fastest-growing environmental consult- ing firms in the region and established himself and the firm as industry leaders. Since its founding in 2001, Great Ecology has grown consistently and steadily. Last year—one of the firm’s best and most profitable years—Great Ecology experi- enced a 47 percent growth rate and annual revenue of $8 million. As Great Ecology’s sales driver, Laska acquired three large Fortune 500 clients and other key con- tracts, which added more than 62 million in revenue, expanding the firm’s service reach. In 2012, Great Ecology opened its third regional office in Denver which has tripled in size within six months. In Ad- dition, Laska was nominated to join the 1 Love A Clean San Diego board of direc-tors.

Casey LeBlanc
President
New Venture Escrow
www.newventureescrow.com

Casey LeBlanc successfully sold two businesses in 2012. He successfully exited those businesses because of the opportunity that he has created with New Venture Escrow for the future. While successfully selling 2 major corporations, LeBlanc has actively grown New Venture Escrow as its president. Within the last year New Venture Escrow has expanded its regional footprint throughout San Diego County with branch locations in north, south, and central San Diego. LeBlanc maintains a unique company culture for the escrow and settlement environment. New Venture Escrow embraces a fun and professional environment. LeBlanc is working to mod- ernize the way the industry does business. New Venture custom developed a mobile app that currently doesn’t exist anywhere in the country. The technology is revolu- tionary and gives real estate agents, cli-en ts, and vendors inside access in to their transactions.

Brad Lee
President
Breg, Inc.
www.breg.com

Breg, Inc. under the leadership of Brad Lee, has created unique products for the health care indus-try. Breg specializes in cost-saving and efficiency improvement tools for orthopedic physician practices by providing the only available software application on the market which also is designed to be aligned with the demands of the affordable care act. Lee oversaw the expansion of their Mexican manufacturing facility to reduce produc-tion expenses as well as acquisitions, syn-ergistic partnerships and new product lines, expanding revenues by $40 million. He headed up efforts to create a program sponsored by Breg to provide an Ortho-pedic Physician Fellowship program that pays the salary of orthopedic surgeons opting to gain further training after residency in such specialties as sports medici-necine and spine injuries. Lee also is com-munity minded and sits on the local board of the Encinitas Soccer League.

Gary Levine
CEO
Gallagher Levine
www.gohomeinc.com

In 2012 was a big year for Gary Levine and Gallagher Levine as a company. One of the greatest milestones in GS Levine’s 26 year history occurred when the organization was recognized by several Interna-tional insurance brokerages as the best fit to merge with and represent their brand in San Diego. GS Levine was approached by nearly 10 world class insurance bro-kerages because of their strong reputa-tion, market share and leadership and the fourth largest insurance brokerage in the world, Arthur J. Gallagher & Co., became their partner. Led by Levine, the marketing team implemented a comprehensive strategy that increased brand awareness and created buzz about the company as well as positioned them for a full rebrand-ing initiative. Gallagher Levine also ex-ecuted the complete re-brand with a new logo, colors, messaging and personality with the team participating in more than two dozen charitable events and increas-ing their participation and partnerships with companies such as the San Diego Museum of Art, Pro Kids Golf, the YMCA, The Boys and Girls Club, San Diego Sports Innovators, the San Diego Padres, Seacrest Village, and Kids Included Together.

Ray Major
CEO
Halo Business Intelligence
www.halobi.com

In the IT industry it is important to stay innovative and Jim Matteo, president of Bird Rock Systems, Inc. stays on the cutting edge of the industry’s developments. He has created a world class company cul-ture at Bird Rock Systems which involves staff participation at every level. Matteo himself is directly responsible for 25 per-cent of the sales revenue for the company. He differentiates the IT resale playing field by offering diverse events in the area for customers and potential customers held at venues such as the Del Mar horse races, the golf tournament at Torrey Pines, movie premiers, lunch and learns, tech- nology workshops, and even boat racing events. This is a great way for him to be active in the unique way to create a brand for the company and it is paying off.

Damian McKinney
CEO
McKinney Advisory Group
www.mckinneyadvisorygroup.com

As CEO of McKinney Advisory Group, Damian McKinney has kept a com-mercial real estate office open during the worst recession in recent his-tory. It is hard to call the company only a real estate company. At his design a number of services are offered includ-ing an in-house legal counsel, portfolio review, capital sources, space planning, event coordination, andø and a vast array of project and development management. McKinney keeps active in the community and travels to China as ambassador for tourism to Hawaii in 2012. In addition to management of the firm. He is on numer-ous boards including All Kids Inc. of Los Angeles. McKinney is proud of his realiza-tion the company was able to invite and host 100 business leaders in San Diego at a charity and executive mixer.
Ash Mehta
CEO
PatientClick Inc.
www.patientclick.com

Ash Mehta is a serial entrepreneur and chief executive with 13 years of business management experience. He has managed multiple businesses in health care IT, business consulting and technology. In year 2012, as CEO of PatientClick, he increased the company’s revenue three fold and oversaw PatientClick’s development of three unique processes for a health care information delivery model. The organization is filing for multiple patents this year. Mehta is heavily involved with the business community in San Diego and Imperial Valley including CONNECT. He is on the board of advisors for Alliant School of Management and CSU San Marcos’ Healthcare IT program.

Marc Menkin
President/Owner
Where You Want To Be Tours, Inc.
www.wheretours.com

Where You Want To Be Tours has created a unique niche in the tourism and hospitality industry due to Marc Menkin’s creativity and unique branding. The destination company’s specialty is “hidden San Diego spots” which has been a popular marketing hit with clients. Under Menkin’s leadership, Where You Want To Be Tours, Inc. has received numerous awards such as “Best Team building Facilitator” by California Meetings and Events, voted Best Tour for Locals by San Diego Magazine, and an Award of Excellence & Appreciation by the U.S. military. Over the years, Where You Want To Be Tours has created unique family bonding programs for faith-based groups and the military. The company’s team building adventures and tours are all about fostering a happy environment and Menkin believes it all starts with the staff. Together as a team they have donated their time to such causes to the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure and the American Cancer Society. Menkin recently was honored by the YMCA for all his outstanding work and dedication. In addition, he serves as a Cabrillo Foundation board member.

Chance Mims
CEO
Academy Securities
www.academysecurities.com

Chance Mims founded Academy Securities in 2009 and provides overall leadership, strategy and direction as the organization’s chief executive officer and majority controlling shareholder. He has been involved in every aspect of the firm’s recent financial success and growth. Mims has brought the best of the U.S. military resources to the Wall Street and investment banking industry by hiring many veterans with transferable skills, seeing their training and combat experience as a great asset. He has led the development of the company’s veteran training and hiring programs. The firm has been frequently featured on CNBC, Fox News, Wall Street Journal, The Bond Trader, Business Insider, and Trader magazine and has been ranked Top 10 as co-managing underwriters by Thomson Reuters for Public Finance Operations. The organization has grown steadily and has opened offices in New York City and Chicago.

John Morrell
Managing Partner/CEO
Higgs Fletcher & Mack, LLP
www.hfmc.com

Most law firms around the country have scaled back operations and staff due to the pressures of the current economic environment. Yet under John Morrell’s leadership, Higgs Fletcher & Mack realized a 5 percent increase in per-partner profits within the last year and reached a new record of 72 attorneys on staff and continued the streak of never having any professional layoffs since he became CEO in 1997. What’s more, the newly established practice groups of transportation and immigration as well as restaurants, hotels and tourism are thriving. As a general rule, law firms rarely change how they do business. Contrarily, Morrell views innovation as one key component to maintaining growth and profitability. Under his leadership, Higgs Fletcher & Mack continually revamps its online presence and W eb-based communication. The firm is dedicated to diversity and Morrell and Higgs Fletcher & Mack continues to fund a Diversity Scholarship program in partnership with the University of San Diego, giving $10,000 annually to a deserving student and funding a new diversity scholarship with California Western School of Law. Morrell is well known for his philanthropic activities, serving as chairman of the Mercy Hospital Ball, a member of the board of directors for Mercy Outreach Surgical Team, a member of the board of directors for the San Diego Rotary Club 35 and the board of trustees for the San Diego History Center.

Dylan Natter
Founder/Chief Executive Officer
centrexIT
www.centrexIT.com

Dylan Natter, founder and CEO of centrexIT, treats his engineers like partners. He hires for integrity and leadership—not on experience alone. One of Natter’s key leadership principles is his...
local staffing policy. Although a common practice among IT management competi-
tors, he refuses to outsource desk support overseas, although it’s more expensive to maintain 100 percent of his staff in the U.S. He contributes to a positive work environment by helping his engineering staff develop their technical skills and becoming more effective com-
municators as new generation leaders for the company. As a result staff turnover is almost zero due to the high turnover among employment candidates. Natter and cen-
trexIT have received recognition for their partnership and assistance with some of San Diego’s major nonprofit institutions, Natter was named the Young Profession-
als of the Month in February 2012 by the Big Brothers Big Sisters San Diego Profes-
sionals Committee of San Diego.

Todd Nelson
CEO
Tombo Biosciences
www.tombobios.com

Todd Nelson had a vision for high performance, high flow cytometry reagents for research use at a cost of 20 to 50 percent lower price that most suppliers in the U.S. at a time with NIH funding for immune function research is at an all-
time low. As CEO of Tombo Biosciences, Nelson built a self-directed team that was able to take the company from zero to 200 products in inventory in less than four months and establish a global distribution channel that includes prod-
uct distributors in Japan, Germany, Belgium, France, Netherlands, and Austria, among others. Tombo is an employee-owned company with a culture unlike any in the San Diego biotech industry, provid-
ing many benefits for employees including free healthcare.

David Oates
President & CEO
Stalwart Communications
www.stalwartcom.com

David Oates has achieved a great amount of success as head of the 200+ employee relations firm Stalwart Communications. This year he was named to San Diego Metropolitan’s “40 Men Who Make A Dif-
fERENCE” and was recently awarded the Ro-
tary San Diego/Imperial Valley District “Governor’s Torch Bearer” award. Not only was he the only member from his club to be honored, but he was one of 63 in the dis-
trict which is made up of 5,500 members. Due to Oates’ success over the past year, he has played a crucial role in expanding the company’s client roster which consists of a record high of 16 clients. He creates a collaborative and supportive environment for his staff that includes an open concept work area. In addition, there are TVs in the office so staff can stay updated on the latest news and watch March Madness and other significant events while working. Aside from providing a competitive salary, Oates also offers a 401k bonus program which affords employees an opportunity to earn commission based on performance. The staff engages in a variety of fun activities outside of the office as well.

Mike O’Brien
CEO
Mingle LLC
www.mingle.com

Mike O’Brien likes a noisy work environment and at his growing online job search organization, the XM satellite radio is always pumping out tunes to boost energy. O’Brien has grown his Climber.com website business to a national level and is currently pushing out two more tools to make the innovative site more relevant to the ever changing digital job market and also to provide more value to clients. O’Brien created the software and is always working on ways to improve the breadth of the name and brand. He believes in supporting his staff and gives congratulations where it’s due. He has monthly sales contests and always thinks of ideas to all departments to support and development, can participate and actually win. O’Brien is an innovator and has combined his technological ex-
boutique wine brand. He has grown exponentially and O’Brien is pioneering this social wine experience site overseas this year.

Dr. Melanie Palm
CEO & Director
Art of Skin MD
www.artofskinmd.com

As the founding direc-
tor of Art of Skin MD in Solana Beach, Dr. Melanie Palm, a board-certified cos-
matic dermatologist and fellowship-trained cosmetic surgeon, provides a full spectrum of both medi-
al and cosmetic dermatologic care. She is also an assistant clinical professor at the University of California, San Diego, and staff physician at Scripps Encinitas Memorial Hospital. She lectures nationally and internationally on laser and filler technology. Palm has authored more than 25 articles in dermatological liter-
he has played a crucial role in expanding the company’s client roster which consists of a record high of 16 clients. He creates a collaborative and supportive environment for his staff that includes an open concept work area. In addition, there are TVs in the office so staff can stay updated on the latest news and watch March Madness and other significant events while working. Aside from providing a competitive salary, Oates also offers a 401k bonus program which affords employees an opportunity to earn commission based on performance. The staff engages in a variety of fun activities outside of the office as well.

Shawn Parr
CEO
Bulldog Drummond
www.bulldogdrummond.com

Shawn Parr, CEO of Bulldog Drummond agency, lives to inspire—from his articles, to his speaking en-
gagements, to the Sunday night dinners he throws at his house, he is constantly inspiring oth-
ers to do what they love. He empowers his employees by allowing them the free-
dom to speak up and offer ideas. Parr has worked with a wide variety of clients. He has been published in Fast Company, PRWeek, Business to Community and many more. He has helped nonprofits and start-
ups such as The Paradigm Project, Invisible Children, and World Vision to create compelling stories and strategic business solutions. Parr has spoken at a number of conferences for companies such as Southwest and Sony. He recently helped launch YouTh-
school, helping to guide high school stu-
dents along a positive path.

Gary Peterson
Founder & President
gap intelligence
www.gapintelligence.com

Gary Peterson founded gap intelligence in 2001 with a $10,000 bonus check. A classic student of business, the leadership and business skills he acquired and worked hard to develop throughout the past 10 years have helped guide the company through the “Great Recession” with high double-digit revenue growth. To-
day, gap intelligence is a proven leader in providing market research to the IT, consumer electronics, imaging, and home appliance industries. This industry leading firm spearheaded gap intelligence’s expansion into the new categories of televisions and home appliances including an as-
sortment of products like refrigerators, laundry units, and kitchen ranges. After launching in March, this quickly became the biggest growth category, attracting several new clients and even more prod-
ucts such as dishwashers and microwaves. One of Peterson’s most successful intern-
In 2012-13, he was intimately involved in the bank introducing a successful new investor residential real estate financing product allowing more product to move through the sluggish housing market. He also oversaw the bank’s development of a new robust online banking platform and mobile banking.

Jorge Ruiz de Castilla
President
The Clay Merchant
www.theclaymerchant.com

Having previously been the owner of an offshore software development com-
pay focus on revenue and loyalty. In Peru, Jorge Ruiz de Castilla’s background in consulting, software engi-
neer, and project management has given

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MOST ADIMIERD CEO SUPPLEMENT December 16, 2013 www.sdbj.com
him the ability to take a 25-year-old brick and mortar hardware retail store and turn it into a successful technology services company, still including the retail store. When Ruiz de Castilla acquired San Diego Computer Consultants as a business to consumer option it incorporated flawlessly into The Chip Merchant (TCM) business model under his supervision. Ruiz de Castilla prioritizes his staff and involves them in the hiring process so that everyone has input on future potential employees. He encourages employee education and guides them toward certifications, which are company reimbursed. The Chip Merchant is a community partner with a number of nonprofits including The Coronado School of The Arts, Walden Family Services and Whispering Winds. TCM has also recently participated in events such as Geek Girl Tech Conference, which helps educate women on many forms of technology.

Robert Scherer
President
TAG
www.teamtag.net

2012 was a banner year for TAG, with a new office opening in Rancho Santa Fe and becoming a software reseller for NetSuite. This can be attributed to Robert Scherer’s firm belief in TAG’s values of “continuous improvement,” “commitment” and “stakeholder enrichment” to better serve communities in which TAG has clients and to sell the most sought after accounting software products. Scherer has contributed to TAG’s success and growth by hiring full-time employees, not consultants. By having long-term engaged employees, who split their time among a variety of clients, it allows for building tremendous internal knowledge across a variety of industries and company sizes. Through the process of strategic acquisition and growth, Scherer has overseen TAG’s expansion into three separate divisions: outsourced accounting, software sales and consulting, and family CFO services. Scherer empowers others by donating his time teaching financial management courses for the construction industry. He is passionate about accounting practices and software solutions for the construction trade.

Mark Schulze
CEO
Crystal Pyramid Productions
www.crystalpyramid.com

Mark Schulze launched Crystal Pyramid Productions in 1981 after graduating from UC San Diego. As a “one-man band,” he video-taped special events, non-profit PAs and short industrials with a single camera, tripod and VCR. The company grew rapidly after Patty Moomey joined him in 1982, and today produces and shoots for broadcast and corporate clients such as UPS, the Chopra Foundation, Microsoft, IBM and Cisco, as well as broadcast companies like Extra!; Discover; the Dr. Phil Show and Inside Edition. Schulze teaches as he works with others from employees to clients, and is always patient when explaining complicated matters of production and how to achieve great results in a resourceful way.

Daniel Shepherd
President
Titan SEO, Inc.
www.titan-seo.com

Today, a 13-year winner of the Titan Boss’ Day award and a fourth year receiver of an Inc 5000 award, Daniel Shepherd, president of Titan SEO, has guided the company from the bottom-up, assisting with many of the new client sales and client retention. He ensures each venture becomes profitable before building on it, or hiring more people for that role. As the top idea-man, he helped develop proprietary software to put the company ahead of the competition. He has created Titan to be profitable, fun, and fast-growing, but also encourages a family atmosphere where everyone feels they are contributing to the success of the company and bettering their community.

Jamie Lynn Sigler
Founding Partner
J Public Relations
www.jpublicrelations.com

Jamie Lynn Sigler is the founding partner of J Public Relations and is an award-winning public relations and marketing communications specialist. A recognized and respected expert in the luxury travel and lifestyle industries, Sigler specializes in building solid client relationships, creative campaigns and in scoring top media placements. JPR’s clients have recently been featured in some of the top media outlets in the country including: The New York Times, Wall Street Journal Weekend, US Weekly, and The Today Show. Sigler further contributes to her industry by helping college and budding PR professionals through her involvement in Public Relations Society of America and PRSSA New Pros. Under her leadership, JPR has grown into a national seven-figure full-service public relations agency with offices on both coasts in San Diego and New York. She also remains committed to giving back to the community and is dedicated to raising money for childhood cancer research through her involvement with the St. Baldrick’s Foundation, founding the San Diego chapter in 2008 with her husband, Jake.
### 2013 Finalist Profiles

**Brendan Smith**  
*Founder/CEO*  
*Motive Interactive*  

Brendan Smith runs Motive Interactive, a performance-based online and mobile marketing network, with an open door policy and complete transparency with employees. Team members know the financial state of the company and the goals. Smith also created a corporate culture that is the accumulation of every individual employee’s personality. He has guided Motive’s revenue growth from $8 million in 2010 to $17 million last year overseeing the launch of a new mobile service which now accounts for 70 percent of the firm’s revenue. In addition, Smith recently spearheaded fundraising $15,000 for those affected by Hurricane Sandy.

**Daniel C. Steenerson**  
*President & CEO*  
*Disability Insurance Services*  

Paycheck protection for every American is not only a lofty goal—it’s an ideal every American is not only expected to achieve every day. He has been re-elected in a number of industry and community organizations. He has been instrumental in furthering the partnership with VAVi and the Challenged Athletes Foundation.

**Steve Stoloff**  
*CEO*  
*VAVi, Inc.*  

Steve Stoloff, CEO of VAVi, Inc. is constantly looking at ways in which integrating new technology can help push the company forward. This year will see the planned roll out of a brand new website. Internally, Stoloff helped co-found the popular Electric Run. Since launching the first run in November of 2012, Electric Run has grown from 30 runs domestically and expanded to Australia in 2013. 2014 will see more growth domestically and an even more aggressive international expansion. Stoloff is active in a number of industry and community organizations. He has been re-elected as Sport & Social Industry Association "Top Master General Agency" Award. Steenerson’s ideas have been featured in many national publications, including National Health Underwriter magazine, Life Insurance Selling magazine and LifeHealthPRO. He also actively supports charity causes and has instituted a program within his company called "Jeans for a Cause" in which employees have the option to donate a few dollars a week to a worthy cause and in turn have the privilege to wear jeans on Fridays. The totals are then matched by Steenerson.

**Robin Toft**  
*President & CEO*  
*Sanford Rose Associates - Toft Group*  

Robin Toft is owner, president and CEO of Sanford Rose Associates - Toft Group, an award-winning life sciences-centered executive search firm highly specialized in placing executives into personalized medicine, pharmaceutical, medical device and diagnostic companies. With offices in San Diego and San Francisco, Toft expanded her firm with the addition of the Sanford Rose Associates -Fort Lauderdale office becoming a significant force in two of the three largest biotech hubs in the U.S. Toft Group is the top performing firm within the 50+ offices in the Sanford Rose Associates worldwide network, and the most successful franchise on record in the company’s 54-year history. Under her guidance the Toft team has partnered with The Foundation for Women, EcoLife Foundation, Challenged Athletes Foundation, MANA, Hope for a Cure, and The Clearity Foundation. Toft has been a top fundraiser and walked in the Susan G. Komen 3-Day /60 mile event to support breast cancer every year since her firm opened.

**Glenn Torrez**  
*CEO/President*  
*PRAVA Construction Services, Inc.*  

Glenn Torrez followed his vision and personally financed the start-up of PRAVA Construction Services. In December of 2004 Sempra Energy approached Torrez to manage their headquarters re-model. He accepted the offer and in January of 2005, PRAVA Construction Services, Inc. was formed. With hard work and a great deal of sacrifice, PRAVA was able to reach its sales goal in the first year. When PRAVA started, it had three employees, Glenn Torrez, his wife Denise, and his son Nolan. During the years he has created a team of 20 highly experienced building professionals. Torrez has been recognized with awards such as Minority Supplier of the Year 2012 and SDCCU Small Business “Excellence in Customer Service” winner. In 2012 he was also named as co-chair of the AGC Build and Serve Committee, as well as named to the 2012-13 board of directors for San Diego North Chamber of Commerce, the Boys and Girls Club of North County, and Sustainable Surplus.

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Additional panelists to be announced.