On behalf of the San Diego Business Journal and the Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce, it is our pleasure to present this special edition of the 2021 Black-Owned Businesses of Year Awards ceremony held virtually on Feb. 25. Black-owned businesses have a proud tradition in San Diego. They have enriched our city in every industry, from law to hospitality, from tech to nonprofits. They have helped define who we as a community and inspire us all in their achievements.

Our goal in hosting this event was to make certain that Black businesses and their leaders are recognized for both their achievements and contributions. We hope to build awareness and the support of the entire San Diego community.

Barb Chodos
President and Publisher
San Diego Business Journal

Donna DeBerry
President and CEO
Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce

CONGRATULATIONS

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT HONOREES

Floyd and Sandra Robinson

BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES OF YEAR WINNERS

Maya Madsen
MAYA’S COOKIES

Tora Harris
JUICED BIKES

Allen F. Maxwell
OMNI2MAX

Rudolph Johnson III
NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE ASSOCIATION

NON-PROFIT CEO OF THE YEAR

BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES OF THE YEAR – RISING STAR WINNERS

Michael Cox
BLACK SD MAGAZINE

Ty Smith
COMMSAFE AI

Christine Willson
IMPERIUM FIRST CONSULTING
Inaugural Event Honors Local Black Businesses
Awards and Panel Discussion Recognize Achievements and Contributions

By NATALLIE ROCHA
Local Black-owned businesses and entrepreneurs were honored on Feb. 25 at a special virtual event held in partnership with the San Diego Business Journal and the Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce.

A panel was also held discussing how San Diego’s corporate community is finding ways to make equity a hallmark of how they do business.

The President and CEO of the San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce, Donna DeBerry, opened the event with remarks from City of San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria who underscored why it is important to spotlight the Black business community.

Fostering Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
In a panel discussion with four local executives Eugene “Mitch” Mitchell, the vice president of external and legislative affairs for Sempra Energy, moderated the conversation on how the San Diego business community can engage with issues of racial justice as well as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

Mitchell posed the question of how leaders can foster sustainable, meaningful change within their organizations through company culture to which Mark Stuart, CEO of The San Diego Foundation, started by shifting the language we use to discuss inclusion.

“For me, while I appreciate the term ‘inclusion’ I really prefer the word used by Berkley’s Haus Institute John A. Powell, and that is ‘belonging.’” Stuart said. “If you think about inclusion for a moment, that means others have to join me or I have to join others welcoming me into their circle. In belonging, we’re all doing it together.”

On this topic of culture, Caroline Winn, CEO of San Diego Gas & Electric, added that it is important for leaders to embody empathy as one of their core competencies as a way to exercise self-awareness and a curiosity for the lived experiences of others in their company.

“You need to believe that really creating this welcoming culture begins with them — it begins with the CEO at the top.” Winn said. “I also think it requires courage — we need leaders who aren’t afraid to challenge — sometimes there can be entrenched organizational attitudes or practices and I also think you need to exercise self-awareness.”

Making DEI a ‘Must’ Not a ‘May’
Going forward, business leaders have a task to create lasting change in the business landscape or as Mitchell put it: how do we make diversity, equity and inclusion “a must, not a may” for corporations going forward?

Mike Fasulo, president and COO of Sony Electronics, spoke to the intangible assets of a diverse workforce and made a point to reference findings from market research firm, NPD Group Inc., regarding what consumers expect from companies.

“From a business perspective, inclusion is good for business, diversity is good for business,” Fasulo said. “During this pandemic, 90% of consumers are likely to switch brands to companies that are associated with a cause.”

By the end of the conversation, Mitchell gave panelists such as Doug Winter, CEO of Seismic, the opportunity to reflect on what their company did right in the past year to invest in DEI and how this will change how they lead in the future.

“We have a tendency as a society to pay lip service and to say all the right things at all the right times, but knowing my team as well as I do and knowing the various leaders in the organization, there’s genuine commitment,” Winter said. “For myself, I think one of the best things we’ve done is committed to a continuous education program.”

Award Winners
The event was topped off by an awards ceremony that recognized three Black-owned businesses of the Year, three Rising Star Companies of the Year, the Black Nonprofit CEO of the Year and the honorees for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Floyd and Sandra Robinson were honored for their work in the San Diego community with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Maya’s Cookies, a gourmet vegan cookie company; Juiced Bikes, an electric-bike retailer; and Omni2Max, a company that provides engineering solutions for government agencies were honored with the Black-owned Business of the Year award.

The Black Nonprofit CEO of the Year Award went to Rudolph Johnson III, President and CEO of the Neighborhood House Association, one of San Diego’s largest nonprofits that offers wrap-around social services to families.

Finally, the awards for Rising Star Companies of the Year went to Black SD Magazine, a quarterly publication that celebrates Black culture; ComSafe AI, a tech startup focused on violence prevention and Imperium First Consulting, a firm that helps small businesses land big government contracts.

Stories on these businesses and individuals may be found on the following pages.

Floyd and Sandra Robinson Honored For Community Leadership

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT: Couple Has Long History of Working Hard to Make San Diego a Better Place

By JAY HARN
Floyd and Sandra Robinson were honored for lifetime achievement at the first Black Businesses Matter Awards and Panel virtual event held by the San Diego Business Journal in association with the Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce Feb. 25.

Making San Diego a Better Place
The Robinsons have demonstrated what it means to be great community leaders always working to make San Diego a better place. Floyd Robinson began his career in baseball playing for the then minor Pacific Coast League San Diego Padres and set a record for highest field percentage while there. He later became a star athlete in Major League Baseball playing for the Chicago White Sox. His baseball career was cut short by a knee injury in 1967. His last season was 1968, but while active, he never played on a team with a losing record.

In 2007, they established the nonprofit Floyd Robinson Foundation. The foundation is a private charity that promotes educational opportunities to young people who are interested in furthering their studies and need additional financial support. The foundation provides qualified graduating senior high school students with comprehensive college scholarships that enables them to enter any college or university of their choice. The foundation’s stated aim is to “improve the lives of their beneficiaries and sustain better communities by investing in good education.”

“In 2009, Floyd Robinson was inducted by the San Diego Hall of Champions into the Breitbard Hall of Fame honoring San Diego’s finest athletes both on and off the field.”

San Diego Roots
While Floyd Robinson moved around the nation playing baseball, he always found his way back to San Diego. Growing up in San Diego, Floyd Robinson attended San Diego High School where he excelled at both baseball and football. He turned down a football scholarship to the University of Arizona to play baseball. His wife Sandra also has deep roots in San Diego and is a Logan High School graduate.

As a San Diego business leader, Floyd Robinson has done work in construction and real estate and at one time owned a local grocery store.

Floyd and his wife Sandra have been married for 57 years.
Rudolph Johnson III leads the Neighborhood House Association (NHA), one of San Diego County’s largest nonprofit organizations — as president and CEO, and for him the work is personal. A native San Diegan, Johnson grew up in NHA’s Head Start program and is the fourth generation in his family to work for the organization.

Now as the leader of NHA, Johnson is honored as the San Diego Business Journal’s Black Nonprofit CEO of the Year. “On behalf of our board members, and all 801 team members we want to thank the San Diego Business Journal for this prestigious award,” Johnson said during the virtual awards ceremony. “I could not do any of this without the incredible support of the San Diego community.”

Significant Growth

The company was founded in 2015 and since then, has grown from a local, farmer’s market brand to a booming brand that experienced significant growth in 2020. Maya’s Cookies touts itself as America’s #1 Black-Owned Gourmet Vegan Cookie Company. The formula business strategy.

This move, in addition to the support of the San Diego community led her company to huge growth this past year and recognition as the San Diego Business Journal’s Black-owned Business of the Year.

“It has been a challenging year for many of us and I know firsthand how hard small businesses and entrepreneurs are working right now,” Madsen said. “I know the sweat, the tears and the sheer will it is taking to get through each day, but I also know that the biggest lesson for me is that I could not do any of this without the incredible support of the San Diego community.”

Neighborhood House Association Looks out for San Diegans in Need

“Rudolph’s leadership has been instrumental in the organization establishing new programs and services, including the Black-Owned Business of the Year. He has been a tremendous asset to NHA and the San Diego community.”

For decades, NHA has catered to a wide variety of demographics, from disabled individuals to the elderly, and continues to strive to meet the needs of San Diegans.

Maya’s Cookies

Maya Madsen, owner of Maya’s Cookies.

Maya’s Cookies Pivots and Makes it Big in 2020

FOOD: Gourmet, Vegan Cookie Company Receives Support from Community

“Maya’s Cookies received amazing recognition,” Madsen said. “I’d like to thank my husband and my three sons for their unwavering support as well as the San Diego chapter of the Links Incorporated, which I’m a proud member and of course, Mass Janice Brown, thank you.”

Cookies Make People Happy

In a matter of a couple of days, sales increased about 10,000%, according to Janice Brown who nominated Maya’s Cookies for the SDBJ award. Madsen has doubled the size of her kitchen, secured a shipping warehouse, offices and even opened up a storefront location in San Diego’s Grantville neighborhood. “As I always say, cookies make people happy and it turns out so does this
Juiced Bikes Focused on Performance of Its Team and Products

**TECH:** Chula Vista E-Bike Company takes People-centered approach to Business

_**Tora Harris**_ said he came to San Diego for one reason—performance. As an Olympic, high jump athlete, he found his way to the Chula Vista Olympic Training Center and stayed in the area to eventually found his company, Juiced Bikes.

What started in 2009 in a storage unit down in Otay Mesa has grown into a successful electric bike brand and this year’s San Diego Business Journal Black-Owned Business of the Year.

In the last two years, Juiced Bikes has achieved three-times revenue growth. The past few months of the pandemic also saw a huge jump in electric, or e-bike, sales across the industry which Juiced adjusted to as market veterans with more than 10 years of experience.

**Delivering the Best Performance**

As the son of a Taiwanese mother and African American father, he speaks fluent Chinese and spent his childhood in both Taiwan and Atlanta, Ga. Growing up, Harris excelled academically and athletically which led him to Princeton University where he earned a degree in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

Inspired by his own participation in the Minority to Majority academic program, Harris believes strongly in working with San Diego schools to develop engineering and science skills with local students. Part of the DNA of Juiced Bikes is working with local charities to donate bikes to fundraising events, connecting with local suppliers and before the pandemic, recruiting students from High Tech High in Chula Vista for hands-on internships at the company’s headquarters.

**Improving Ourselves and the Community**

“So, when we’re hiring and looking for people to join our team, we really look for who can deliver the best performance?” Harris said. “I never really thought about diversity in the workplace until this year when we had the Zoom call and I could see everybody on one screen.”

Harris noticed the diversity within his own company which makes sense, as Juiced Bikes is a minority-owned and operated brand that dips into the talent of San Diego’s local community.

“I hope this award can highlight our company and let people recognize, especially people of color, what’s possible,” Harris said. “And you know, really continue to look for ways to improve ourselves and our community.”

_Tora Harris originally came to San Diego as an Olympic high jump athlete._

“I never really thought about diversity in the workplace until this year when we had the zoom call and I could see everybody on one screen.”

TORA HARRIS

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**Imperium First Consulting Secures Big Deals for Small Businesses**

**CONSULTING:** Firm Helps Minority, Disadvantaged Entrepreneurs in San Diego

_**Christine Willson**_ Labor & Contract Compliance Manager Imperium First Consulting

**“This environment is demanding, complex, but also filled with many possibilities.”**

CHRISTINE WILLSON

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firm which Willson said made it possible for IFC to attain small business contracts, build relationships and partner with consulting firms and also prime contractors.

**Teaming Up to Mentor Businesses**

This DBE certification also helped IFC utilize the training and support sessions offered by the San Diego Small Business Centers (SDSBC) both in National City and in Carlsbad, which offered the firm the competitive edge it needed.

IFC has also teamed up with Strategic Business, a woman-owned DBE firm to provide mentor and outreach services for small businesses in the community.

“This award would not be possible without our team—thank you team IFC for your continued support,” Willson said. “Imperium First Consulting will continue to grow, and provide a more customized service for our clients. Once again, I’d like to thank San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce for your support to small businesses.”
Omni2Max Offers Defense Solutions to Military Branches

DEFENSE: U.S. Navy Veteran uses his experience to continue serving through his business career

“I don’t know what to say, this is the first of receiving such prestigious awards, so I just want to say thank you very much for your consideration and for this award.”

ALLEN MAXWELL

After a 22-year career in the U.S. Navy, Allen Maxwell realized he could use his expertise to start his own company and be a defense contractor himself. In 2009, he founded Omni2Max Inc., which specializes in engineering solutions, cybersecurity, as well as logistics for government agencies. Since then, Maxwell has grown the company which operates as a Certified, Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) and has a Top-Secret Facility Clearance.

Omni2Max was among three other local companies recognized by the San Diego Business Journal as a Black-Owned Business of the Year. “I just want to say thank you for such a prestigious award. I want to thank the San Diego Business Journal, the Black Chamber of Commerce and all that participated and selected me and my company as an awardee,” Maxwell said during the virtual ceremony.

Experience to Execute Business

Today, Omni2Max has over seven decades of combined experience in military systems operations, engineering, logistics and Department of Defense acquisition and contracting. The company uses this experience to execute everything from providing paper for the government that is affixed on medicine bottles to providing industrial water treatment for several bases across the United States.

The core work of Omni2Max consists of cybersecurity, information technology, logistics management, program management, engineering, systems engineering, performance base acquisition, and help desk customer relations management.

Connecting for Global Growth

Within the San Diego community, they recently became a part of the MetroConnect — the flagship international sales accelerator program run by the World Trade Center San Diego (WTC) that helps San Diego companies jump-start and scale their global growth.

“This is a prestigious honor and I’m very, very excited about it,” Maxwell said. “I don’t know what to say, this is the first of receiving such prestigious awards, so I just want to say thank you very much for your consideration and for this award.”

In addition to his work as President and CEO of Omni2Max, Maxwell is a best-selling author with his book, “The System Is Unforgiving: Play By The Rules And Win,” which discusses his life experiences and strategy for navigating the Navy and the world of business.
O pportunity can be found anywhere—even in 2020, which is when Black SD Magazine LLC was founded as a publication to elevate Black stories, culture and lifestyle. According to owner and publisher, Michael Cox, it is the first African-American magazine published in San Diego County. Black SD Magazine was honored by the San Diego Business Journal with the Rising Star Company of the Year award at the 2021 Black Businesses Matter in San Diego Awards.

"Thank you so much again for the award of Rising Star Company of the Year it means so much to me because of all the hard work and efforts my team puts into making sure that we are able to produce amazing stories, stay involved in the community, helping entrepreneurs, creatives and small business owners," Cox said during the virtual awards ceremony.

Uplifting Entrepreneurs

The quarterly publication has also received recognition from former Mayor Kevin Faulconer, County Supervisor Nathan Fletcher and Councilmember Chris Ward for being the first Black printed magazine in San Diego.

One of the key features of the media group is its innovative effort to provide a free, 3-month entrepreneur program to help foster African-American entrepreneurship. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit program of Black SD Magazine is called The Catalyst Black Academy and it supports entrepreneurs understand their own business economics, pricing strategy, branding and more.

Collaboration to Educate

In collaboration with UC San Diego Extension, Catalyst Black Academy is offering its first annual scholarship for one African-American entrepreneur, creative or small business owner to take four classes through UCSD.

All of these efforts by Black SD Magazine are aimed at educating and creating more awareness for the issues facing the Black community in San Diego and nationwide.

"It means so much and I am just so grateful that it's recognized and that the work is going noticed so thank you so much again and thank you for putting on this amazing event for all the other winners and all the other Black-owned businesses, entrepreneurs and creatives that are really leaving a mark in San Diego," Cox said.

Black SD Magazine is headquartered in East Village and has a team of six employees. According to Cox, it is completely self-funded with each new print edition paid for through sales from the previous quarter. Previously Cox told the Business Journal that part of the business model is to not include ads in the magazine, just a full 64 pages of editorial.

With this storytelling approach in mind, Cox doesn't put the Black SD Magazine name or logo on the front cover. Instead, he features the subject and company of the person. Cox believes this makes for a more personalized experience.

Cox told the Business Journal last month that in the future he hopes to increase quarterly presales from 500 to even 5,000 through partnerships with local businesses and subscriptions. He also wants to expand The Catalyst Black Academy, a recently registered nonprofit to advance African-American businesses and the community through programming and mentorship. All hosted by Black SD Magazine.

Cox said he also plans to create Black SD Magazine renditions in other cities starting in 2022. ■
When it comes to workplace safety, Ty Smith means business. His technology company, CommSafe AI, specializes in disrupting new and emerging threats for their clients, 24/7.

As a retired Navy SEAL, Smith assembled a small but mighty team of experts in technology, military special operations, data science and law enforcement to develop a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) tool that allows organizations to get ahead of threats and violence in the workplace before they happen.

CommSafe AI, a Black-owned and veteran start-up, was recognized by the San Diego Business Journal as a Rising Star Company of the Year.

“I really appreciate this award for several reasons,” Smith said. “First and foremost, over the last 5 years that I’ve been growing this company, it’s been the hardest thing I’ve ever done and I’ve done some pretty hard things before this, but this has been challenging to say the least.”

Ty Smith
Founder & CEO
CommSafe AI

AI Addresses Threats

Smith founded the company in 2016 and has put it into a position to grow in the multibillion-dollar security market.

CommSafe AI is a cloud-based software that analyzes employee communication and uses predictive algorithms to identify and flag toxic communication. This technology addresses harassment, aggression, Title IX offenses, discrimination, conflict, and threats, which the company said costs U.S. workplaces about $528 billion per year.

Growing Demand

Similar to the spam filter algorithm for emails, the CommSafe AI tool analyzes communication in real time and flags toxic messages that would threaten the integrity of a safe communication space or violate shared company values. This AI tool was in the works prior to COVID-19, but has accelerated development of the product as there is a growing demand for workplace safety online.

Currently, CommSafe AI has partnered with more than 45 leading companies and organizations across the U.S. to use its technology to address these issues.

“And to receive this kind of award from an organization like the San Diego Business Journal, this is more than just market feedback, this is absolute validation of all the hard work that the CommSafe AI team and myself have done over the last 5 years to build this organization into something that’s valuable and deserves to be representing our great city of San Diego,” Smith said.

CommSafe AI Offers Disruption from Cyber Threats

TECH: Local Start-Up Enters Multibillion Dollar Security Market

“Over the last 5 years that I’ve been growing this company, it’s been the hardest thing I’ve ever done and I’ve done some pretty hard things before this, but this has been challenging to say the least.”

TY SMITH

Congratulations

Allen F. Maxwell and Omni2Max

The Omni2Max team is my A Team. They are far more diverse and dynamic than any other teams I have worked with in the past. When the team faces challenges, their success hinges on a core set of fundamentals for group collaboration and teamwork. They are a great team of individuals with direction that energizes, orients, and engages each member.

The teams acts on their inspiration that they’re working toward the company’s explicit goals which is why Omni2Max is the best place to work.
## Congratulations Finalists

### BLACK-OWNED BUSINESS COMPANY

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<td>The Boss With The Floss Dental Practice</td>
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<td>For The Arts</td>
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SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL
The Community of Business celebrates
BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES
in SAN DIEGO

CBIZ  MHM  Deloitte.
edf renewables  Inseev Interactive
JANPRO  KAISER PERMANENTE
CLEANING & DISINFECTING
LiUNA!  MOSSADAMS
Feel the Power

pillsbury  RSM

SDCCU  Small Business Finance

TOO TRIS  Willis Allen
REAL ESTATE  SONY