Congratulations Winners

Samantha Anderson
Origin 63

Stacey Anfuso
La Jolla Logic

Elizabeth Barrie
Barrie + CO

Teresa Campbell
San Diego County Credit Union

Kim Folsom
Founders First Capital Partners LLC

Danielle Fontanesi
Fontanesi Legal Consulting

Cheryl K. Goodman
Sony Electronics, Inc.

Rangapriya (Priya) Kannan
University of San Diego

Alessandra Lezama
TOOTRIS

Nancy Maldonado
Chicano Federation of San Diego County

Lidia S. Martinez
Lifetime Achievement Honoree

Catherine Rells
Gene Tox Lab Solutions, Inc.

Megan Storer
2-1-1 San Diego

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Letter from the Publisher

On behalf of the San Diego Business Journal, welcome to the 27th annual post-event section showcasing those honored at our 2020 San Diego Business Women of the Year Awards held virtually on Nov. 19. It is a privilege to honor the accomplishments and significant roles these business women have played in the success of both their organizations and in the community.

The 12 winners were chosen by a panel of judges from more than 300 nominations: Chris Bryant, past president and CEO of the San Diego Employers Association, Iris Garcia, president and chairwoman of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Debra Rosen, president and CEO of the North San Diego Business Chamber and Ronson Shamoun, CEO and founder of RJS Law.

We were also honored to present Lidia S. Martinez with our Lifetime Achievement Award. Recently retired from Southwest Airlines, Lidia's community outreach work and giving spirit helped her to set her company's standard for outreach and corporate social responsibility.

In addition to the awards ceremony, this event included a discussion on “The Power of Mentorship” and how women can help women further their careers by mentoring others. Thank you to Cheryl K. Goodman, head of corporate communications, for moderating this discussion. And thank you to our panelists Carrie Vilaplana, vice president and private wealth advisor with The Private Bank of Union Bank, Krista Goryl, senior vice president and regional manager for Wells Fargo Advisors, and Marie-Aline Zappia-Kuzmaack, RN, MSN, chief administrative officer Kaiser Permanente San Diego.

Special thanks also to our sponsors, Kaiser Permanente, Sony Electronics, Union Bank, and Wells Fargo. Enjoy reading about this year's honorees. Congratulations to all.

Barb Chodos
President & Publisher

Judges

Chris Bryant
Retired President & CEO - San Diego Employers Association

Debra Rosen
President & CEO
North San Diego Business Chamber

Iris Garcia
President and Chairwoman
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Ronson J. Shamoun
Founder and CEO
RJS Law

Chris Bryant served as President and CEO of the San Diego Employers Association. Chris came to the organization after spending many years in banking, where she held leadership roles in Business Banking, Sales and Marketing, Lending, Human Resources and Administration at the local, statewide, and national level. Chris volunteers with a number of organizations and is known for her commitment to the San Diego community. She currently serves as the Treasurer for RFS Haven's Children's Health Fund, is the Past President and current board member of the Executives Association of San Diego and she is a member of the DREAS Advisory Council for National University's School of Business and Management. Chris also served as the Treasurer for the Nationwide American Lung Association and she is a graduate of LEAD San Diego.

Since assuming her position in 2009, Rosen has built the Chamber into a respected regional business organization, diversifying its programs, membership and Board of Directors. Lobbying for business and communities in the San Diego region has been a focus of the chamber with an emphasis on job growth, vibrant communities, business retention and expansion. Rosen has aggressively advanced a competitive agenda that includes building strong chamber membership and advocacy for business, strengthening political relationships, developing a sustainable military program, and protecting business interests on a local and state level. When not working she enjoys spending time with her children, husband of 37 years, boating and a great bottle of Champagne.

As current Chairwoman of the San Diego Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Iris Garcia counts with a complete spectrum of relationships stemming from business to civic leaders, allied alongside important philanthropic organizations, and a flourishing experience executing various aspects of business gatherings from workshops to galas for over 10 years. Her strengths in new collaborative work have resulted in multiple benefits for underserved communities in San Diego County and Tijuana. Additionally, mentoring and teaching have always been passions, core instilled from early on in volunteering to serve high-risk youth for more than a decade.

Ronson J. Shamoun is the founder and CEO of RJS LAW. RJS LAW was voted San Diego's Best Tax Law Firm by the UT's best poll 5 years in a row and also in 2020. The firm specializes in tax disputes, estate planning and trust administration. Mr. Shamoun is an adjunct professor and advisory board member at USD School of Law and School of Business. He is the recipient of the USD LAW Distinguished Alumni award; CEO of the Year, SD 50, and SD 500 by the SDBJ; and founded the nationally recognized USD LAW-RJS LAW Tax Controversy Institute. Most recently, he was awarded San Diego Business Journal's 2020 CEO of the Year in the Small Business Category.
Congratulations
Lidia S. Martinez
San Diego Business Journal's 2020 Business Women of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award Honoree!

“If you are successful, it is because somewhere, sometime, someone gave you a life or an idea that started you in the right direction. Remember also that you are indebted to life until you help someone less fortunate, just as you were helped.”

-Melinda Gates
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Lidia S. Martinez Champions Corporate Social Responsibility

AWARDS: Mentorship Plays a Big Role in Her Life Story

BY BRAD GRAVES

For 30 years, Lidia S. Martinez has been a visible reminder of Southwest Airlines’ commitment to corporate social responsibility. For a long time, she has handled community outreach on behalf of the Fortune 500 company.

But she didn’t get there by herself.

Martinez is very aware of the role of mentors in her life. “I benefited from people who believed in me, who took me under their wing,” she said in a recent interview.

She is intent on passing all the knowledge she has gathered on to another generation.

One of her favorite quotes is from philanthropist Melinda Gates. “If you are successful,” Gates said, “it is because somewhere, sometime, someone gave you a life or an idea that started you in the right direction. Remember also that you are indebted to life until you help some less fortunate person, just as you were helped.”

A Full Itinerary

Martinez’s trajectory has been from a girl living in the border town of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to a community outreach manager for a person whose itinerary had her crisscrossing the country on jet aircraft, frequently, interacting with top executives and doing the work of a Fortune 500 company.

She recently retired as manager for community outreach at Southwest Airlines after spending a little more than 30 years with the company. Much of that time has been in San Diego.

Martinez leaves quite a legacy at Southwest. She helped launch the company’s National Multicultural Community Affairs Department in 2003. She was one of five individuals who successfully created the outreach platform for Southwest to invest in and engage with communities.

Jeff Nevin and Mariachi Champaña participated in Southwest Airlines’ Cabo inaugural flight festivities. Pictured here with Lidia S. Martinez and Leah Koontz of Southwest Airlines.

Once they were out in the open, others got used to being on the road. “I spent off offices on the West Coast, so Martinez became quite familiar with areas like Chicago and the cities where he worked (a journey that included eight winters in Chicago).”

Some family moments, but she feels the experience was well worth it.

Martinez said a lot of her mentoring came from the Southwest Airlines’ marketing department early in her career. “Proposing goodwill over ROI has helped,” she added.

“Proposing goodwill over ROI has helped launch the company’s National Multicultural Community Affairs Department in 2003. She was one of five individuals who successfully created the outreach platform for Southwest to invest in and engage with communities.”

“The effort has been felt far beyond the airline’s sphere. Martinez helped Southwest set a standard for outreach and corporate social responsibility that other companies now aspire to.”

Lifetime Achievement Award

Martinez was honored recently with the Lifetime Achievement Award during the San Diego Business Journal’s 2020 Business Women of the Year Awards. She said she accepted the award with great emotion, and was humbled to be in the same company as other Lifetime Achievement Award winners.

Martinez said that her work with Southwest, and her support of nonprofit organizations, has done a great deal of good. And it offered her a few specifics.

Her support helped students go on college tours from coast to coast. It has helped create a world that is just and fully equal for all LGBTQ+ people. Her support helped empower Latinas, as well as fly Black and Brown students to Washington, D.C. to learn about civic engagement. That support helped elevate and advance urban leadership, and it has helped provide a place where families in need can find the means to self-sufficiency.

Martinez said she takes pride in knowing that she served as her community’s voice within corporate America.

A group of Martinez’s peers offered congratulations on video during the San Diego Business Journal’s virtual awards ceremony. They included two of Martinez’s Southwest Airlines peers. Kelly Knox and Laura Nieto, as well as Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, vice president with the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and LEAD San Diego, and Inez González, executive director of MANA de San Diego. Martinez also thanked her friend and colleague Leah Koontz, the airline’s vice president and controller, “who from Day 1 championed all things San Diego. We had fun supporting important causes and more importantly, we became friends for life.”

Jeff Nevin and Mariachi Champaña participated in Southwest Airlines’ Cabo inaugural flight festivities. Pictured here with Lidia S. Martinez and Leah Koontz of Southwest Airlines.

Dr. Inez González Perezchica, executive director of MANA de San Diego (left), Lidia S. Martinez and Dr. Ted Martinez Jr.

Lidia S. Martinez stands with frontline Southwest Airlines employees to show appreciation for community partners.
Navigating the Halls of Power

People may not believe Martinez on one point — that she was a shy person, and in many ways still is. But she has learned so speak up. If she kept her mouth closed, she said, she would be working on somebody else’s vision, and have someone else telling her story.

Besides, the business world can be competitive. Martinez said she learned to get her ideas out on the table quickly. Once they were out in the open, others might reject them — but at least she had the advantage of broaching the subject in the first place.

Looking Ahead

Martinez said a lot of her mentoring came from people in the nonprofit community, and CEOs in the business community. “I learn from people I respect and trust,” she said.

These days she finds herself mentoring other leaders “I make sure I make time for them,” Martinez said.

Her community involvement includes MANA de San Diego, part of a national organization for Latinas. (The name is a truncated version of the Spanish word for sister, hermana). Its goal is to empower Latinas through education, leadership development, community service and advocacy. Martinez will be coaching up-and-coming leaders through her work with the group.

In retirement, Martinez plans to work with nonprofit organizations such as HOPE of Los Angeles. The acronym stands for Hispanics Organized for Political Equality. It is a nonpartisan organization committed to ensuring political and economic parity for Latinas.

She said she will continue to support organizations that focus on equity, equality, human and civil rights.

She is also focused on helping individuals. In particular, Martinez feels that she has a capacity for mentoring young women. “If I can relate to their needs,” she said, “Been there, done that.”

“All businesses, small and big, have an opportunity to bring value to people’s lives,” Martinez said in accepting her Lifetime Achievement Award. “Let’s help those less fortunate and give them a life of opportunities that will get them going in the right direction. Because who knows? Your next best hire may just be that little girl from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua.”
Cheryl K. Goodman, Head of Corporate Communications at Sony Electronics, leads the corporate communications strategy for Sony North America. Goodman oversees executive communications, corporate social responsibility programs and employee communications. Goodman's experience spans a variety of sectors, including media, technology and non-profit organizations. Prior to her executive appointment at Sony, Goodman led a diverse and successful career in communications and public relations, including roles at Jupiter Media, AARP and The New York Times. Goodman holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Public Relations Society of America and serves as the chair of its Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Goodman was named PR Week's Woman of the Year in 2020 and is a frequent contributor to industry publications and event panels. She is also an active board member for Youth on Record and the Galvanize Institute.
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Congratulations Meg Storer

We are honored to have you on our team!

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Samantha Anderson is the co-founder and president of Origin 63, a company specializing in sales, marketing, and customer service technology solutions using the HubSpot software platform. She was previously the co-founder and chief operations officer of 41 Orange, a B2B events marketing and lead generation company that worked with clients like ADP, Systran, Robots & Pencils and others. She oversaw the company’s successful pivot of services to HubSpot support packages (as Origin 63) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pivot impressed the judges of the 2020 San Diego Business Journal Business Women of the Year Awards, who named her Rising Star.

“I am absolutely humbled to be recognized among these amazing leaders,” Anderson said in accepting her award. “To all the nominees and to the award winners, congratulations, because this recognition really is a testament to your strength and resilience in the face of adversity.”

Looking back, Anderson said that 2020 was probably one of the hardest years in business for her. However, the pivot and the new business both turned out to be successes.

Anderson is a graduate of San Diego State University where she received a B.A. in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations and a minor in Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience. She co-founded and served as COO of 41 Orange in 2012; the relaunch as Origin 63 came in April.

At Origin 63, Anderson has pioneered a distributed team and virtual working environment with flex scheduling that supports employees’ work/life balance, while also contributing to the sustainability of the company. She believes a flexible work environment allows employees to pursue their professional goals while also raising a family.

In addition, Anderson has spent four years on the board of San Diego’s historic ballet school, San Diego Civic Youth Ballet. Most recently, she has helped the nonprofit organization navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and offer classes virtually.

As a pioneer of innovation in cybersecurity technology in aerospace and defense, Stacey Anfuso, founder and CEO of La Jolla Logic, has made significant strides in improving the U.S. Navy’s cyber posture on its enterprise networks.

She and her company have done it through the application of artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques. This now-patented technology is recognized as a critical component for the military and U.S. Navy.

These and other new technologies make her work exciting, Anfuso said. Such forward thinking has also spurred the company. La Jolla Logic has been recognized nationally for its fast growth.


“I’m very honored to be receiving this award,” Anfuso said. “I thank the San Diego Business Journal for this opportunity as well as the excellent team we have here at La Jolla Logic. Without each and every one of our team members, it just wouldn’t have been possible to have come this far.”

La Jolla Logic was nationally recognized as one of the fastest-growing private companies in America by Inc. Magazine in its 2020 survey. Stacey Anfuso’s entrepreneurial insights and perseverance have also been recognized by the U.S. Small Business Administration, which honored La Jolla Logic with the District Director’s Growth in the Technology Sector Award in 2018, and as San Diego’s Woman-Owned Small Business of the Year in 2019.

La Jolla Logic is no longer strictly a Navy contractor. It works for other branches of the military as well as commercial customers.

The company will soon celebrate its 10th anniversary.

“It’s been really a great time and a great ride, and a lot of fun working with the capabilities and such a competent staff,” Anfuso said.
There’s a lot involved in taking your business to the next level — from financing expansion and improving cash flow, to marketing services and transition planning. You’ll find ideas and solutions that may help you grow your business at wellsfargoworks.com.

Let’s get started. Visit your local branch or find a time that works for you at wellsfargo.com/appointments.
Elizabeth Barrie is an architect, a builder, an educator and the owner of a successful business in San Diego. Nearly six years ago she followed her passion and fearlessly made a career move that involved significant personal and financial risks. The success of Barrie + CO has shown the design and construction industry that Elizabeth Barrie has the technical and business acumen to be a major player in San Diego’s competitive construction management market.

She is a winner in the Small Company Category in the San Diego Business Journal’s Business Women of the Year Awards.

Barrie said she felt honored to receive her award, and she addressed all of the other women recognized by the program. “I feel very fortunate to be among all of you,” she said, “and I think without your leadership and your mentorship and your challenge to set the bar just a little bit higher, I wouldn’t be where I am today for sure.”

On the metrics alone, Barrie has shown herself to be a successful businesswoman, achieving an increase in sales volume of 142% and a more than 300% increase in professional staff. She attributes her company’s success to a very talented group of employees and to the business plan she created with her business partner Shawn Lantz six years ago.

The wider community has benefited from Barrie’s leadership. Earlier this year, when COVID-19 nearly shut down the city, she immediately came up with a plan to help two sectors of our local economy that had been particularly hard hit by the pandemic – hospitals and restaurants. Launching a GoFundMe drive called Local Food for Local Medical Heroes-San Diego, she was able to raise $18,000 over a 10-week period that was used to buy 2,100 meals from local restaurants that were distributed to frontline workers at several local hospitals.

For 10 years, Teresa Campbell has brought business acumen and insight to San Diego County Credit Union. Numbers tell part of the story. SDCCU has grown to $9.3 billion in assets and reached over 425,000 members. Membership has more than doubled (from 204,000 in August 2010) in the 10 years Campbell has served as president and CEO.

Campbell is a highly strategic and effective leader. When faced with a crisis, she does what is right for employees and the community. The credit union’s principle that People Come First and Profits Second guided SDCCU’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communication to employees began in early March with clear practices detailing safe operations. Employees were protected with continuous information, distribution of personal protective equipment and the installation of Plexiglas. Approximately 16% of the workforce was designated for remote work. Some branches were closed and others had hours adjusted, and marketing drove customers to online and mobile platforms.

Non-management branch staff on the front line received temporary 25% base pay increases. Operations staff received 20% during the initial months of the pandemic, along with the ability to wear comfortable clothing to work.

Recognizing her leadership in the near term as well as success in the long term, judges voted to present Teresa Campbell with one of the San Diego Business Journal’s 2020 Business Women of the Year Awards.

“I am honored to be recognized as a 2020 Business Woman of the Year, especially among so many dynamic leaders who are making remarkable contributions to San Diego workplaces and communities,” Campbell said. “This acknowledgement is especially rewarding given the challenges that all business leaders have faced this year. I’m incredibly proud and thankful for my leadership team and staff at SDCCU for their commitment to providing exceptional service even in the most challenging of times.”

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**Biosero**

**Congratulations Andrea Salazar**

Chief Operations Officer of Biosero
Business Women of the Year Award 2020 Finalist

We applaud Andrea for her executive leadership at Biosero. As a role model for minority women in business and through her community service for Girls Inc. of San Diego and Del Mar Women’s Giving Collective, Andrea empowers women and girls to excel.

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During her career, Kim Folsom has raised more than $30 million in institutional venture financing, created over 500 premium wage jobs and has founded or served as a key executive for six successful ventures.

Today she is CEO of Founders First Capital Partners LLC, as well as CEO of the nonprofit Founders First Community Development Corp. The latter helps underserved and underrepresented small business owners overcome the challenges they face due to lack of access to financial and human capital.


“This is such an amazing experience to receive this recognition for the great work that we do at Founders First,” Folsom said.

Founders First Capital Partners is the largest minority and women-led, revenue-based venture platform with $100 million in committed capital. Its focus is partnering with employer-based, contract revenue generating small businesses.

“I started this company five years ago to leverage a handful of successes and a mountain of lessons learned overcoming challenges with the six prior venture backed companies that I ran,” she recalled. “Along the way, I learned how to create value, solve big market problems, deliver solutions for my customers as well as convince VCs to think outside the box to help me innovate and create solutions.”

In accepting her award, Folsom thanked her friends, teammates and stakeholders. She fondly recalled how her mother, father and brother showed her how to succeed — each in a unique way.

She also reassured businesses owners stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. “You’re not alone,” she said. “Be open to ask for help, and know that there are folks that are out here that want to support your success.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Danielle Fontanesi responded. She joined forces with a team of tech experts, epidemiologists, public health experts and public policy leaders to provide government officials and the general public with a tool to gather and analyze the best-available local-level data on COVID-19 in the United States. Her organization is called Covid Act Now.

In addition, Fontanesi continues to run and manage her own law practice, where she acts as external general counsel to startups and rapid growth companies. She has extensive experience in all areas of business and corporate law from initial company formation to highly complex cross-border mergers and acquisitions.

During her husband’s battle with leukemia, she left her job as Associate General Counsel of a multinational renewable energy company and became her husband’s full-time caregiver as he recovered from a bone marrow transplant. After a year of living in hospitals and isolation, Fontanesi returned to work. She needed maximum flexibility during her husband’s recovery, so she started her own law practice.

“It was not an easy path to get to where I am today,” she said of her roughly four years in private practice. “I have had an incredible set of teachers along the way, not the least of which have been my clients.”

In recognition of her achievements, Fontanesi received a Rising Star Award in the 2020 San Diego Business Journal Business Women of the Year Awards.

“I’m so honored to be the recipient of this award,” Fontanesi said, offering her congratulations to all of this year’s other nominees. “It is such an honor to be part of such an incredible, successful and inspirational group of women.”

In addition to the above, she is actively involved in the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (San Diego & Hawaii Chapters), UCSD Moores Cancer Center, and Padres Pedal the Cause.
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Cheryl Goodman leads by example in every aspect of her career and constantly advocates for women in the tech field in her executive position at Sony Electronics Inc. She has made it her personal mission to increase awareness around cognitive diversity, gender equity and the unique role each individual can play. Goodman is a fierce proponent of lifting other women up and around cognitive diversity, gender equity and the power of creativity and technology.

■ ■ ■

Professor Priya Kannan’s vision is to transform every student on the University of San Diego campus into an ethical, entrepreneurial leader by providing each student with the values, skills, and mindset to create and grow socially responsible businesses.

■ ■ ■

“Here’s to strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them.”

— Unknown

Successful women work here.
Congratulations to Cheryl K. Goodman on being named SDBJ’s Business Woman of the Year Awards. They named Kannan a winner in the Large Company category.

Cheryl Goodman
Head of Corporate Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility, Sony Electronics Inc.

Rangapriya (Priya) Kannan, Ph.D.
Department Chair, Innovation & Entrepreneurship Department
University of San Diego School of Business

“Thank you, San Diego Business Journal, for convening leaders and for acknowledging contributions to our society on an annual basis for so many categories. If the future can’t see it, they can’t be it. So thank you for bringing some really wonderful leaders that just happen to be women to the forefront and acknowledging their contributions.”

She thanked her family as well as her boss, Mike Fasulo, COO and president of Sony Electronics North America. In addition, she noted that Sony’s global CEO, Kenichiro Yoshida, has core values that are firmly rooted in diversity.

“We know that crowdsourcing thought is cognitive diversity and cognitive diversity means profits — profits with purpose,” Goodman said. “The proof is in the profits when you run a diverse organization.”

“Two decades ago, when I came to the United States, I could not have imagined that I would be receiving this prestigious award,” she said in her acceptance speech. “Those of you that know me well know that I come from a conservative family. Breaking traditional gender role expectations and walking the path from being a traditional wife and mother to being a professor and nominated as a finalist for Business Woman of the Year was not easy and I thank every single person who helped me get here today on my journey.”

“May we raise them.”

― Unknown

Congratulations to Cheryl K. Goodman on being named SDBJ’s Business Woman of the Year Awards. They named Kannan a winner in the Large Company category.

Kannan said she was excited and honored to receive the award. She thanked her immediate and extended family as well as supporters.

“Two decades ago, when I came to the United States, I could not have imagined that I would be receiving this prestigious award,” she said in her acceptance speech. “Those of you that know me well know that I come from a conservative family. Breaking traditional gender role expectations and walking the path from being a traditional wife and mother to being a professor and nominated as a finalist for Business Woman of the Year was not easy and I thank every single person who helped me get here today on my journey.”

“May we raise them.”
Congratulations Betzy Lynch
BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR FINALIST!

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Alessandra Lezama started at the bottom both professionally and personally. She has not only taken the storied path from the sales floor to the board room during her 24-year career. The founder and CEO of TOOTRIS was also a minority immigrant in a new country and a single mom striving for a better future for her family.

In making her way through a career in a male-dominated industry (technology) and winning no less than four CEO jobs, Lezama has faced multiple obstacles and shattered glass ceilings. Along the way, she has created her own family. Lezama recently concluded work as CEO of AbacusNext. She took what was once a niche software company with less than 29 employees and, in less than four years, transformed it into a disruptive global technology organization with over 500 employees.

In 2019 she founded TOOTRIS, a tech-enabled service focused on child care. Its app gives parents, providers, and employers tools to find and deliver real-time access to child care.

Lezama is passionate about supporting women in the workforce. While women are advancing in leadership positions and as entrepreneurs, Lezama does not want to lose any momentum. “We need to continue to stand together,” she said in her acceptance speech, “and push forward to have more women reach greater heights.”

Nancy Maldonado is more than the CEO of the Chicano Federation. She is a multifaceted nonprofit thought leader who puts her community first. Throughout her career and volunteer work, she has remained committed to making an equitable impact on under-resourced communities within education, health, and social services.

Meeting the onset of the coronavirus pandemic head-on, Maldonado shifted the Chicano Federation’s focus to better meet families’ emerging needs. She initiated distribution campaigns for food and personal protective equipment, challenged elected officials to be better allies for the Latinx community, and launched a nonprofit task force dedicated to help the community heal and recover from the virus.

Taking this work into consideration, judges named Maldonado an honoree in the Medium Company Category in the San Diego Business Journal’s 2020 Business Women of the Year Awards.

“Thank you for this great honor,” Lezama said in accepting her award. “I’m always grateful to the San Diego Business Journal for their important role bringing our community together but more importantly for the recognition of all the extraordinary women here today.” She said she is sharing her award with her team, all of her supporters and “my extremely talented and hardworking mom, my best friend and partner.”

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Catherine Rells works in the worlds of medicine and music. She is one of the co-founding members and managing partners of Gene Tox Lab Solutions, which helps large and small healthcare organizations manage their patient populations through specialized lab testing, informatics, and education. Since becoming CEO, she has been able to lead the company’s vision with instilled values, faith, and a warrior spirit.

Rells is also co-founder and executive director of The House of Music, which brings musical programming and access to musical instruments to underprivileged youth. Those are just some of the efforts that led judges to name her a Rising Star in the San Diego Business Journal’s 2020 Business Women of the Year Awards.

“As a woman of Filipino and Hispanic descent, I am honored and grateful to receive this award …” Rells said. “This award is being received on behalf of many: my team, my mentors, my board, my friends and my family, but most importantly for women who continue to build companies despite politics and the current pandemic.” She offered her congratulations to all of the nominees.

Rells became CEO of Gene Tox in July 2018. She has guided the company’s strategic plan since its inception. Her servant leadership style, industry expertise, and market knowledge have helped to build the business. Recent accomplishments include recruiting a board of experienced, successful, highly respected business leaders, as well as hiring key team members. Rells is also co-inventor of a patent pending algorithm and technology platform.

At The House of Music, she continues her efforts with board recruitment and fundraising with a focused tenacity. Catherine Rells was born and raised in San Diego. She has three children and lives in Rancho Bernardo. As a woman of faith, she commits her time to being an ongoing student, leading Bible studies and encouraging others by sharing her own story.

Megan Storer’s leadership has shone as San Diego and Imperial counties have mobilized in response to COVID-19.

Storer is chief of staff for 2-1-1 San Diego, the social-service equivalent of a deluxe concierge service. The organization employs more than 200 people who connect clients to community services.

When COVID hit, the county activated 2-1-1 to respond, and calls increased by 400%. Eager to lead in the face of adversity, Meg Storer has maintained daily contact with the county to deploy its T3 initiative (an abbreviation for test, trace and treat) to 2-1-1 clientele, overseeing the delivery of messages to more than 50,000 families about testing facilities.

Also during 2020, she helped the 2-1-1 San Diego staff transition to remote work environments. Through it all, Storer has worked tirelessly to ensure that 2-1-1 San Diego connects individuals with the right community services.

William York, the CEO of 2-1-1 San Diego, said his executive team agrees that Storer is the “glue that holds 2-1-1 together.” Recognizing her role, judges named Storer an honoree in the Medium Company Category in the San Diego Business Journal’s 2020 Business Women of the Year Awards.

“I am incredibly honored and proud to be here with all of you today to accept this recognition,” Storer said. “I am so proud and honored to be a part of an amazing mosaic of trailblazers and leaders and colleagues and co-workers. You all have given me the honor to get up every morning and serve you as you serve our region.”

She thanked her mother, brother, family and closest friends. She also thanked the Business Journal “for allowing all of us to get together and carry on such a great tradition of recognizing strong women leaders and mentors in the San Diego region.”

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