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# TOP TECH
# 2020

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## *Letter from*
# COX Business

When the world began to lock down in March, we were all unsure how our lives would truly change. In the following seven months, we were challenged to adjust our ways of learning, working, connecting with each other and celebrating.

As the pandemic continued, we were faced with three choices for the 2020 Top Tech Awards: (1) Postpone (2) Cancel (3) Pivot. These Awards recognize innovation and we felt it was our responsibility to uphold that spirit of Top Tech. Instead of walking away from the challenge, we ran straight ahead and created "Top Tech World" — a virtual world of fun, interactive networking and celebration of our IT Heroes who are on the front lines keeping businesses moving.

Though we couldn't be together in the Paddock at Del Mar Fairgrounds, we were able to join together with hundreds of technology leaders in one virtual campus for a truly incredible experience.

I want to congratulate every one of the nominees and honorees this year on your accomplishments. We look forward to celebrating you next year in person at the 14th annual Top Tech Awards in 2021.

Congratulations once again,

**Duane Cameron**
**Vice President**
**Cox Business**

## *Letter from the*
# San Diego Business Journal

The San Diego Business Journal is proud to be the media sponsor for the 2020 Top Tech Awards presented by Cox Business. Information technology is playing such an integral part in how we navigate through a challenging 2020. It is facilitating important research. It's keeping the lines of communication open. It is supporting and building community.

This year's awards ceremony centered around innovation. We celebrated in an exciting computer-generated virtual world. Please see pages 32 and 33.

Well-deserved congratulations to the 13 honorees and the 191 nominees.

Your contribution is so important to the well-being of San Diego's Community of Business and the community as a whole.

Thank you to Vice President of Cox Business, Duane Cameron, and his talented team for hosting this special event that showcases the region's most innovative technology leaders.

We hope you enjoy this special section that tells the winners' stories.

**Barb Chodos**
**President & Publisher**
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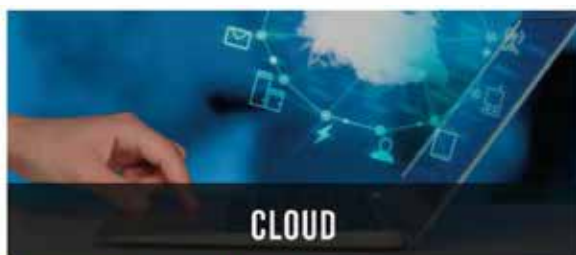**SCALEMATRIX HQ, SAN DIEGO**

## IS THIS HAPPENING TO YOU?

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# WORLD OF WORK CHANGES QUICKLY, IT EXECUTIVES KEEP UP THE PACE

## TECH: REGION OFFERS AN APPEALING ALTERNATIVE TO SILICON VALLEY

**By Brad Graves**

COVID-19 has changed work life all over the world. San Diego is no exception. Remote work has become a lot more common … even the new normal.

Terry Loftus is an IT leader serving a workforce of more than 55,000 public school employees — people who suddenly found themselves having to work from home, and who needed computers at home. Much of the responsibility for that shift fell on Loftus' office, the San Diego County Office of Education.

"There is a much higher demand for support and services, particularly on the IT side," said the executive, who is assistant superintendent and chief technology officer. "The demand has been very high on the technical staff."

Desktop computers are still king in public education. Employees switching to a hybrid schedule with a few days at the office and the rest of the workweek at home were faced with the unwieldy option of carting a PC, monitor and peripherals between both places, Loftus said. Predictably, since March, public education has seen a shift toward mobile devices.

### A Time of Transition

Jonathan Behnke, chief information officer for the city of San Diego, recalled the process of converting 2,500 people to home offices. "We were able to make a quick transition to remote work," he said. He recalled how Amazon.com's desktop as a service offering, WorkSpaces, helped smooth the process. "We were up and running in two weeks."

"COVID brought about a rapid adoption" of collaboration and file sharing tools, he said. In a story that repeated itself across the United States, workers quickly started getting familiar with the Zoom videoconference tool.

Some organizations found they needed to change their business models. John Merritt, senior vice president and CIO of the YMCA of San Diego County, said his organization has made the transition to telehealth; it is now delivering services such as counseling online. "As you can imagine, mental health services right now are an important endeavor," he said.

The YMCA's traditional service delivery model is giving way to an online model. The YMCA is beginning to explore virtual membership, Merritt said, and that may last longer than COVID-19.

For the technology industry, remote work is nothing new, said Joe Gursky, director of information technology for the USS Midway Museum. Coding and software companies make the transition to remote work relatively easily, he said. "Most of their work is in front of computer."

However, like everything else, COVID-19 has tilted the balance, putting many more people into the remote workforce.

Huge technology companies that preferred to keep a core group of workers at the main office are realizing those people can work remotely, too. "The half of the software developers that were still locked in the headquarters building, they now jumped over the wall," said Marco Thompson, president of the EvoNexus startup technology incubator.

### Destination San Diego

One phenomenon San Diego may benefit from is that tech workers, disillusioned by life in Silicon Valley or San Francisco, will choose other parts of the country to make their homes.

San Diego's tech community will grow richer by gaining Silicon Valley talent.

They will likely be lured by San Diego's climate and location, its laid back mood, and its relatively low cost, said the USS Midway's Gursky. While many people perceive San Diego as expensive, it's

**USS Midway Museum Director of IT Joe Gursky**



**City of San Diego CIO Jonathan Behnke**



**EvoNexus President Marco Thompson**



**Connect w/San Diego Venture Group CEO Mike Krenn**



**San Diego County Office of Education Assistant Superintendent and CTO Terry Loftus**



**YMCA of San Diego County CIO John Merritt**

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LEADERS SHIFT PRIORITIES AS 2020 PROGRESSES

## TECH: AS THE WORLD CHANGES, PREFERENCES AND NEEDS CHANGE AS WELL

**By Brad Graves**

2020 has been a year of change for San Diego's information technology professionals.

The world has changed with the arrival of COVID-19, so many of yesterday's top priorities no longer have the No. 1 spots.

Priorities and plans that once sat on the back burner have gained importance.

"We're really accelerating things we hoped to do in the coming year or two," said Jonathan Behnke, chief information officer for the city of San Diego.

For example, the city was planning to introduce an online city permit offering by the end of 2020. With COVID-19, the city rolled it out early.

It's part of a portfolio of expanded digital services for the public, including virtual building inspections.

"Digital equity is another big focus," Behnke said. With libraries shut down, the city pivoted to offering library services in outdoor settings, such as library patios. It's there that patrons — particularly those with low incomes and little access to technology — can check out portable computers and use the internet. As of this writing, the central library and two branch libraries had the service. Eleven more installations were in the works.

The city's IT department is also accelerating data-driven decision making. For example, it's working with the risk management department to find places where people tend to file claims against the city. If those claims are coming from a specific geographic area, Behnke said, decision makers can physically go to the location in the city and figure out how to improve its safety.

The city has delayed some back office projects that are not as time-sensitive, he reported.

### Telemedicine and Education

Some technologies are coming into full bloom. Videoconferencing services such as Zoom went mainstream in 2020. Another big change can be seen in the medical field. Healthcare providers had been working with telemedicine for 20 years, but it had not gone mainstream. COVID-19 "gave it a kick," said Mike Krenn, CEO of Connect w/San Diego Venture Group, an organization that helps San Diego's startup community.

Terry Loftus, who works in the world of public schools, has witnessed change during 2020.

Expectations for the IT team and the individuals in it "have gone up pretty radically," he said.

# Congratulations to the 2020 Top Tech Awards Honorees

This year, perhaps more than any before, we are reminded of and grateful for the incredible work of San Diego's IT leaders to keep business moving and all of us connected.

We offer our heartiest congratulations and gratitude to all the Top Tech Awards Nominees and Honorees.

## COX
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## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

# TECHNOLOGY'S ALLURE LED TO A CAREER IN IT, AND SERVICE

## TECH: RICH COPPA WEARS MANY HATS AT THE ARC OF SAN DIEGO

**BY FRED GRIER**

As a top executive with The Arc of San Diego, Rich Coppa has made life better for a great number of people with disabilities.

As CIO, part of Coppa's job is helping clients with disabilities better access and interact with information technology. Coppa is also vice president of infrastructure and oversees real estate, facilities and The Arc's vehicle fleet.

This year, Coppa is being honored with the Top Tech Lifetime Achievement Award.

### A Virtual Awards Ceremony

Coppa accepted his award during an online presentation Sept. 17 before a virtual crowd of more than 500 people.

He said the award felt like the highest achievement of his career. "I'm honored I've had an ability to help and make a difference with thousands of people with disabilities and make their lives better," he said.

> " **"I've been fascinated with technology for my whole life. I was instilled with the desire to learn new things from my grandfather, who was in the aerospace industry working on all the Apollo missions"**
>
> RICH COPPA

He thanked his family, his team at work, management and board members at The Arc, Cox Business and the people associated with the Top Tech Awards.

Coppa is a two-time Top Tech Awards honoree and three-year executive judge. He holds a B.S. degree in business management with additional degrees and certifications in computer science and administrative management.

### A Fascination With Techonology

Coppa's career success can be attributed to his comprehensive technology industry experience that spans almost 34 years.

As a student, Coppa was first introduced to the field of technology in the 1980s, when home computers were the emerging technology pushed by "unicorn" startups such as Apple.

"I've been fascinated with technology for my whole life. I was instilled with the desire to learn new things from my grandfather, who was in the aerospace industry working on all the Apollo missions," he said. "The whole exploration of learning new things, was something I was brought up with during my childhood from my grandfather."

After graduating college, Coppa decided to join the U.S. Air Force with the desire to learn everything he could.

Coppa served as a noncommissioned officer stationed in Europe, where he was granted the opportunity to work on everything from aircraft to mainframe computers.

He also received several honors, which include the John L. Levitow Honor Graduate Award from NCO Preparatory School, the Air Force Achievement Medal, and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

> " **"When someone gives me the opportunity to teach or train in something, I always look at it as a blessing. Over the years I've accumulated all these licenses and they have all been ancillary to my actual career."**
>
> RICH COPPA

### From a Single Computer

Coppa joined The Arc of San Diego in 1995. At the time, the organization had one computer, which managed its overall $10 million annual budget. Today, with the help of Coppa, The Arc operates as a $36 million not-for-profit organization utilizing over 700 networked computers, tablets and mobile devices at 22 locations.

The Arc serves between 2,100 and 2,200 people at any one time.

Over the last 25 years, Coppa has helped develop custom databases to complete calculations internally. He has also programmed The Arc's payroll and human resource systems, web presence, and consumer billing systems to new standards specified by the Department of Labor.

Going above and beyond, Coppa completed the requirements for his B-General Building Contractor with the California Contractors State License Board (CSLB) and the American Academy of Project Management, Master Project Manager (MPM2).

His classifications added to The Arc's landscaping license give The Arc the ability to contract for government set-aside NISH and JWOD contracts.

"There are not many chief information officers that are general contractors, certified master project managers or EMTs," he said. "When someone gives me the opportunity to teach or train in something, I always look at it as a blessing. Over the years I've accumulated all these licenses and they have all been ancillary to my actual career."

### Keeping Perspective

Coppa's words of wisdom to the next generation of IT leaders were "don't sweat the small stuff." He added that software can drive you crazy and hardware will drive you even crazier, if you allow it.

Coppa is also an AYSO soccer coach and junior high school flag football coach. He shared that he really enjoys teaching the game of football. He doesn't plan to stop anytime soon.

"I've been teaching junior high football and I love it," he said. "Who knows? Maybe I'll be teaching pro football someday."

## COX BUSINESS EXEMPLARY

# HONOREE TURNS TECHNICAL SKILL INTO 'EXTRAORDINARY OUTCOMES'

## TECH: WITH PASSION AND VISION, JAKE FIELDS DEVELOPS A COMPANY

**BY BRAD GRAVES**

For Jake Fields, forming a tech company is a natural thing to do. He formed his first such company at age 22, and has since founded or helped launch eight more.

In 2014, Fields co-founded a business around a product that turns big-rig trucks into computer-connected vehicles. This comes as the trucking industry sees the need for more software, and a greater variety of it. The business goes by the name of Platform Science.

Six years later, Fields' technical vision and dynamic leadership brought him one of the biggest honors in the 2020 Top Tech Awards. He is the Cox Business Exemplary Honoree.

"Technology chops do not make a Top Technology Exec," wrote Platform Science CEO Jack Kennedy in nominating Fields — his chief technology officer — for the honor. "It is the ability to convert those skills into extraordinary outcomes that matters. You will find no one better matched for the challenge."

People who know Fields describe him as an original thinker, an excellent teacher and an incredibly focused hard worker. They call him passionate, innovative and visionary.

### Business Successes

The award comes on the heels of several business successes. Last fall, Fields played a significant role in securing a partnership between Platform Science and one of the nation's largest trucking companies, Schneider. Platform Science deployed its innovative technology onto Schneider's fleet.

More recently, Daimler Chrysler, the maker of Freightliner trucks and the largest manufacturer of Class 8 trucks in North America, tapped Platform Science to be the primary on-vehicle fleet management software development and distribution partner across its fleets, enabling customers to purchase and utilize third party telematics solutions and connectivity services directly from their trucks without aftermarket hardware installation.

### A Worthwhile Pursuit

"I'm honored to receive the award," Fields said in a recent interview, turning his attention to the community at large. "It's been amazing to continue to see the San Diego community evolve, with more tech companies and tech leaders. The talent in San Diego is amazing."

The art of entrepreneurship, Fields said, includes "picking the right problem to solve … a worthwhile problem."

Exposure to large transportation corporations in the days before he founded Platform Science showed Fields the industry's pain points — and showed him the market was ripe. The trucking industry has "huge inefficiencies" that can be improved through technology. These include the management of a driver's limited time. "Multiply that by thousands of drivers, by thousands of fleets. Obviously, that's a huge number," Fields said.

Platform Science has 150 employees. As he scales the business, Fields said he wants to combine the right technology with the right team.

In his time away from the office, Fields helps develop the next generation of technology leaders, lecturing on digital innovation and mentoring university students.

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## NONPROFIT HONOREE

# JEFFREY HAMILTON

*Director of Information Technology*
*Mental Health Systems*

Jeffrey Hamilton was instrumental in transforming IT and security at Mental Health Systems, helping to secure, grow and enhance business services for 120 behavioral health programs across California. He has completely transformed the company's infrastructure and technology service offerings that are grounded in Azure Cloud Services, Microsoft 365 and new strategic relationships with vendors. The transformation began with a complete overhaul of the firewall and switches and the implementation of Advanced Threat Protection (ATP) at all site locations in 90 days. All on-premises hardware (25 servers/VM) was migrated to Azure cloud servers. The move eliminated the nearly $400,000 expense to replace outdated, out of warranty hardware.

Hamilton spearheaded Voice over Internet Protocol transition to Microsoft Teams telephony service from another vendor resulting in $144,000 in annual cost savings. This strategy reduced phone hardware from 1,100 physical units to 120. Most employees were transitioned to using headsets as part of the deployment, resulting in significantly lower startup costs. The VOIP Teams implementation was negotiated through a new strategic partnership with Mobiz Inc. that included a custom development solution to convert the intake, client management and record-keeping system — currently based in Excel — to an Azure-based Software as a Service solution. The new technology uses face recognition and biometric security and is valued at $200,000.

Hamilton has strengthened his organization's information security posture by deploying proven solutions to successfully fight viruses, malware, phishing, impersonation and other cyberattacks.

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## STARTUP HONOREE

# LARRY HEMINGER

*Chief Information Officer*
*MemComputing Inc.*

As an experienced enterprise software and cloud architect, Larry Heminger quickly turned an early stage proof-of-concept cloud platform into a mature and secure software as a service (SaaS) product after joining MemComputing in June of 2019.

A breakthrough in high-performance computing, MemComputing's disruptive MemCPU coprocessor technology is dramatically decreasing the time it takes to find feasible solutions to some of the most complex optimization problems across a variety of industries.

By now the product has been proven to successfully run and solve its customers' complex optimization problems in oil and energy, transportation logistics and routing, as well as other vertical markets. Heminger was able to quickly enhance and secure MemComputing's Saas platform within a matter of months, such that by the end of 2019 MemComputing was able to on-board several well-known Global 500 clients to the platform as well as utilize the platform for demonstrations of several paid proof-of-concept projects.

"I feel that only a leader with the sort of experience that Larry brought to MemComputing could have accomplished so much in such a short period of time," said one of several people who nominated Heminger for his award.

Heminger has developed a technology roadmap and strategy to further develop the MemCPU SaaS into a truly multi-cloud architecture, providing the ability to scale its compute intensive applications across each of the major public cloud infrastructures.

## PRIVATE MICRO HONOREE
# ANTHONY ZOBLESCIN

*Director of Information*
*Technology*
*Pacific Debt Inc.*

Anthony Zoblescin has positioned his company, Pacific Debt, to meet the challenges of 2020 and double its staff by 2021.

Located in downtown San Diego, Pacific Debt settles millions of dollars in consumer debt each month. Like many debt negotiation call centers, Pacific Debt spends millions of dollars per year on lead generation. Zoblescin's technology innovation now allows the company to maximize its use of very expensive purchased lead generation data. It also drives better performance by the sales reps to consult with clients and close more deals. This is a better ROI all the way around.

Zoblescin planned, developed and delivered an integration between Pacific Debt's online sales funnels, Experian's credit pull APIs and Pacific Debt's sales CRM, allowing prospective consumers to pull their own credit, prequalify for services and receive a prospective savings estimate during lead submittal, strengthening contact rates during the prospecting sales process.

His work upgrading the internal network infrastructure to future-proof the business and provide additional layers of network security has served the company well. Zoblescin has implemented business continuity planning at all levels of IT systems and infrastructure, which has paid dividends with Covid-19. Right now, 100% of call center workers are remote. Business has not declined, and there have been no layoffs under his direction.

A commitment to Pacific Debt's staff — as well as his creativity, innovation and humility — make Anthony Zoblescin a leader.

## PRIVATE SMALL HONOREE
# JERRY CREEKBAUM

*Chief Technology Officer*
*Expedition Communications*

Jerry Creekbaum has hit the ground running since joining Expedition Communications by advancing the company's entry into the satellite broadband internet market. His twofold focus has been to gain market share for an emergency responder offering in the United States, and to develop business continuity solutions for organizations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For the business continuity line of service, Creekbaum has on-boarded an entirely new team with a new product for the company. This has diversified Expedition's income stream.

Cost has been a challenge for first-responder communications. Creekbaum has been able to look at this age-old industry challenge and recognize a competitive solution. He spent the first few months at Expedition Communications collaborating with its satellite capacity partner. With his leadership, a new business model for first responders was formed. It breaks from tradition by offering first responders a pooled plan, allowing an unlimited number of nomadic satellite terminals to be configured within the plan and one simple annual fee for the bandwidth.

Creekbaum's leadership is characterized by strategic thinking; he uses his strong engineering background to visualize and solve end-to-end design challenges. He doesn't go it alone, however; he is a collaborative problem solver. He builds trust with his employees with transparency, providing clarity in process and expectation.

Based in Carlsbad, Expedition Communications specializes in satellite internet systems, digital signage and wireless networking, with 24-7 tech support to global locations.

## PRIVATE MEDIUM HONOREE
# BROOK BENSON

*Manager of IT*
*Balboa United*

Before Brook Benson arrived at Balboa United — a services organization that helps medical practices — the organization relied 100% on an outsourced IT managed services provider. That provider had been in place for more than 10 years, held all the "keys to the kingdom" and provided very little documentation. For a little more than a year, Benson performed extensive discovery across the organization's more than 25 locations. He selected a new IT managed services partner to help only with targeted items and projects. This move created a great deal of savings while mitigating future risk.

He delicately moved 23 virtual servers and all their non-static data to a new virtualized cloud environment. This was done with little to no help and no root access. Benson also negotiated a very flexible Infrastructure-as-a-service deal so Balboa now has the option to shrink its server footprint and/or move applications to a larger cloud services provider. Again, the move was a money-saver. It gave the company 100% access to its data and allows for flexibility to increase ROI.

In addition, Benson set up telehealth functionality for clients and migrated locations from a traditional phone system to a cloud-hosted PBX.

While many of the projects Benson completed in 2019 may sound like table stakes to an IT professional, he was able to transform the entire company's IT strategy in 12 months with little to no help — all while serving more than 25 locations supporting critically ill patients.

## PRIVATE LARGE HONOREE
# MICHAEL SINGER

*Executive Vice President of*
*Technology*
*Veyo LLC*

Veyo can thank Michael Singer for making big technological strides in 2019.

The company matches riders who need non-emergency medical transportation with drivers. As the firm's executive vice president of technology, Singer helped introduce Veyoville, a high scale, high fidelity simulation of a typical city that allows Veyo to experiment with different matching algorithms. Using this simulation, Veyo was able to improve its matching of trips to drivers by 15% or more than 1 million rides, getting more of its members to their appointments on time and keeping more drivers busy.

Singer also introduced Veyo's RideView portal and developed HAL the Chatbot. The latter saved Veyo $1.5 million in 2019 and is growing in 2020 to enable full conversations and create even more savings for the company.

In his role, Singer evangelizes Veyo's technology. He has become a thought leader in the nonemergency transportation field on topics ranging from artificial intelligence and big data to the use of autonomous vehicles.

Those who know him say Singer has a can-do attitude; he is an expert at execution and a master of innovation. He is also a servant leader, understanding that a high-performing team can only be successful if all members of the team are successful, feel appreciated and are on a path to continuous improvement.

## PRIVATE EXTRA LARGE HONOREE
# RAM PATRACHARI

*Chief Information Officer*
*Viejas Casino and Resort*

Ram Patrachari gets things done at Viejas Casino and Resort. During his tenure, he helped expand the gaming floor by 300% and provided IT services to Viejas' new hotel buildings. He was instrumental in upgrading a state of the art, 4,000 square foot data center, taking the project from initial concept to completion in a record six months.

He has implemented the agile methodology SCRUM approach to project management within Viejas. This shortened delivery times on projects by more than 40% while improving IT alignment with the business. He has implemented several virtualization projects that decreased the physical server count by more than 70%. This resulted in a 40% reduction in power and cooling expenses.

He also established a management framework that helped guide the information technology department's actions. This enabled the IT organization to align more readily with the overall organization's goals and objectives. Under his guidance, the IT department enforced a strict change management methodology whereby the reliability and integrity of the systems improved greatly. The increase in revenues was attributable to the increased uptime numbers of the systems and supported software applications.

Patrachari manages a budget exceeding $5 million. He oversees five director level direct reports and 35 indirect reports. His leadership style is characterized by honesty, integrity, confidence and an ability to inspire others.

## PUBLIC SMALL HONOREE
# FELIKS DUSHATSKY

*Director of Information*
*Technology*
*ImprimisRx*

As the IT director for ImprimisRx, a specialty pharmaceutical company, Feliks Dushatsky manages people and projects to ensure that pharmacy staff can manufacture and process orders and that patients receive their crucial medications. Dushatsky has overseen a number of successful projects, including setting up the infrastructure, storage and network of an offsite data center; switching the company network, replacing the firewall and migrating the service desk to a new platform; and significantly raising the organization's Microsoft security score in Office 365 with various measures.

He has also upgraded and migrated a phone system and call center to a new platform; migrated ERP and pharmacy management software; overseen on-premise and cloud backup optimization; conducted audits for cost savings (Office 365, AWS); and implemented internal controls to assure compliance (HIPAA, SOX, PCI).

Dushatsky's community service includes providing hands-on help and strategic leadership to an animal hospital in East County. He regularly assists with general IT work, networking and security. When it comes to interpersonal networking and continuing education, one of his focal points is security. He is a member of the Palo Alto Networks FUEL user group and attends the Blackhat, DEFCON, Palo Alto Ignite and ToorCon cybersecurity conferences to stay up to date on trends.

Dushatsky is collaborative and a good communicator. He is also accountable, taking responsibility for his team's work. The combination makes for an excellent company culture.

## PUBLIC LARGE HONOREE
# AMY DEFORD

*Director of Information*
*Technology Operations*

Amy Deford came to WD-40 Co. a little over a year ago. In that time she has transformed the IT operations, service desk and information security departments.

WD-40, a maker of lubricants and other products, has a global operation. Under Deford's leadership, WD-40 has successfully migrated to Azure, Microsoft's cloud computing offering. Deford has disrupted the thinking of a lot of colleagues by being able to run a global company for areas under her purview completely in the cloud. Where many have argued that this approach is too costly or risky, she has proved them wrong. By steering away from the traditional on-premises approach, the business anticipates saving $2 million over five years. She has also been able to keep the solution secure and has provided for the ability to do full failover almost automatically to another part of the company should one part go offline.

One positive impact from taking IT to the cloud was almost zero business impact when work from home became mandated. "We didn't skip a beat," said Doug Cyphers, the WD-40 executive who nominated Deford for her award.

On top of all this, Deford has established a solid change management process that all IT departments participate in on a regular basis. The result is not a single self-inflicted service disruption over her tenure.

## GOVERNMENT HONOREE
# SCOTT DAESCHNER

*Deputy Director, Department of*
*Information Technology*
*City of San Diego*

Scott Daeschner works with maps. As deputy director in the city of San Diego's IT department, he runs the computer mapping division, formally known as the Geographic Information System (GIS) Division. Last year, Daeschner implemented a plan to centralize GIS across the city to reduce costs, drive value from synergies, and bring efficiencies and innovation for public services.

He has helped several city departments with their needs. One of his recent projects was to comply with a Federal Communications Commission rule requiring cities to make their assets available to host 5G wireless telecom equipment. The city's permit issuance process had historically taken 6-10 months per assessment and new FCC rules required a permit decision in 60-90 days. Daeschner's team created specialized software for the task, supporting the Development Services Department within a very compressed development window to ensure equity and transparency to the process.

Daeschner's work is marked by vision, collaboration and innovation. He received the President's Award from ESRI, a maker of GIS software, in July 2019. The company selected him from 150,000 worldwide customers for his leadership and innovation.

Daeschner is on the management committee of SanGIS, which brings the city and county of San Diego together to deliver efficient and effective municipal GIS services to the public.

He has driven incredible value and efficiencies into city services and is truly a leader in GIS.

## BENEFIT>>
**FROM 22**

a bargain compared to Silicon Valley. (The Valley can also be a "pressure cooker," Gursky added).

With high-tech talent and a beach city mood, "San Diego is the best of both worlds," he said.

Behnke agreed there might be an influx of talent. "I think it can improve our tech community," he said.

"San Diego is going to be an awesome place for people who decide Silicon Valley isn't their bag anymore," said the YMCA's Merritt.

As for living in San Diego, or Idaho, on a Silicon Valley salary? That might not happen.

Tech companies are saying that the six-figure salaries they pay workers living in Silicon Valley will not go to workers who relocate to other parts of the United States. Salaries will be indexed to the cost of living of whatever city a worker elects to join.

"I'm very interested to watch the migration patterns," Gursky said.

As an aside, Gursky said he lived in Las Vegas at the time it became a tech hub. Home prices grew rapidly when that city received an influx of technology workers, he said.

### Home Work and Hoteling

With the new emphasis on working remotely, the real estate needs for organizations are changing.

EvoNexus has gone from 24,000 square feet to 6,000 square feet of building space. "I think that our experience at EvoNexus is probably similar to other companies in that we are now 25% percent physical and 75% virtual," Thompson said.

Some San Diego companies with employees coming into the office only a few days per week are moving to a "hoteling" format, assigning spaces on a day-by-day basis, said local tech executive Mike Krenn.

Krenn is CEO of Connect w/San Diego Venture Group, a longtime San Diego organization offering resources to tech

startups.

The executive noted that a lot of San Diego businesses still need to be tied to specialized commercial real estate. Biotechnology firms need their wet labs.

### A Virtual Office?

Gursky said he's not convinced that every job can be done remotely, and said people naturally like to be together.

Still, there are ways to make a place seem like something altogether different. He spoke about the power of the flight simulators on the retired aircraft carrier USS Midway, and their ability to put people in a different space, at least mentally.

He also spoke about how virtual reality technology of the future may make the remote work experience a little more like a face-to-face encounter, an experience of "we are with someone in a place."

People familiar with videogames may be most familiar with the possibilities of such technology. Graphics on videogames are getting "ridiculously good," he said.

## LEADERS>>
**FROM 22**

Prior to COVID-19, the desktop computer with a separate monitor was a prominent feature in the schools. With school staffs working from home and students learning at home, schools have placed more of an emphasis on mobile computing, said Loftus, who is assistant superintendent and chief technology officer with the San Diego County Office of Education.

With that came a demand for training, as well as for cybersecurity software for mobile devices.

A worldwide demand for mobile devices, as well as COVID-19's effect on the supply chain in Asia, has slowed the education office's ability to get technology quickly, however. Mobile devices used to be available in a week, Loftus said. At the height of the pandemic, the same device took two or three months to obtain. The timing is a little better now. It currently takes four to six weeks to get a mobile device.

### Changing Course

Joe Gursky, director of information technology for the USS Midway Museum, said at the beginning of the year, his organization was building out infrastructure for a restaurant at his museum. Now, however, visitors are

limited to outdoor spaces of the museum. The digital menu boards and point of sale systems will be needed eventually, but for now, the project has been delayed.

Still, the pace is fast.

"We're busier than we've ever been with infrastructure, making sure things are running," said Gursky. The organization used its downtime to replace essential hardware.

In recent months, the Midway's information

technology staff added a Security Event and Information Management (or SEIM) platform from Splunk. Among other things, the software lets Midway staff keep track of attendance and whether the museum is complying with health regulations.

> "
> **"We're really accelerating things we hoped to do in the coming year or two."**
>
> JONATHAN BEHNKE

With only the outdoor portion of the museum open, the Midway is using technology such as internet-connected touchscreens to let visitors look around off-limits spaces, such as the engine room.

In the same way, Gursky said, information technology is helping to bring images of the Midway and docent commentary to school groups across the nation.

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## EDUCATION HONOREE
# STEPHANIE CASPERSON

*San Marcos Unified School District*
*Director of Educational Technology*

As director of educational technology for the San Marcos Unified School District, Stephanie Casperson serves in two roles gracefully and simultaneously: one of leader and one of supporter. She leads and serves through high expectations for herself and others. She is humble in taking credit for results, yet takes things personally if results are not what she expected.

She has shaped the culture of her team by example. Casperson is connected to work 24/7. She answers her phone, texts and emails immediately and solves the problem just as quickly. The information technology team responds immediately to any issues at the schools; this is Casperson's expectation. She understands the urgent needs of teachers and administrators as she has held both of those positions previously.

During the recent school closures, the district has transformed its system from a "brick and mortar" learning model to a distance learning model.

Casperson has been part of every step. Her work in leading and supporting this transformation included surveying families to determine their IT needs and having her team update 4,000 end-of-life Chromebooks in two days to prepare them for checkout. In the days since, she has offered professional development to teachers getting up to speed in distance learning, and tech troubleshooting for parents and staff.

The San Marcos district serves 21,000 students in grades K-12 and runs 18 schools. It employs about 2,400 people.

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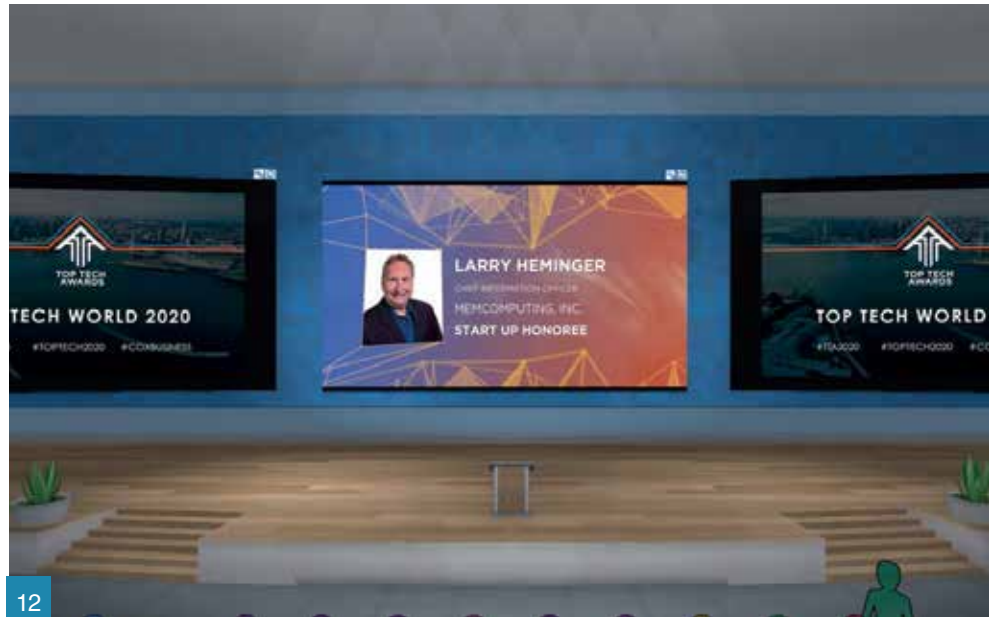**Anthony Zoblescin**
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The 13th annual Top Tech Awards, presented by Cox Business, hosted more than 500 registered guests virtually on Sept. 17. Those in attendance celebrated the 191 qualified nominees submitted for a Top Tech honor.

Using an immersive technology platform, Cox Business redefined networking by creating Top Tech World to recognize the nominees and announce the honorees. The awards presentation streamed through both the virtual world and the Top Tech Awards website to announce 13 Top Tech honors.

Since 2007, Cox Business has hosted the Top Tech Awards to pay homage to the wealth of talent in the San Diego community who have vision, take risks and implement cutting-edge technologies, all in the name of making their organizations more connected, more productive and more successful.



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1 - Vice President Cox Business, San Diego: Duane Cameron with CBS 8 Anchor and Top Tech Emcee Heather Myers.

2 - Behind the scenes during the presentation of the Top Tech Awards

3 - Director of Information Technology for the USS Midway and Top Tech Judging Chair Joe Gursky.

4 - Lifetime Achievement Honoree, Rich Coppa Vice President of Infrastructure of The Arc of San Diego.

5 - Lifetime Honoree Rich Coppa, watching award video prior to giving acceptance speech Co-Founder & CEO.

6 - Jake Fields, COX Business Exemplary Honoree and CTO of Platform Science

7 - Jerry Creekbaum of Expedition Communications, Top Tech Honoree in the private small company category was presented his award by CEO Dean Eldridge.

8 - Top Tech Honoree Jeffrey Hamilton Director of Technology for Mental Health Systems was presented his award by CEO Jim Callaghan at a surprise meeting.

9 - Jim Wild, General Manager of Viejas presented Top Tech Honoree, Ram Patrachari of Viejas Resort and Casino his award in a surprise dinner meeting the night of the event.

10 - Scott Daeshner- Scott Daeshner, Deputy Director for the City of San Diego and Top Tech Honoree in the Government Category was presented his award by Top Tech Judge, Jonathan Behnke.

11 - Cox Business Executive team as avatars in Top Tech World

12 - Top Tech Start Up Category Honoree, Larry Heminger of MemComputing Inc. honored in the Top Tech virtual world.

13 - Shane Hansen of Thompson Instrument Company as an avatar in Top Tech World.

14 - Gold Sponsor ScaleMatrix ready for visitors at the ScaleMatrix virtual world booth.

15 - Top Tech photographer, Brant Bender visits Top Tech Awards booth in the virtual exhibit hall

16 - Past Honoree, current Judge and Advisory Committee member, CIO of the YMCA John Merritt as an avatar in virtual Top Tech world.

17 - The Top Tech Awards presentation was streamed through Top Tech World and also via the Top Tech Awards website.

18 - Top Tech Awards Sponsors were highlighted in both the program and the virtual world.

19 - Cox Business congratulating Top Tech nominee Becky Sergi of SGPA Architecture and Planning.

20 - ScaleMatrix team along with Top Tech Judge, Ryan Fay of Gartner, took a spin around Top Tech world via boat.