

CELEBRATING BLACK ENTREPRENEURS

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

NON-PROFIT CEO OF THE YEAR



Maya Madsen
MAYA'S COOKIES



Tora Harris
JUICED BIKES



Allen F. Maxwell
OMNI2MAX



Rudolph Johnson III
**NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSE ASSOCIATION**

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 I'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 company; 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; **CommSafe AI**, a tech start-up 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.



DONNA DEBERRY
President & CEO
Central San Diego
Black Chamber of
Commerce



MIKE FASULO
President & COO
Sony Electronics



EUGENE "MITCH" MITCHELL
VP External and
Legislative Affairs
SDGE & Southern
California Gas • Sempra Energy



MARK STUART
President & CEO
The San Diego
Foundation



CAROLINE WINN
CEO
San Diego Gas &
Electric



DOUG WINTER
CEO
Seismic

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. He played nine seasons of **Major League Baseball** and was one of the American League's top hitters during the 1960s.

Business Partners

He and his wife are both life and business partners well-known for developing **Golden Age Garden**. This 76-unit apartment complex provides low-income housing for senior community members helping to create a more affordable and inclusive environment.

In 2007, they established the nonprofit **Floyd Robinson Foundation**. The foundation is a private scholarship foundation that promotes educational opportunities to young people who are



Floyd and Sandra Robinson

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 Logan Heights, he 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 been involved 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. ■



■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

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.



Rudolph Johnson III
President & CEO
Neighborhood House Association

Neighborhood House Association Looks out for San Diegans in Need

NONPROFIT: Rudolph Johnson III Leads the More Than 100-year-old Nonprofit with Pride



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“Our workforce reflects the diversity of San Diego. However, African-Americans serve at all levels of our organization, including key leadership positions. We value this award and we pledge to continue the excellent work here in the San Diego area.”

RUDOLPH JOHNSON III

Caring for San Diegans

Prior to NHA, Johnson served as the general manager of the San Diego Convention Center and holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from San Diego State University.

Since 2006, he's served as the lead

executive of this more than 100-year-old organization and guided NHA to impact the lives of thousands of families through its myriad programs throughout the San Diego region.

Under his leadership, Johnson helped connect the dots of these services to form the agency's Continuum of Care Model. This service delivery model begins at the prenatal stages of life, includes wrap around services for the entire family, and continues all the way to senior care.

Recently, one of the biggest ways NHA has been able to meet the needs of families during the coronavirus pandemic is through food distribution services.

Helping Students, Families in Pandemic

The nonprofit established distribution centers all across the county, and its Head Start program — which provides affordable and effective education for families — has been able to maintain quality teaching for around 7,000 students across San Diego.

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.

"Our workforce reflects the diversity of San Diego," Johnson said. "However, African-Americans serve at all levels of our organization, including key leadership positions. We value this award and we pledge to continue the excellent work here in the San Diego area. Thank you so much." ■

Neighborhood House Association



FOUNDED: 1914 CEO: Rudolph Johnson III

HEADQUARTERS: Kearny Mesa

BUSINESS: Nonprofit provides wrap around social services for families in San Diego

EMPLOYEES: 801

WEBSITE: neighborhoodhouse.org

NOTABLE: Johnson started in NHA's Head Start program as a child and now leads the program as the organization's President and CEO

CONTACT: communityaffairs@neighborhoodhouse.org



■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

Like so many business owners, the start of the pandemic posed an uphill battle for the owner of **Maya's Cookies**, **Maya Madsen**. But she quickly pivoted her gourmet, vegan cookie business from its farmer's market format to an e-commerce 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, the grit 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."

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, and for good reason.

This past year, Madsen said her annual revenue grew six times over and she currently has 20, full-time employees. Prior to receiving SDBJ's award, Maya's Cookies was

Maya's Cookies Pivots and Makes it Big in 2020

FOOD: Gourmet, Vegan Cookie Company Receives Support from Community



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“I know the sweat, the tears, the grit 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.”

MAYA MADSEN



Maya Madsen, owner of Maya's Cookies.

featured on a number of local and national lists for Black-owned businesses to support.

"And this year in particular with the horrific death of George Floyd and the increased awareness for social and racial injustices, my community reached out to lift up Black-owned businesses and honestly, that matters," Madsen said. "For my friends, allies and fellow businesses, that support matters."

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

amazing recognition," Madsen said. "I'd like to thank my husband and my three sons for their undying support as well as the San Diego chapter of the Links Incorporated, which I'm a proud member and of course, Miss Janice Brown, thank you." ■

Maya's Cookies



FOUNDED: 2015

FOUNDER: Maya Madsen

HEADQUARTERS: Grantville

BUSINESS: Makes and sells gourmet, vegan cookies

EMPLOYEES: 20

WEBSITE: mayascookies.com

NOTABLE: Maya's Cookies annual revenue grew six times over in 2020 **CONTACT:** 858-265-995



Juiced Bikes Focused on Performance of Its Team and Products

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



■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

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



Tora Harris
Founder
Juiced Bikes



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

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“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

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 also our community.” ■

Juiced Bikes



FOUNDED: 2009

CEO: Tora Harris

HEADQUARTERS: Chula Vista

BUSINESS: Specializes in making electric, E-bikes

WEBSITE: www.juicedbikes.com

NOTABLE: Founder and owner, Tora Harris was an Olympic, high-jump athlete

CONTACT: 888-303-8889



Imperium First Consulting Secures Big Deals for Small Businesses

CONSULTING: Firm Helps Minority, Disadvantaged Entrepreneurs in San Diego



BY NATALLIE ROCHA

After 15 years of working with construction management firms and government agencies on various state, federal and locally funded contracts, **Christine Willson** was ready to take a leap of faith.

In 2015, she did just that by starting her own firm, **Imperium First Consulting (IFC)** to use her knowledge to help small businesses get the contacts and support

they deserved.

Now, Imperium First Consulting has been recognized by the San Diego Business Journal as a Rising Star Company of the Year.

“I am honored and accept this award with gratitude,” Willson said during the virtual ceremony. “Thank you to my clients for giving me the opportunity to serve. And thank you to the Small Business Development Center, especially the North County office for your support.”



Christine Willson
Labor & Contract
Compliance Manager
Imperium First
Consulting

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

CHRISTINE WILLSON

firm helps small businesses learn about certification, contract opportunities and vendor registration to gain certification through many of the local, state and federal agencies. In doing so, IFC connects these local entrepreneurs to agencies with initiatives aimed at including them in large bid opportunities.

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

At first, it was tough for IFC to gain traction and pick up contracts. But in 2017, IFC became a certified

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 my 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.” ■

Imperium First Consulting



FOUNDED: 2015

FOUNDER: Christine Willson

HEADQUARTERS: Mission Valley

BUSINESS: Consulting for small businesses to get government contracts

WEBSITE: www.imperiumfirstconsulting.com

NOTABLE: IFC is a certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firm

CONTACT: imperiumfirstconsulting@gmail.com

Certification and Contract Opportunities

For the past decade, Willson has been assisting prime contractors in contract compliance and prevailing wage oversight. Her



Omni2Max Offers Defense Solutions to Military Branches

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



■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

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, cyber security, 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, Minority-Owned (MBE), Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) 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



Allen Maxwell
President & CEO
Omni2Max

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

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“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

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 jumpstart 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. ■

Omni2Max



FOUNDED: 2009

CEO: Allen Maxwell

HEADQUARTERS: La Mesa

BUSINESS: Provides engineering solutions, cyber security and logistics for government agencies

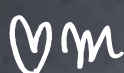
EMPLOYEES: 30 in San Diego; 100 nationwide

WEBSITE: omni2max.com

NOTABLE: One of Maxwell’s daughters followed in his footsteps and joined the Navy.

CONTACT: info@omni2max.com

Maya Madsen
- Owner & Founder



maya's
COOKIES

GOURMET • VEGAN • LOVE

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL



Thank you to the community for nominating and voting for Maya’s Cookies for the SDBJ Black Business Matters Award

MayasCookies.com

@MayasCookiesSanDiego @MayasCookiesSanDiego @MayasCookies



Black SD Magazine Spotlights Black Culture in San Diego

MEDIA: New Quarterly Publication Already Making an Impact on the Community

BLACK SD Magazine

■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

Opportunity 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 Start 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.



Michael Cox
Owner & Publisher
Black SD Magazine

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. ■

Black SD Magazine



FOUNDED: 2020

OWNER/PUBLISHER: Michael Cox

HEADQUARTERS: East Village

BUSINESS: Quarterly publication focuses on Black culture

EMPLOYEES: 6

WEBSITE: www.blacksdmagazine.com

NOTABLE: Received a proclamation from the city for The Catalyst Black Academy

CONTACT: Michael@BlackSDMagazine.com



Neighborhood House Association

“A Neighbor You Can Count On...Since 1914”

Congratulations

Neighborhood House Association 2021 Black Owned Non-Profit CEO of the Year Winner



Rudolph A. Johnson III
President & CEO

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL





CommSafe AI Offers Disruption from Cyber Threats

TECH: Local Start-Up Enters Multibillion Dollar Security Market



■ By NATALLIE ROCHA

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



Ty Smith
Founder & CEO
CommSafe AI

“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

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.”

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 of 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

CommSafe AI™

FOUNDED: 2016 CEO: Ty Smith

HEADQUARTERS: La Jolla

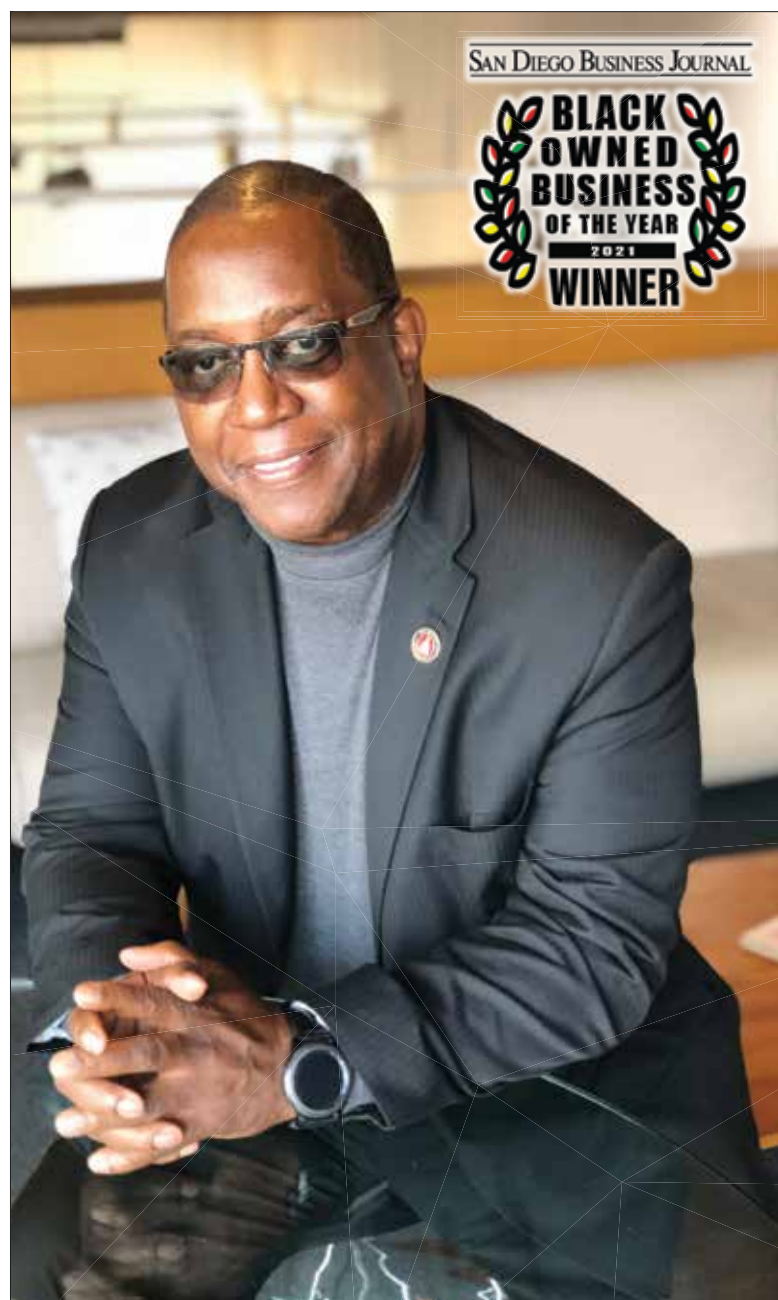
BUSINESS: Tech company specializes in conflict and violence prevention

EMPLOYEES: 10

WEBSITE: www.commsafe.ai

NOTABLE: Co. is participating in Evonexus, San Diego's largest tech startup incubator

CONTACT: ty@commsafe.ai



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

3natural Bionutrition
 A Child's Place FCC
 Active Potential Kids
 Admirals Experience
 All Star Auto Detailing
 BeeZee Taxi
 Blendees
 Crafted Locally Distribution
 Daneen Wilburn Music
 Dezigne Theory LLC
 Dirt Don't Hurt
 DreAm Hair Design
 Dunn Rite Family Daycare
 Emersons School of Martial Arts
 Fadumo Muse Small Family Daycare
 Family Health Services Training Center
 Fanuala Cab
 Farah Abdalla Family Child Care
 Felix BBQ with Soul
 Genae Cunningham (hair by Genae)
 GFASH LLC
 Greater San Diego Chapter
 GT2 Fitness and Bootcamps
 Hair by D'Essence
 Hairtopia Salon
 Happy Time Learning Academy
 High Definition Entertainment LLC.
 Hirsi, Maryan Family childcare
 HomeRun Hair Designs
 Homes With MY Realty
 ICONIC Beauty Station

IMAAAQKM Consultants And Security Services
 Jackson Family Daycare
 JM Care Staffing
 Juiced Bikes
 Keyd, Ayan Family Childcare
 Love and Care When Your Not There
 Many Shades of Pink Foundation
 Maya's Cookies
 Meri Consulting
 Meyers Nave
 Michelle Alexander Family Daycare
 Mohamed Farah
 Mustafa Sahid
 Neighborhood House Association
 Omar, Deka Family Childcare
 Omni2Max
 PromoDrone
 Queenz Extensions
 Reena Rene Anderson
 San Diego Code School, LLC.
 Signature Hair Studio
 SIP Wine & Beer
 Solomon Moss Tiling
 The Bright App
 The Formula Skin Lab
 The Gillespie Production Group
 The Maye-Williams Company LLC
 Tiny Teapots Preschool & Daycare
 Welfie
 Workplace Climate LLC

BLACK-OWNED RISING STAR COMPANY

341 Global Consulting
 Aadila's Holistic Goods
 BARRE + Bay Wreath
 Black San Diego Magazine
 Black SD Magazine
 Bombshell Brow Bar
 Boutique VIno
 By Any Beans Necessary
 CAFE X
 Carrolls Learning Angels
 Casper Jiu Jitsu academy
 CommSafe AI
 Coops West Texas BBQ
 Custom Cuts
 Dezigne Theory LLC
 Dirt Don't Hurt
 Ensunet Technology Group
 FireSnake Fitness
 Fivespace
 For Advanced Pain Management
 For The Arts
 Greenish Vibes
 Grind and Prosper Hospitality Group
 Imperium First Consulting
 Incremental Fitness

Legit Express LLC
 Lulu Family Childcare
 Micheaux Media
 NewGait
 Philips Nonprofit and NGO Consulting
 PromoDrone
 Pure Indoor Cycling
 queenz dna
 Rap A Tap Center
 Relive You Center
 Rhymes with Reason
 Rhythems Chicken & Waffles
 San Diego Code School (SDCS)
 San Diego Tech Hub
 SISTERcircle
 Slow Burn BBQ San Diego
 The Boss With The Floss Dental Practice
 The Bright App
 The Dojo Cafe
 The Formula Skin Lab
 The Peace Watchers
 The Writ Juice
 Tiny Teapots Preschool & Daycare
 Willson

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

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