



THE
TOP
100

INNOVATORS and Entrepreneurs



Featuring

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Lumen & Forge



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The Top 100 Innovators &
Entrepreneurs
2022/2023

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www.TheTop100Magazine.com

Redwood Media Group
990 Westbury Road
Westbury, N.Y. 11590

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THE TOP 100 MAGAZINE



The staff of *The Top 100 Magazine* would like to express their gratitude for having the privilege of working with some of the brightest, most accomplished, and esteemed thought leaders in the world.

Through the combined efforts of our account directors, writers, production staff, and artists, as well as the cooperation of everyone who is featured in this extraordinary edition, I believe we are presenting one of our most impressive publications to date.

I know that our readers will be equally enthused by these stories and appreciate the tremendous fortitude, dedication, and perseverance of these individuals, along with the many sacrifices they have made in the pursuit of their dreams.

It is my sincere wish that each and every one of these amazing professionals continue to experience success and my pleasure to present *The Top 100 Innovators & Entrepreneurs Magazine*.

Joseph Nunziato
CEO, Redwood Media

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THE
TOP
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INNOVATORS

and *Entrepreneurs*

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Dr. --- NATHAN S. BRYAN



“

The most gratifying part of our work is knowing that we helped to change a life.

There are those who pursue science in the name of science. Then there are those for whom science is a calling. For Dr. Nathan S. Bryan, it was a Divine invitation that he could not deny—and one that set him on a decades-long journey. This is the remarkable story of how one man's sacrifice, devotion, persistence, and defiance led to revolutionary discoveries that are changing the lives of millions.

Dr. Bryan is a trailblazer in the field of nitric oxide-based product technologies with dozens of patents to his name and a successful entrepreneur with several thriving companies that together have delivered nearly a billion dollars' worth of products to consumers and the medical community. From Bryan Nitriceutical's nitric oxide-based nutritional products and dietary supplements to Pneuma Nitric Oxide's skin care and beauty lines to Nitric Oxide Innovations's drug development program for COVID-19, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's, diabetic and pressure ulcers and other life-threatening and debilitating health conditions, there is almost no category that Dr. Bryan has not touched. And he's not done yet. "My mission and passion are to continue to advance the science of nitric oxide and innovate new nitric oxide product technology in every major market segment around the world," he shares.

Founder & CEO



The (rocky) Road Less Traveled, For the Betterment of All.

"I could never have imagined or planned this journey. I have been blessed beyond measure." ~ Dr. Bryan

Today, Dr. Bryan leads a trio of companies. He's an international leader in molecular medicine and nitric oxide biochemistry, and a former assistant professor of molecular medicine who's authored hundreds of research papers and books. But he's much more than that. He is an inspiring force whose humility belies his extraordinary accomplishments, and whose determination to bring his life-changing nitric oxide products to the masses compelled him to buck the system and tread into the commercial territory traditionally discouraged and sometimes forbidden by academia. And it was anything but easy. Riddled with setbacks, disappointments, betrayal, and sleepless nights, Dr. Bryan refused to give up. "It was only my strong faith in God and support from my family and friends that I endured," he recalls. "I always knew that the science of nitric oxide could change the world. I was fortunate and blessed enough to figure out how to deliver it safely and effectively to humans." For the millions of grateful consumers who have benefitted for over a decade from his products—including hundreds of professional, NCAA, and U.S. Olympic team athletes—they undoubtedly feel just as fortunate.

Pneuma Nitric Oxide, Bryan Nitriceuticals, Nitric Oxide Innovations: Delivering Groundbreaking Products to the Masses

"Simply put, nitric oxide increases blood flow and regulates oxygen and nutrient delivery to every cell in the body. Loss of nitric oxide contributes to diseases of aging." ~ Dr. Bryan

Nitric oxide is a natural anti-aging molecule that decreases over time, and by age 40, the body has only about 50% of the production compared to teens and early twenties. Used by many doctors and medical spas, Pneuma's N1O1 serum, cleansers, and moisturizers replenish this "beauty molecule" to restore a youthful appearance. Unlike other skin care products that hide or mask blemishes and wrinkles, N1O1 serum gets to the root cause of aging skin.

Bryan Nitriceuticals is a nitric oxide-focused nutrition and dietary supplement company that provides dietary

“I've devoted my entire life's work to the study of nitric oxide and the development of products that can improve people's lives—delivering many of them directly into the hands of the consumers, without a prescription.

nutritional products and supplements. Their NO2U lozenge is an orally disintegrating tablet that generates nitric oxide gas as it is dissolving. This lozenge helps support nitric oxide repletion and production to enhance oxygen and nutrient delivery, supporting cardiovascular health, blood pressure, and cognitive and memory function. If your body cannot make nitric oxide, our technology does it for you. Their NO Beetz product is an innovative natural energy product that provides the nitric oxide power of fermented beets but without the beet taste, beet color or oxalates. It also provides electrolytes for hydration and mitochondrial ATP for energy support. This product is a game-changer in the energy category and should replace all the unhealthy and unsafe energy drinks.

Nitric Oxide Innovations is a clinical-stage biotechnology company focused on developing nitric oxide drugs through the FDA. Their lead drug, Noviricid (Nitrvir[©]), is currently in phase 3 clinical trials for COVID, and they have drug programs around Alzheimer's disease, ischemic heart disease, ischemic, non-obstructive coronary artery disease (INOCA) and a topical nitric oxide drug for diabetic and pressure ulcers. Many other drug indications are in development.

A New Era Begins

"My guiding principle in research is to see what everyone has seen but to think what no one else has thought." ~ Dr. Bryan

As Dr. Bryan continues to blaze a path with cutting-edge nitric oxide drugs and products, he now has his eye on a bigger mission. "I can proudly say that I've thought outside the box, and this has led to many discoveries," he says. "Now, I'm focused on educating the world on the importance of nitric oxide."

As part of this special four-page series, we sat down with Dr. Bryan, to hear more about his journey, the science behind nitric oxide, and the overarching vision that guides him: "I want to change the world and leave a lasting legacy on humanity."

A Conversation with Dr. Nathan Bryan

Q: How did your interest in science and medicine blossom into a passion for the study of nitric oxide?

A: I've always been interested in those fields, but I fell in love with the feeling of discovery when I was involved

in undergraduate research while pursuing my degree in biochemistry at the University of Texas. While in the PhD program in molecular and cellular physiology at LSU School of Medicine, I was introduced to nitric oxide—and this is where my path became clear. A Nobel Prize had just been awarded for the discovery of how this molecule worked in the body. From that point on, I've devoted my entire life's work to the study of nitric oxide and the development of products that can improve people's lives—delivering many of them directly into the hands of the consumers, without a prescription. In fact, that was our primary reason for launching Bryan Nitriceuticals, so that people could benefit *right now* from our nitric oxide-based supplements until our FDA drugs become approved.

Q: Your journey to bring these products to the masses was not without its challenges. Will you share some of the obstacles that you encountered along the way?

A: I could have never imagined that my life's journey and hardships would become what my life is today. It was really a divine power that steered me and gave me the courage to continue. My thoughts and ideas were challenged, ridiculed and questioned by my academic colleagues early on. However, I was constantly reminded of the quote by German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer: "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." My ideas and discoveries turned out to be fundamental truths corroborated by science and clinical translation. Today, nitric oxide as a science and as a viable therapeutic candidate for many, if not most, human diseases is evident. My mission and passion are to continue to advance the science of nitric oxide and innovate new nitric oxide product technology in every major market segment around the world. This technology is disruptive and I've become a target of frivolous lawsuits from people trying to stop my innovations. I know I'm doing the right thing when people come after me. It means what I am doing is meaningful and transformational. The most troubling aspect of all of this is that the lawsuits are from former partners and people I once trusted. The truth is on my side so I will continue to fight against greed and envy.

Q: How does low nitric oxide contribute to heart disease, Alzheimer's, and other serious health issues, and how is Nitric Oxide Innovations working to solve these?

A: Nitric oxide is naturally produced in our bodies and is responsible for oxygenation of every cell in the body, but as we age, we produce less and less of it, and this loss contributes to the onset and progression of many diseases, such as ischemic

heart disease, pulmonary hypertension, heart failure, stroke and Alzheimer's disease. The science shows that there is really not a single disease where nitric oxide at the right dose at the right time would not be beneficial. Without it, blood vessels become stiff, constricted, inflamed, and as a consequence, organs, tissues and cells do not get sufficient oxygen and nutrients. Drugs or therapies that increase nitric oxide open the blood vessels, allowing for more efficient oxygen and nutrient delivery to every cell in the body. We have drug programs around these diseases and our topical nitric oxide drug for diabetic and pressure ulcer. Our lead nitric oxide drug for COVID-19, called Noviricid, is in phase 3 clinical trials, and we're seeing patients improve on this drug therapy. We hope to have the FDA study completed by the end of 2022 and have several drugs approved over the next few years.

Q: Let's turn to your popular skin care and beauty line, Pneuma Nitric Oxide. How does this "anti-aging" molecule work to restore youthful skin?

A: Without proper blood flow delivering oxygen and nutrients to the cells of the skin, the skin cells lose hydration, lose collagen, and lose their barrier function. As a result, the skin begins to sag, fine lines and wrinkles appear, and the skin becomes inflamed. Restoring blood flow by delivering topical

“ I want to change the world and leave a lasting legacy on humanity.

nitric oxide can restore cellular function and turnover, improve collagen deposition, thereby improving the skin's appearance, and restoring the color, tone, and texture almost immediately. We have created a new product category in skin care.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your work, Dr. Bryan, or what drives you?

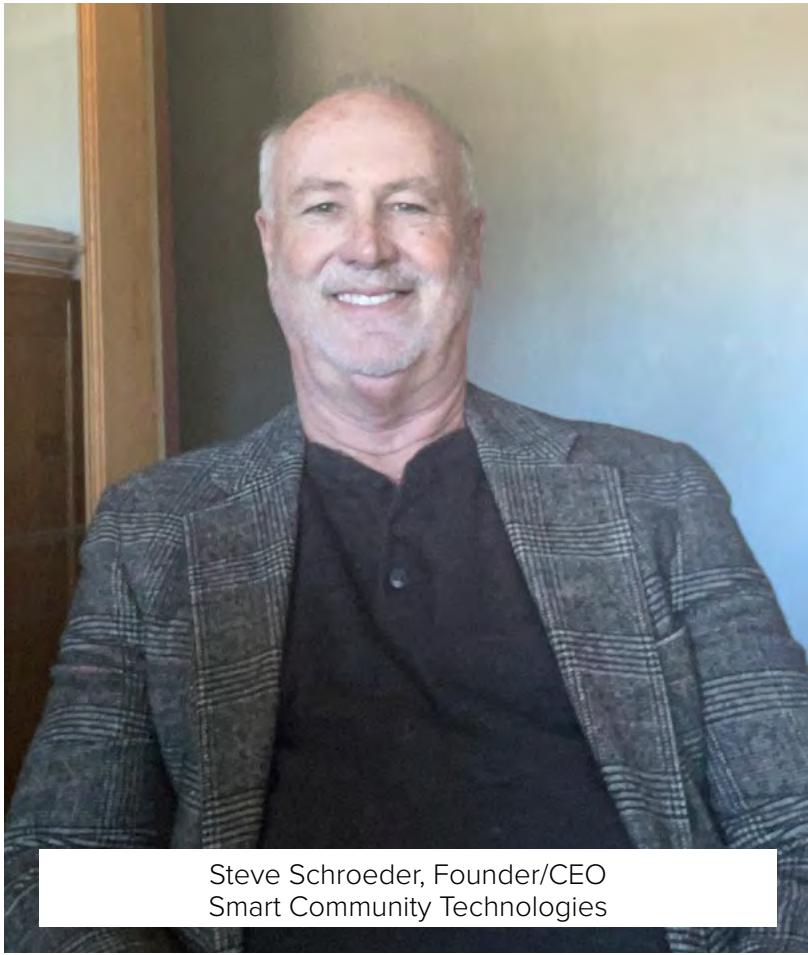
A: What keeps me going is the phone calls, emails, letters from people that tell me I've changed their lives. I spent 20 years in Academia where we made many discoveries, but my most satisfying position is entrepreneur and CEO of my companies



and seeing products from my discoveries come to market and change lives. Most scientific discoveries never make it to commercial success, so being able to bring to market products that work and change lives is tremendously gratifying. We've accomplished a lot but we are just getting started.

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Steve Schroeder, Founder/CEO
Smart Community Technologies



SMART COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGIES IS A BITCOIN ONLY COMPANY DEVELOPING ON THE LIGHTNING NETWORK.

“The butterfly effect holds that the world is deeply interconnected such that one tiny event can produce much larger consequences. We’re changing lives one person, one event at a time, but together, we can change the world.”

There's the road less traveled, and then there's the road that no one saw coming. Steve Schroeder has always been a forward-thinking entrepreneur driven to push the boundaries of technology to help others. Years before launching Smart Community Technologies in 2017 and DeCoy in 2021, he'd co-founded Bowling Rewards in 2007 and Loyal Patron a few years later in Colorado, before selling the rights to his partner in August 2014 to pursue mobile technologies and innovative concepts with a company in Georgia. That fall, Steve had just settled into his new home and job, beginning the next chapter of what he humbly recalls as an “ordinary career.” Then fate stepped in with an unexpected crisis that would turn his ordinary career into an extraordinary journey—and a destiny that might just change the world.

Thirty days into his new role, Steve was in a development meeting for an innovative mobile app using geolocation and AI when, mid-sentence, he collapsed, in cardiac arrest. Twenty minutes later, he was pronounced dead as paramedics sped him to the hospital. Doctors put him into an ice-induced coma in an attempt to save him, but the odds of survival were a grim one percent. A week later, Steve awoke. Some might call it a miracle, a merciful act of Providence.

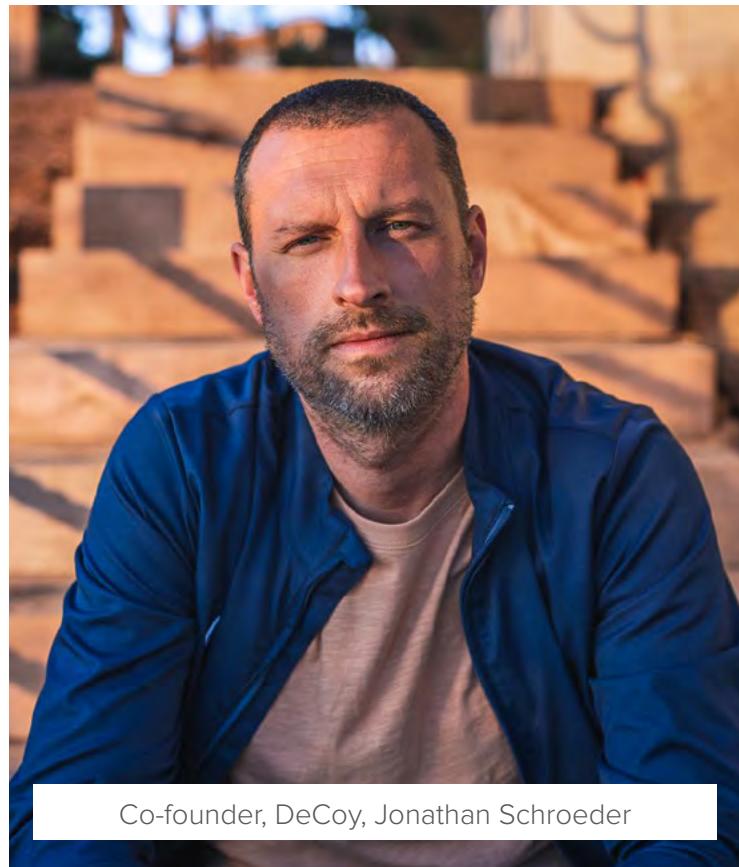
Others might point to a sheer will to live, if not for himself, for his daughters, Naomi and Peyton; his elder son and DeCoy co-founder, Jonathan; and the younger Gentry, who, with severe autism, requires Steve's constant care. Whatever the forces that pulled him back from darkness, they put Steve on a path to reexamine not only his place in the world as a father and a business leader, but that of every individual as vital, intertwining threads that make up the fabric of families, communities, nations.

In 2020, as the world came to a standstill in the grips of the pandemic, Steve's mind traced the pattern of those strands, imagining them as the colorful, fluttering wings of human action and interaction. He followed the reverberations of seemingly inconsequential daily behavior—the purchase of a single cup of coffee, a window-shopping excursion—and envisioned the enormous, life-changing impact these trivial events could have not just on the individual, but on humankind. Then, in a single flash, he realized why he was spared—to use his decades of experience and expertise in digital assets to contribute to the greater good in a big, *big* way. This is the remarkable story of DeCoy and the man behind the ground-breaking customer loyalty app

designed to benefit consumers, communities, countries, and the world, for the betterment of all. Welcome to the butterfly effect—in real time.

What is DeCoy? The Customer Loyalty App On a Mission to Change the World.

How can an app change the world? By offering a host of innovative benefits never before seen in a mobile app. First, users pick up *free* items with no strings attached, and not just free appetizers, bowling, golf, and food, but free money is deposited into the consumer's wallet. Second, they can use DeCoy to pay for everything in USD, bitcoin, or other currencies—and transfer what they earn to anyone in the world free of charge without any currency conversion or intermediary fees. Users can also purchase brand packages, such as 31 Grey Goose vodka cocktails for \$10 from your favorite location or 12 appetizers for \$12, and earn money playing real-life games. Finally, DeCoy is protecting consumers, communities, and countries alike. With a growing number of partners, including Ford, Papa Johns, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, Olive Garden, Miller Coors, and bowling centers across the U.S., DeCoy is completely flipping the script on the entire customer loyalty space so that everyone wins. "We are changing lives one person at a time, and together, we can change the world," Steve says.

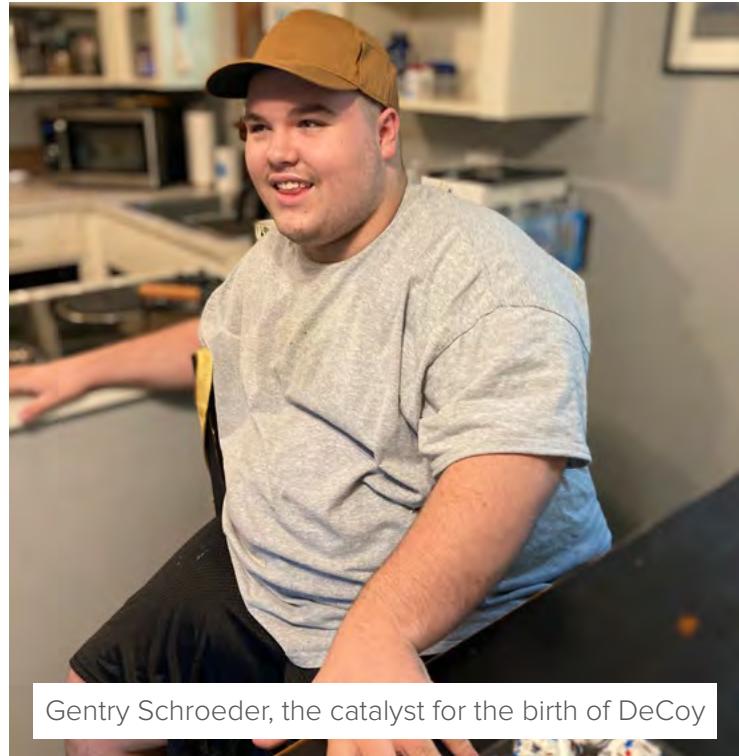


Co-founder, DeCoy, Jonathan Schroeder

With a growing number of partners, including Ford, Papa Johns, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, Olive Garden, Miller Coors, and bowling centers across the U.S., DeCoy is completely flipping the script on the entire customer loyalty space so that everyone wins.

How it Works: The Butterfly Effect in Action.

It's surprisingly simple! DeCoy members can earn money, free items, *and* bitcoin just by showing their app at a store and through their everyday behaviors, all while also helping others. For example, walk into a Papa John's, show the app, and pick up a free pizza, or go to Walmart once a month, and receive \$10 to buy anything, just for visiting their store, or maybe spend five minutes in a store, take a picture of, say, macaroni and cheese and post to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc., and earn rewards. Members can spend, save, invest, or donate their real money rewards for behavior anywhere in the world right through the app without incurring any transfer fees, wire fees, or conversion fees. Members can join for free or pay a small fee for added benefits, but the rewards far exceed the value of the minimal fee *and* DeCoy immediately donates 50% of this to the charity or cause of the user's choosing using DeCoy's proprietary Fundraising as a Service Technologies (FAAST). What's the catch? There isn't one. "Everything about DeCoy is about people giving to others," Steve says. "It is in giving that we receive."



Gentry Schroeder, the catalyst for the birth of DeCoy

We had the pleasure of sitting down with Steve to learn more about DeCoy and how this growing community of butterflies—from consumers to businesses to charities—is benefitting, and get a sneak peek into his upcoming book.

THE INTERVIEW

Steve, tell us a bit more about how DeCoy works, who can join, and the innovative bitcoin aspect of it.

Any person can join for free or pay a small fee for added benefits and support of any community in the world, and any business, company, community, or charitable organizations can use or license DeCoy for free. Members earn free bitcoin just by using the app, and we deposit into their private wallet in the DeCoy app—that's it! They can save it, donate it, or spend it as they like.

How can businesses and community organizations benefit from DeCoy?

DeCoy is free for businesses to join and use, all at zero cost and no risk to them. In addition, non-profits, schools, and churches can request the DeCoy API without any cost to the nonprofit and use custom tools to raise money for their organization with their members or other people in the community. We show them how to use their own dashboard to control free items, rewards, entries, balances, etc. This means each community can not only create their own currency, they can generate their own value within seconds and drive record donations on autopilot. DeCoy automatically directs 50% of the small membership fee along with all real-life gamifications, dwell times, and geo-scavenger hunts to benefit that particular entity by code via smart contract. In addition, members, groups, communities, countries, churches, or schools can pool their behavior to raise even more money or support emergency needs around the world and transfer their monetary rewards in-app to any other app user in the world for FREE! Good bye Western Union and other monetary intermediaries.

You're also working on new book. Can you share just a bit about this?

I am actually working on several new books, but the first is entitled *Special Needs Parents and Pandemics... a true story*

of a father who was forced to become a mother and what he learned.

Gentry was 16 in March of 2020 when the entire U.S. economy was shut down due to COVID-19. He had just been transferred about a year earlier to a special group in Cumming, Georgia, which he would never have been able to apply for unless it was urgent. Gentry was physically hurting his mother and his teachers, and since he was so big and strong, he could easily overpower his mother, so it became risky for her to be alone with him. When the pandemic hit, nobody knew how to act, since nobody had been through a pandemic, but I quickly realized that I was left on an island with nobody to help. No school, no church, no friends, no work, everything was closed and there was no support. I had to flee to Arkansas where my mother and father had just moved, and my sister had been in the same community for 40 years. The book explains what happens when a sole parent caregiver has to move to a new place sight unseen in the middle of a pandemic and how DeCoy emerged out of this experience to help every special needs family in the community, then the country, and then the world.

Finally, what do you enjoy most about your work, Steve? What drives you?

What really drives me is helping others. I want to bring technology and theology together in a way that gives people confidence in what they believe, give them hope in the future, and support them financially with no strings attached, and just give them a strong reason to live with meaning, education, and empowerment that carries them during rough times and leads them to the same conclusion that I have come to and that's that it is in giving that we receive. I believe our lives are not our own, especially if we have been given so much that the rest of the world or most of the world does not enjoy. I have been given so much, I am thankful for so many things, I want to help others who don't have those advantages and give them a reason for living that will carry them through all of eternity.



What really drives me is helping others. I want to bring technology and theology together in a way that gives people confidence in what they believe, give them hope in the future, and support them financially with no strings attached.

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DeCoy members can earn money, free items, and bitcoin just by showing their app at a store and through their everyday behaviors, all while also helping others.

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Steve has two daughters, Naomi and Peyton, and two sons, Gentry and Jonathan.



IBRAHIM Alkurd

Founder
& CEO

How Ibrahim turned \$2k into a multimillion-dollar business by 25

When Ibrahim Alkurd was growing up, he looked up to the Mark Zuckerbergs and Bill Gates of the world. At the time, he could not have predicted that by the age of 25, he'd be well on his way to emulating huge entrepreneurial success. Nor could he have foreseen the serendipitous train ride that would take him from a medical student to the founder of two multimillion-dollar businesses.

Today, Ibrahim is a firmly planted leader in the digital asset space and the owner of a pair of thriving companies—New Mine, an international service provider for digital-asset mining, and Lavalier Capital Management, a digital asset investment company with two funds and over \$50 million in assets under management. Founded in 2016 and 2018 respectively, New Mine closed \$2 million in sales in its inaugural year and Lavalier Capital Management's flagship fund was named the top-performing fund in its industry for two years running.

The narrative of Ibrahim's success is not hyperbolic. After all, just a year prior to launching New Mine, he'd never heard the term "bitcoin." Ibrahim recalls that fateful railway journey that changed everything. "I knew nothing about bitcoin when my friend told me about it that day on the train, so I understood the initial hesitation from people when it first emerged, because they didn't understand it, and neither did I—but I quickly became fascinated by it." After that conversation, Ibrahim took a job at a call center and saved \$2,000 while learning everything he could about bitcoin. A few months later, in 2015, he began arbitrage trading, turning that \$2k into \$13k in just three months. After seeing an unmet need for reliable mining services, he launched New Mine a year later to fill the gap. The demand for services was so great—30x what they could provide—they were turning clients away. At the same time, people were asking Ibrahim to manage their digital assets. In

response, he co-founded a digital asset fund that grew to \$50 million in assets under management. In 2021, the company returned an astounding 1,128% in profits to its clients.

We spoke with Ibrahim to learn more about the growing popularity of bitcoin and digital assets, what he sees for the future, and what drives him to continue to innovate as a leader in this dynamic space.

Ibrahim, for those who are unfamiliar with bitcoin, will you give us a brief primer of what it is and how it can be used in our everyday lives?

Bitcoin was created in 2009 by a pseudonymous inventor known as Satoshi Nakamoto. Its purpose was to be an electronic peer-to-peer cash system, but it has also attracted investors as a store-of-value currency, comparable to gold. Satoshi detailed bitcoin's groundbreaking technology in a nine-page document that laid the foundations of electronic peer-to-peer cash and its underlying blockchain technology. Since bitcoin's creation, thousands of digital assets have emerged, and an entire industry has been born. In my view, the best use case of bitcoin is as a store-of value.

To what would you attribute the growing popularity of digital assets?

The global digital asset market has become one of the fastest growing markets we have seen in our lifetime. In recent years, much of the popularity growth in digital assets can be attributed simply to accessibility. Digital



LAVALIERE
CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

“

Entrepreneurship allows me the ability to solve a problem and provide value to people. Obviously, a business has to be profitable, but your focus should be on fixing a problem and then the income will come.



asset trading used to be available only in a few online platforms, while today, numerous brokers offer it. This sector is seen by many as the future evolution of finance and people are keen to get in on it. Blockchain technology has the potential to change the world in many ways and can have a profound impact on our financial sector.

What does the future look like for digital assets?

In the short term, the digital asset sector will continue to be volatile and have its ups and downs. As this market matures, we will see the emergence of the Googles and Facebooks of this space. The best application of blockchain technology has been in digital assets and the best application of digital assets has been in decentralized finance, also known as DeFi. Decentralized finance is a sector of this market that offers financial instruments without relying on intermediaries such as brokerages, exchanges, or banks by using smart contracts on the blockchain. DeFi has grown to the billions, and I expect it to grow to the trillions in the coming years.

“

The global digital asset market has become one of the fastest growing markets we have seen in our lifetime.

Let's end with a personal question. What do you enjoy most about your work, or what drives you?

I enjoy the challenge of entrepreneurship and the unpredictability of it. I love the fact that I've created these companies from nothing, and I think that is very powerful. Entrepreneurship allows me the ability to solve a problem and provide value to people. Obviously, a business has to be profitable, but your focus should be on fixing a problem and then the income will come.

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Christopher Tuma



— Founder —

“ My goal is to serve as an extension of their internal recruiting team rather than an outsourced firm.

In the dormant years of the pandemic, entrepreneurs, visionaries, and innovators across the country were quietly turning their ideas into reality—bringing forth solutions to problems that have plagued consumers, businesses, and industries for decades. And Christopher Tuma is among them. He's the founder of Churchill Fox, a company on a mission to revolutionize the recruiting industry. As competition for talent is at a fever pitch and companies struggle to find qualified candidates in the wake of the Great Resignation, it comes at a time in which the country is experiencing the greatest explosion of small businesses and startups in its history—and Churchill Fox is leading the charge to help them thrive with a model designed specifically for enterprises with 20 to 1000 employees, built by a man who knows every inch of the industry.

Christopher got his start in recruitment at just 22, and in eight years has held every role in the industry, from recruiter to CEO, working on behalf of over 200 of the Fortune 500s, and just as many small to mid-size companies. His experience gave him a deep insight into the industry. “When it comes to recruitment, I'm not someone who's just managed a recruiting team or a sales team, I've actually done it, and still do it, myself,” he shares.

In 2022, at just 29 years old, Christopher opened the doors to Churchill Fox to not only provide top tier recruiting services, but to save companies time and money by giving them direct access to specialized recruiters who focus on the particular industry of the client company, thus eliminating the need for salespeople and allowing for lower fees. Most of all—he actually made it easy. Client companies simply visit the website and enter information about who they are and who they're looking for, then book time to talk with a recruiter directly about their specific needs. Christopher's colleagues, who come from some of the best agencies in the country, get to focus on the industries they know so they can hire based on the nuances and critical details needed for specific industries, and pull from networks built over years of successful recruitment.

We spoke with Christopher to learn more about what inspired Churchill Fox, and how they're turning the recruiting industry on its head.

“ What it’s a cool feeling when you find someone their dream job and help them advance their career and help a company find that perfect person they’ve been looking for.

Why did you leave a thriving career as an executive to start your own firm?

I started to see how transactional the industry seemed, instead of human—just checking off boxes of skills and qualifications to find a résumé that matched. But it doesn’t end with checkboxes; they don’t necessarily mean a candidate is qualified, and oftentimes they’re not. There are nuances, very specific skills and personality traits that must be considered. I started the company to put the people at the center of it all. And what I wanted was to help companies save money and have the experience be more efficient, enjoyable, and personable for everyone, resulting in a long-lasting union that allows both companies and candidates to thrive.

Where did the idea for your revolutionary recruiting model come from? How does it work?

The process is simple. A company can simply go to the Churchill Fox website and click “Hire Now.” This will lead them to a page where they add some basic details about the job they are looking to fill, and access to a calendar to schedule a time to connect with a recruiter about the role. Then they can just sit back and let us head hunt the best talent for them!

My goal is to serve as an extension of their internal recruiting team rather than an outsourced firm. If you post a job on a job board, every applicant costs money, whether or not they’re qualified. And most of the time the candidates aren’t vetted, they just have key words on their resume. Plus, if you go through a normal recruiting firm, there’s typically a much higher placement fee, but since we don’t have salespeople who earn commission, we can charge a much lower fee. We’re not salespeople, we’re recruiters who specialize in the specific industry for which you’re hiring. Time is of the essence in recruiting, and companies need qualified candidates who can hit the ground running. Our clients visit our site and talk with a recruiter that same day. Furthermore, I often show clients both the candidates they can afford, and those they actually need, because often times, the salary targeted and the skillset targeted do not match up. In this competitive market, the best candidates can demand a little more.

How is the Churchill Fox team unique?

I have an all-star team of previous coworkers, some of whom I’ve worked with for years, so I knew exactly who I wanted to bring on. This industry requires a lot of perseverance. It can take patience and creativity to find the right candidate. It takes flexibility and tenacity to get what your client needs, and my team



has that. And because we don’t have salespeople, I can use more of our revenue to pay them higher commissions while keeping costs low for our clients.

What do you enjoy most about your work, Christopher?

First, it’s a cool feeling when you find someone their dream job and help them advance their career and help a company find that perfect person they’ve been looking for. Then there’s the relationships. I’ve had some clients for years, so I understand how they hire and what they really want. We go golfing, have dinner. I meet their families, and introduce them to mine, so this is not just transactional for me. This business is personal, and I treat it as such.

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BRYAN SHUPE

“Our state. Our news. Our home.”

The man behind the media movement to restore community voices for the betterment of all.



Contact: shupe@delawarelive.com LI: Bryan Shupe

Community. Where traditions are born and passed down through generations. Where values, views, and beliefs are shared—and sometimes debated—over coffee at the local diner. Where dreams are born, nurtured, rise, and flourish, and neighbors look out for neighbors. This is very essence of “community.” For Bryan Shupe, it’s everything—and for the people in his hometown of Milford, Delaware, and across “The First State” there’s nothing he wouldn’t do. His passion to improve their quality of life drove Bryan through a childhood of volunteerism and ignited a lifetime devoted to this mission—as a local business owner, community leader, Delaware state representative, and the creator of Milford’s first hyperlocal community-driven media outlet, Milford Live. Today, as the CEO of Delaware LIVE News network, a locally owned, statewide news media company, he’s bringing communities back into the spotlight with stories by the people, *for* the people, and *of* the people of Delaware.

It all began in 2010. When Bryan saw the newspaper replace local-interest stories with national, often negative, news, he created Milford

Live, filling the digital pages with positive outcomes from local businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders, and news that mattered to Milford residents. In 2020, Bryan expanded his vision with Delaware LIVE News, a network that is giving the voices back to communities across the commonwealth, with statewide, local news and live-streaming high school sports. “People want to be involved and engaged in their local communities,” Bryan says. “We listen to the concerns and ideas of our residents, and deliver information that matters to *them*.” And Delaware LIVE is delivering on that promise. In 2022, Delaware Public Libraries honored the news outlet with its *Media Award*. For Delawareans, it’s a long-awaited return to what news once was—and should be—and the rekindling of communal harmony and camaraderie.

“ We listen to the concerns and ideas of our residents, and deliver information that matters to them.

Delaware LIVE News network: “Our state. Our news. Our home.”

Delaware LIVE was launched in an effort to combat the national takeover of Delaware news. Rooted in traditional journalism, the network uses a digital platform to interact directly with readers daily. Featuring hyperlocal content about community culture, businesses, schools, government, health, and sports, Delaware LIVE highlights innovators and influencers that are playing a vital role in Delaware’s future, and tells the collective and individual stories of the people, institutions, and experiences across the state.

We sat down with Bryan to learn more about Delaware LIVE, their mission to bring attention to local communities, and his ongoing efforts to improve the quality of life for all.

The Interview

Q: Delaware LIVE is flipping the script on the national news behemoths, covering topics that matter to each community. Do citizens play an active role in the stories you produce?

Yes, they do. People write to us to tell us what they want to hear and questions they have about their community, and then we pursue them. A lot of times we're surprised by what people want to know more about, and being able to uncover and present these stories that matter to them is important to us. A lot of news agencies just copy/paste content from press releases issued by state agencies or nonprofits, and the public is unaware that they're following the one-sided narrative they want to tell you. We get multiple sides of the story, talk to the people who are impacted by things that are going on, people for/against an issue, and really focus on traditional journalism and how it was intended to inform the public about what's going on in their local communities.

Q: What has the response from the Delaware community been to Delaware LIVE?

It's been absolutely amazing. They've told us that we're really filling a void for local news and they're really excited that they have an opportunity to get engaged with their community. They feel like they know where to go to have their voice heard. It's exciting because people tell us they never knew certain things were going on with their community, and because of our reporting, they're able to attend the local government meetings and take part in the process *before* it's voted on. Now we're seeing that bigger networks are starting to follow our lead and report more hyperlocal, and I think that's our larger goal—developing an atmosphere where all media outlets are focusing more on our neighborhoods, communities, and talking about actions that are going to impact our community before they happen so that people can get engaged.

Q: Your passion for improving people's lives is clearly seen in your personal and professional endeavors, Bryan. Where does this come from?

When I was in high school, I told my parents I wanted to be an entrepreneur and I wanted to get involved with local government. They would say, "I don't know how that will work out for you, because we don't have a lot of money, we don't have prominent name." When



I started my first business at 26, and then was elected mayor at 29, I saw that I could really effect change, and I realized that my path in life was to bring people together among all this divisiveness, among these commonalities to say, "You don't have to have a lot of money, a name; you can do things in your community by working together toward a common goal. This remains my mission in everything I do.

Q: Delaware LIVE clearly epitomizes your mission, as does your ongoing work on behalf of the people of Milford and across Delaware. Will you share just a few of your accomplishments?

I'll be happy to. In Milford, I rehabilitated a 20-year vacant property at the entrance of our downtown business district, creating a 14,000 square-foot home for two local businesses. As a state lawmaker, I established a public-private partnership, alongside my colleague Rep. Bentz, to attract primary care physicians and nurse practitioners to Delaware through a Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Program (HB 48). My wife and I also own Fur Baby Pet Resort with 18 employees, and we try to help them grow to meet their desire of where they want to go in the company and their personal goals.

Bryan serves on the Boys & Girls Club of Delaware Board of Trustees, the University of Delaware Political Science Advisory Board, the Brandywine Valley SPCA Advisory Board, the University of Delaware Mentoring Program, and Delaware State Chamber of Commerce Small Business Alliance.

**Bryan
SHUPE**

Jadis Montijo



“I always find a way.”



As the founder of two flourishing ventures and a partner in others, Jadis Montijo has been a business leader and successful serial entrepreneur for a decade. But more than that, he's a visionary rebel. A FTM transgender captain of industry, who marches to his own beat. He has his eyes firmly fixed on what he wants to accomplish—and the passion and ingenuity to make it happen. “I always find a way,” he says.

In 2018, Jadis met Dr. Jonathan Keith during a surgical consultation. After Jadis' first procedure, performed by Dr. Keith, Jadis struggled to find a scar tape that would satisfy his aftercare treatment. Products available on the market failed to fit his active lifestyle. After many failed attempts to find a scar tape that would stick, Jadis approached Dr. Keith about teaming up to bring life changing innovation to the scar care industry and design products not just for everyone, but especially with the trans tribe in mind.

Motivo Scar Care: More Than a Brand. A Movement.

Motivo Scar Care focuses on creating scar treatment products that offer a better fit to the consumer's lifestyle and have purposeful effects. As a premium brand, every aspect of the brand ethos is showcased within the products: Quality, purity and effectiveness. Consumers will find that, when compared to competing products, Motivo's products will last longer, perform more effectively, and enable a better quality of life.

Building the brand from personal experience, and Dr. Keith being one of the leading gender affirming surgeons in the USA, not only do they want to bring a much-needed change to the scar treatment industry, but also to be a pillar of support and resources for the trans community. “Giving back to communities that are close to our hearts is paramount to us. Not only can consumers resonate with our brand's mission, but we are a brand they can stand behind,” Jadis shares.

As Jadis leads the LGBTQIA+ and scar treatment industry into a brighter future, he's also helming a thriving, New Jersey-based cannabis consulting firm, called JADIS, that he founded in 2017.

JADIS: Taking Cannabis Entrepreneurs from Seed to Sale

JADIS is composed of diverse industry leaders with over 10 years of vertical cannabis expertise. The group has successfully worked in key markets across the country, inclusive of Washington state, Oregon, California, Colorado, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Nevada, and more. Their experience ranges from organic license acquisition, sales, branding, marketing, compliance, all facets of operations, and community program development, to social equity and diversity initiatives. The group has assisted a multitude of clients in winning and developing cannabis licenses for all classes, demonstrating a deep understanding of regulated cannabis licensing intricacies by market and facility operations. They have also worked with established clients to improve operational efficiencies, remedy complex compliance issues, and develop systems to maximize profitability. During their tenure, they have forged strong networks of strategic partnerships that have bolstered the growth of the groups they interact with.

He has recently partnered with two successful entrepreneurs, Garth Case and Rita Ewing, to open a cannabis dispensary in NJ, called PLUG Naturals. PLUG Naturals will showcase the benefits of their technology. They plan to set the standard for innovation, quality, convenience, and education for their customers.

We spoke with Jadis to learn more about his experiences, what drives him as an entrepreneur, and what advice he'd give to others chasing their dreams.

What was life like for you growing up?

I was always in my own lane. A class clown and a rebel. In first grade, I asked if I could go to the bathroom and walked right out the front door, home (my mom brought me back to school and grounded me). Both of my parents worked, we weren't wealthy, but we had what we needed. I just always starved for more. Starved to feel more like myself, starved to do things my way, starved to make things better.

Your determination to create Motivo Scar Care was born out of your own top surgery. Tell us a little bit about your experiences.

The main issue is me being one of the sweatiest people on earth (ha!). The recommended aftercare of scar tape was not working for me. I was at a bar one time, and it fell from under my shirt onto my shoe. I gave up on scar treatment after that, which resulted in a second "scar revision" surgery. I then approached Dr. Keith about building a brand to not only solve the issue, but to also empower the people using it.



What is one piece of advice you'd give to aspiring entrepreneurs or LGBTQIA+ folks that might help them with their own journeys?

Mindset is EVERYTHING. Every person on this planet has something uniquely special about them, very few have the mindset to recognize it and take action. Praying and manifesting will not work without taking action. You have to take risks to get what you want. Living every day, not being who you want to be and not following your dreams, is not worth it to me. Even for the most successful people, we all have our moments, days of doubt and discomfort, but nothing is more uncomfortable than staying the same.

What do you enjoy most about your work, or what drives you?

I love everything about business and being an entrepreneur—the good and the bad, the ups and downs, the unpredictability, and all of the challenges. I'm naturally a problem solver, so for me, it's fun. Success is great, but in the end, I just want to see how many of my dreams I can accomplish and who can I help along the way. I enjoy being involved with the Transgender Patient Family Advisory Council for Saint Barnabas Medical Center, and mentoring trans individuals, who I help with overall knowledge and resources towards transitioning, and even business-related matters.

MOTIVO
SCAR CARE™

JADIS

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MISHA FRADIN

In 2018, Misha Fradin co-founded Lumen & Forge (L&F), a multi-disciplinary technology integration company with a focus on immersive projection mapping, content creation, and interactive experiences. Leveraging leading-edge technologies, L&F transports participants into awe-inspiring, magical, and otherworldly encounters. One of their core services, 360° dome projection, was used during the 2020 Miami Super Bowl off-site events.

Based in Las Vegas, Nevada, the company has dominated the field, attaining world records and continuously amazing their list of famous clients, which include National Geographic, Jeep, Capital One, Coca-Cola, and Mastercard, among others. “Our mission is to bring knowledge and experience to bear when providing bespoke solutions. Our years of experience in working with top brands and marketing companies is what allows us to bring dreams and ideas to life,” Misha shares.

To date, L&F has served thousands of clients and completed hundreds of projects with Misha at the helm, ensuring that the gears in all of the departments operate effectively. “I help design and build systems that enable everything to run smoothly. I have a hand in every aspect of almost every client-facing project, from the initial client relationship to the final installation,” Misha adds. “We’re only here because of our clients, so I make sure they’re happy.” Considering that most of their business is due to word-of-mouth referrals from satisfied clients, Misha has succeeded in his mission.

The Top 100 Magazine spoke with Misha to learn more about Lumen & Forge, the services they provide, and the clients they serve.

Who are your clients?

Everyone wants to include immersive technology as part of their advertising strategy, so we’ve amassed quite a roster of clients. From National Geographic, Capital One, Mastercard, and Jeep, to marketing agencies, restaurants, malls, cruise ships, hotel chains, beverage brands, and stadiums. We can work in any industry in any part of the world, and we’ve created experiences that people will never forget. We don’t just put video on the ceiling—we take up the entire sky.

Managing Partner & Co-Founder

“ Our mission is to bring knowledge and experience to bear when providing bespoke solutions.

LUMEN &
FORGE

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How did you start in this industry?

We started creating immersive domes and projection mapping experiences from my garage. As projects came in, we built the team, and as needs in the industry arose, we filled them. Our success has been based on our reputation, integrity, and our ability to honor our relationships.

Tell us a little about how you create and execute a client's vision.

Some clients don't know what they want, or they have some idea in their mind that they can't verbalize. We want to bring their ideas to life, not push our ideas on them. We guide them from 'idea' to 'idea on paper.' We create our 3D experience, build renders in the 3D world, offer design options, then get their feedback. After that, we whittle it down to the actual 'experience.' Then it goes into cost analysis and contracting, and finally, execution.

What inspired you to specialize in 360 dome projection?

Partly because it was hard. Partly because no one was doing it. What got me into the industry was working for a geodesic dome company. I sold projects for major brands in the past, and they had projection systems, but we built the domes, and other companies would come and create the videos. I combined the two into a turnkey solution. What inspired me to go off on my own was watching the actual effect that the concept had on people. Structures don't really have the impact I wanted, but combined with a show or a concert, it can change someone's perspective forever.

What has the response been from participants?

Everyone loves large immersive experiences. The National Geographic project, *Beneath the Blue*, was a huge hit that attracted nearly 5,000 participants. We hired local artists to build structures out of recycled plastic, then produced a 360° video experience to emulate being underwater. We created an amazing planetarium dome show for Jeep, where we immersed viewers in a realistic off-road drive. There were base-rumbler that shook the floor and seats, a wind machine to simulate open windows, a scent machine that offered a forest aroma, and the seats were heated. After that event, Jeep completed a survey, which showed that consumers were 40% more likely to buy one of their vehicles.



What are just one or two of your favorite or most memorable projects?

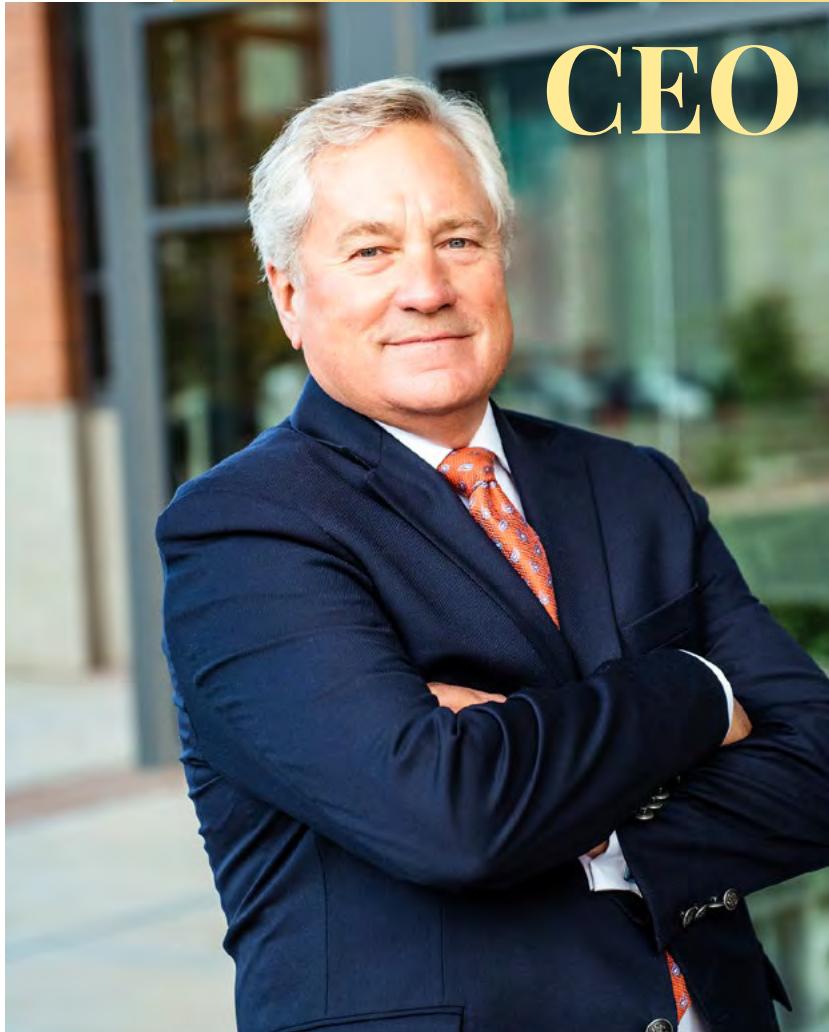
The Miami Dome project was the most memorable based on the size and scale of the project. My favorite one was the Jeep experience because we had the freedom to build the experience from the ground up and it utilized all of our creativity. People were throwing their hands in the air and kids were smiling. That kind of response is very rewarding.

What do you enjoy most about your work/what drives you?

What drives me is being able to help shift someone's perspective for the better, and I think that's what I also enjoy most about the work. A lot of effort goes into what we do, but seeing the smiles, excitement, and wonderment make it all worthwhile.

Lumen & Forge received gold and bronze Reggie Awards and the 2020 Mondo Award for our Dome Miami project.

Steven EROR



CEO

Regional Anesthesia: The breakthrough that could halt the opioid crisis.

The opioid epidemic. It has been declared “one of this century’s most devastating public health disasters,” according to a Stanford *Lancet* report published earlier this year. Over 600,000 people in the U.S. and Canada have died of an overdose in the last two decades. As opioid deaths continue to soar with breathtaking speed, the epidemic is projected to claim 1.22 million more lives in the U.S. by 2029, unless immediate action is taken to stop it. The alarm has been sounded—loud and clear—in an urgent appeal for novel solutions to halt a catastrophic crisis that is stealing sons and daughter, fathers and mothers, and tearing apart families and communities.

For Steven EROR, it is a perilous threat to humanity that cannot be ignored, and he’s determined to eradicate it. He’s been on the forefront of the development of innovative technologies to improve patient care and outcomes for over 25 years. It is the singular passion that has driven him as the leader of biopharma, drug delivery, and acute pain management medtech companies—and one that compelled him to create patented medical devices and methods to address risk stratification in lung cancer and non-surgical tubal occlusion for women who are unable to survive pregnancy, both of which have been used for years. Now, he’s turned his full focus to halting the opioid crisis.

In 2020, Steven joined forces with Solo-Dex, Inc., as CEO, to lead in their pursuit to help put an end to the opioid scourge. The answer to the epidemic was staring them in the face: improve regional anesthesia by making it more widely available. In April 2021, they delivered with a revolutionary catheter that allows for continuous nerve block (cPNB) *without* opioid use or supplementation—placed with ultrasound in just five minutes and eliminating pain for days. The medical community liked the ease of use, and soon the catheter had been used in the treatment

“ We’ve introduced fast, simple, and reliable regional anesthesia that continuously blocks pain, allowing for postoperative pain management without opioids.

of over 7,000 patients and employed by a dozen hospitals and surgical centers across the country and internationally. Solo-Dex is now on track to become the standard of care for managing acute pain before, during, and for days after surgery. “Our catheter can eliminate the need for opioids while improving patient comfort,” Steven explains. “It is gaining acceptance because it is placed using one hand, in a simple, easy, five-minute procedure and stays in place.”

The Solo-Dex Fascile® cPNB Catheter & Regional Anesthesia: Simple, fast, and the breakthrough that could halt the opioid crisis

"General anesthesia, on its own, need not be routine practice for the management of pain, which too often leads to opioid dependency," Steven explains. "We've introduced fast, simple, and reliable regional anesthesia that continuously blocks pain, allowing for postoperative pain management without opioids."

Designed by and for anesthesiologists, the Solo-Dex Fascile® cPNB catheter overcomes the barriers to the widespread use of regional anesthesia. The catheter can be placed with one hand, in five minutes, using ultra-low doses of medication, and without the need for sterile drapes or gloves. Patients who have used the Fascile® cPNB catheter report higher satisfaction, and a decreased need for follow-up doctor visits for pain and hospitalizations. "Surgeons want high patient satisfaction," Steven says. "Ours is an elegant, easier, and safer alternative to opioids and general anesthesia."

We spoke with Steven to learn more about his role, the importance of regional anesthesia in combating the opioid crisis, and how the joint efforts of Solo-Dex and doctors are beginning to stem the tide.

Q: Steve, what's different about the Fascile® cPNB catheter, and why is it important to combating the opioid crisis?

Our cPNB catheter removes both the guesswork and complexity of placing a continuous nerve block that remains active for days. Local drugs designed to deliver longer duration blocks simply do not provide the coverage to transition the patient to non-opioid pain management.

Q: Let's talk briefly about your role at Solo-Dex. How are you helping to bring the company to the forefront of pain management?

I focus on what, who, and why. The *WHAT* deals with the discovery of a powerful idea for an underserved market opportunity, which is sustained by both financing and vision. The *WHO* is a network of competent, motivated individuals and investors driven to succeed. The *WHY* is to provide value to all stakeholders and improve the outcome for patients.

Q: You've received overwhelmingly positive feedback from patients who have used the Fascile® cPNB catheter. Can you share some of this with us?

Patients seem surprised that the pain relief is so absolute, more complete relief than oral pain therapy. A patient has



shoulder rotator cuff repair, and six months later, his wife shows up for a block for a knee replacement. A teenager with fracture returns to school the same day. It really is a wonderful thing to see.

Q: Let's end with a somewhat personal question, Steve. Will you describe the future you'd like to see?

Many agree that general anesthesia is a blunt instrument that is particularly challenging for our senior community and the memory impaired, who recover slowly. A solution that reduces cost, enhances patient satisfaction, and eliminates opioid abuse is a better future.

Steve holds a BA in economics and an MBA in finance and is a former adjunct professor of Finance, David Eccles Graduate School of Business at the University of Utah. He is a fellow of the National Association of Corporate Directors, a member of the American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine, the Medical Device Manufacturing Association, the Advance Medical Technology Association, the Keirtsu Forum, the Asia Society and The Washington Foreign Law Society, and the Director of Renew America Together Civility Institute. He has received the Rising Star Award from Swedish American Life Science Summit, the Most Innovative Predictive Analytics Award from Corporate Vision, and the 2018 Biotechnology Award from Global Health and Pharma, among many others.

SOLQDEX

Janet Courtney

66 I built LHT with the mission of being a therapy company run by therapists *for* therapists for the betterment of students.



CEO & Founder

A CALLING FROM GOD:

Janet Courtney, MS, CCC-SLP, didn't just fall into her present career. While she had been a practicing speech-language pathologist since 1994, and had a demonstrated history of working in the e-learning industry for over nine years, it was a calling from God that led her to found Lighthouse Therapy® (LHT) in 2018.

Lighthouse Therapy® is an online therapy company specializing in teletherapy for speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral and mental health services to schools. They assist students from early intervention through 12th grade, and in the 21-22 school year alone, they reached over 2,100 students. Under Janet's astute guidance and the support of her talented and determined staff, since their inception, nearly 4,000 children have been served through Lighthouse Therapy®. "I built LHT with the mission of being a therapy company run *by* therapists *for* therapists for the betterment of students," Janet shares.

"What we do allows school administrators to effectively meet their testing deadlines, achieve manageable student/therapist ratios, and increase access to therapy services. This leads to better team morale, less turnover, and helps to increase students' performance."

LIGHTHOUSE THERAPY® SERVICES:

As a contract company, LHT helps schools reach more students than they could otherwise. To accomplish this objective, LHT provides online therapists who work directly with their students. This is especially valuable since many schools cannot hire all the therapists they need, or their budget doesn't support hiring a full-time therapist. "That's where we come in," Janet adds. "We're one of the only companies that will contract to serve a single child, rather than require a minimum number of students. We're open in all 50 states. We want the students to be the best they can be and have a bright future."

Lighthouse Therapy® is an online therapy company specializing in teletherapy for speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral and mental health services to schools.



FAITH AND CONVICTION:

From the onset, Janet put her faith in God. “This wasn’t something I did by myself. God filled my life and LHT with amazing, mission-driven people. They have a passion for what we’re doing— helping kids—and they make me look really, really good,” Janet states. “As CEO, access and opportunity allow me to be successful, but it’s also about making the right choices and taking advantage of them. God gives those to me. If you do the things you’re called to do and fight for what you know is right, then God blesses it.”

SAYING YES TO GOD:

“I said ‘yes’ to God, and my family’s, 2200 kids’, and 120 therapists’ worlds were impacted, all because I said, ‘yes’ to Him on that pivotal day.”

Janet was working as an independent therapy contractor when she heard God’s voice saying, “I want you start your own company.” At the time, Janet thought it was crazy, but God knew better. She heard God say, “You’ve been asking me what you should do, and I’m telling you.” After speaking with her husband, Mike, and receiving more guidance from God, she quit her part time job to focus on starting LHT. Four days after she let go of the safety net of outside work, her husband was unexpectedly laid off. It was a challenging time that left Janet wondering, “Lord what are you doing?” The experience humbled her, but Janet continued to follow God’s instructions and forged ahead. “I believed in what God called me to do and I would not give up,” she adds. In its first

year in business, LHT served 49 children, despite difficult circumstances. Now, just four years later, they are in what Janet calls “a beautiful place” in life and in business.

THE REASON FOR IT ALL:

“In simple terms,” Janet says, “I love what I do. God’s given me a servant’s heart to help people. As educators, when we see students succeed, it’s the most beautiful and rewarding thing in the world. Lighthouse Therapy has touched the lives of 2,200 kids this year. We do that through God’s calling. He has taken it beyond my imagination, and we aren’t done yet. This excites and fires me up to leave a legacy. People need to know that God loves you. It doesn’t matter if you have a disability because God doesn’t think you’re broken.”

WE'RE BRIGHTER TOGETHER:

Special education in America is “woefully” underfunded. We want to spark a conversation and nationally shine a light on the needs within our schools. We’re hoping LHT’s story will inspire you to get involved by watching our video *Brighter Together* at lighthouse-therapy.com/brightertogether.

Janet holds a master’s degree in speech-language pathology with a minor in audiology from Purdue University, a Bachelor of Science degree, summa cum laude, from Mercy College, and she received the President’s Award, graduating at the top of her class. She was also nominated for Success Magazine’s Top 50 Women of Influence.





Mariasis

"I pour my heart and soul into my work. My products are a reflection of me. I do whatever it takes, break through walls, and inspire those around me to be unstoppable. I believe in a better way."

This is Jason Mariasis' credo—one that he has nurtured, believed in, and practiced throughout his entire career. A servant leader. An influencer. A motivator. A profound sense of purpose. This is what underlies a success story that can only be described as astonishing.

From the time he was in grade school, Jason aspired to be more, to do more, and to achieve more. His first foray in entrepreneurship was Galaxy Productions, a DJ and event planning business that he started while in 6th grade with only the support of his parents, his dad's stereo, and a Discman. It wasn't long before Jason was turning a profit. After taking on a partner, he doubled down, buying better equipment and reinvesting his earnings.

Before long, Galaxy Productions had six employees and over 50 engagements per year. By the time Jason was in high school, he had been named a future leader by a Massachusetts newspaper, and in college was featured in the *New York Times*.

Now, Jason is the vice president of digital product management for Credit One Bank, where he is responsible for leading digital product strategy and digital transformation initiatives, but he's also amassed an enviable list of noteworthy projects over the past 15 years.

To learn more about his extraordinary career history, we spoke with Jason about his strategy, his endeavors, and his motivation.

“

We began by talking to customers to uncover their unmet needs and worked backwards from those to create meaningful solutions.

Jason, let's talk about the journey from entrepreneur to intrapreneur.

You start a business because you want to make an impact. I want to do something that matters with a group of people that share in that vision, that want to work together to do something great. The theme throughout my entire career is a profound sense of purpose, whether building businesses from the ground up or working on behalf of large companies in service to customers. I am always focused on the *why*—why am I doing this, why am I joining this company, what's the problem that needs to be solved, and how do we find a better way? This purpose aligns with my position at Credit One, just as it did throughout every role and company in my career. I joined Credit One to help them expand beyond a credit card provider to a financial success partner, and ultimately, a life success partner that helps customers succeed at every part of their journey and achieve their goals. It's a *Rising Tide Lifts all Ships* philosophy, and I believe that companies can succeed while lifting others up. People don't buy what you *do*, they buy *why* you *do* it. It's all about adding value. Success can look different. It doesn't have to be at the expense of others. It can be a win-win.

Vice President, Digital Product Management

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A servant leader. An influencer. A motivator. A profound sense of purpose. This is what underlies a success story that can only be described as astonishing.

You've acquired over 15 years of experience in building and scaling disruptive products globally for Fortune 500 companies and startups. Tell us about those roles.

From 2011 to 2015, I was a product manager at Capital One Labs. This was my first job after graduating from Hamilton College. At the time, the Lab was an internal startup within Capital One, tasked to drive innovation. The charter was to reimagine how people interact with their money. I helped develop cutting-edge mobile experiences to make banking easier for customers, starting with a first-of-its-kind instant rewards redemption option called "Rewardly," that eventually evolved into the Capital One Mobile Wallet, debuting as the Apple App Store's number one finance app, with millions of users. We began by talking to customers to uncover their unmet needs and worked backwards from those to create meaningful solutions.

In 2015, I became the head of digital marketing products for Vistaprint Digital, providing SaaS digital marketing services for small businesses all in one place. Vistaprint was historically a print-



based company, but they wanted to move into the digital marketing space in response to shifting customer expectations. I helped facilitate Vistaprint's transition from the

world's largest print company to a marketing partner for more than 16 million businesses around the globe in collaboration with an outstanding team. While still at Vistaprint, I co-founded and became the CEO of Stratus, an AI-driven, personal finance management platform touted as the first ever "TurboTax for financial planning for everyday people." We created this smart, low-cost, digital alternative to traditional financial advisors for those that needed help the most. We kept the customer at the center, offering friendly, personalized, step-by-step recommendations to achieve financial security and build long-term wealth and accumulated tens of thousands of users.

In 2019, I joined Sterling, a leading provider of background and identity services, as head of product for its new small and mid-sized business unit. I was hired to design a solution geared toward that segment and expand Sterling's total addressable market. We built out a new arm of the company and launched SterlingNOW, the first-ever, on-demand, self-service background screening platform, providing unprecedented access to high-quality, enterprise-grade screening at an affordable price to enable faster, smarter and safer hiring decisions. I oversaw the exceptional product, design, research, and engineering teams that designed it, and we brought the first version to market within three months. We had 9,000 small businesses on the platform while I was there, and secured 36 partnerships with some of the world's largest retail franchises and professional employer organizations.

I'm incredibly thankful for these opportunities, the many talented team members, managers and mentors I was fortunate enough to work with, the countless lessons learned, and for what we were able to accomplish.



Q&A

with
**BEN
YOUNG**

Founder & CEO

VOZZI

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What drives me is to be cutting-edge in an industry that I love. I love sports and have so much passion for it; I wanted to improve it.

Serial entrepreneur, investor, boundless optimist, tech geek, die-hard Browns fan: that's Ben Young, in a nutshell. In 2017, after two previous successful ventures, he melded these facets together with the founding of Vozzi, a unique software platform helping the sports, entertainment, and endurance industries drive revenue via SMS. The Utah-based company took off and now stands as a mass SMS leader in sports, servicing over 400 partners, including teams such as the Philadelphia Flyers, Tennessee Titans, Arizona Coyotes, Memphis Grizzlies, and Pittsburgh Pirates, Spartan Race, and Tough Mudder. They're delivering for every one of them with an average of 25 times their return on investment and an ecstatic, loyal fan base that feels like they're part of the team rather than just a faceless ticket buyer. Vozzi counts Ticketmaster, Salesforce, Tickets.com, and Microsoft Dynamics among its tech integrators. As an approved vendor with Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint, and AT&T, they're helping teams put the buying experience where their fans want it—in the palm of their hands—with a seamless purchase journey, from tickets, merchandise, experiences, and everything in between.

We spoke with Ben to learn more about Vozzi and how they bring teams and fans together in a home-run experience.

Get in Touch

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“ We’re assisting teams to increase revenue by ”
making the fan experience better.

Q: What compelled you to start Vozzi?

A: It came out of my passion for sports. I've been a season ticket holder for multiple organizations but always felt the communication was chaotic and needed improvement and streamlining. I wanted to develop something that would help teams communicate but not be punishing on their budgets. That's our goal. We're assisting teams to increase revenue by making the fan experience better.

Q: What services do you offer, and how do they benefit your clients?

A: Our goal is to make the experiences of our partners' fans easier and better. Communication and purchasing are going mobile. That's what fans want, and we're giving them. Statistics show that emails only have a 13% open rate and a 17% return rate, whereas text messages have a 98% open rate, with an average reply time of 47 seconds. Teams still using email solely or social media will get left behind. Fans want immediacy, ease of use, and use of their phones—and more and more of them want to feel a real connection with their team. We're helping our partners deliver this to them and access more significant revenue with feature sets that meet three goals: First, building a reliable database of usable

phone numbers. Second, driving revenue with that database, and third, doing it all compliantly. With these objectives in mind, we offer a suite of feature sets. We provide a mass text option, which alerts the entire database to promotions, events, and offers, and we also offer a text-to-buy opportunity. With this automated text system, fans text the number of tickets and dates.

They want, and the system does the rest; the tickets are automatically sent to their phone, so their whole experience is covered from beginning to end. It's a revolutionary feature we've become known for. We also offer one-on-one SMS that gives fans immediate, personalized responses to establish genuine relationships with the teams. And with every text our partners send, they see a significant return on investment, and we want nothing less than that.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your work? What drives you?

A: What drives me is to be cutting-edge in an industry that I love. I love sports and have so much passion for it; I wanted to improve it. So that's what we do. We improve the team side and the fan experience, which gives me the passion for what I do.



Nerma Albertorio

Nerma's dedication to entrepreneurial growth has earned her multiple awards, including *Mentor of the Year* at 2015's *H3 Conference* and the 2022 *Techstars Allstar Community Leader* awards, and is a Cordes Foundation and Aspen Institute fellow. We spoke with Nerma to learn more about what she and Project Makers are doing for the small businesses and startups of Puerto Rico.

“ We focus on low-income families to promote mobility, using the United Nations framework as a model.

Q: Tell us about your work with Project Makers and its mission.

This is the first fund investing in social enterprises in Puerto Rico, so it's incredibly important. We focus on low-income families to promote mobility, using the United Nations framework as a model. Right now, 53% of our kids live under the poverty level, so we need to help them. We're investing in startups and people with solutions to help underserved communities. Right now, we're looking at startups focused on sustainable development goals and working to help families escape the cycle of poverty through career opportunities and jobs that allow them to grow. Our investments right now are \$50,000 per company. We just started this program last year and have funding right now for 20 companies and have already funded six of them.

You might never realize it, but 6,000 entrepreneurs and hundreds of startups and small businesses across Puerto Rico were all helped to success by one driven, dedicated woman: Nerma Albertorio. She founded Centro para Emprendedores in 2012 in San Juan, which has blossomed to a multi-million-dollar organization providing thousands of people and businesses with support, quietly and behind the scenes. That's because, with over 15 years in developing entrepreneurial programs for women, artists, engineers, and communities living below poverty levels, Nerma knows how to effectively create business opportunities for the people who need them the most, even in the most challenging economic environments.

In July 2022, she joined Project Makers as their co-manager director, designing entrepreneurship programs for all segments. Project Makers is the first social impact fund created in Puerto Rico, investing in companies with the mission of eliminating poverty. They combine education, technology, and mentorship with access to financial resources.

Founder Co-Manager Director

“We start with the person—not the money they might make.”

Q: You believe that access to education and collaboration is essential to fostering entrepreneurship. Why is this important?

Being introduced to entrepreneurship very young made me see the world differently and made me realize that I have the tools to succeed—I didn’t have to wait for someone to give them to me. So, if you teach people at an early age, their future can be different. For many people, being an entrepreneur is the only way out of the situation they’re in. You have to help them develop their minds so they can see possibilities differently, and that they have the tools and resources to make it happen. There’s a moment as an entrepreneur when you get it: “I can do this myself. I do know what to do!” But you need a support system of people with similar mindsets who encourage you. My entire team has been through the entrepreneurial journey themselves. We have different stories and backgrounds that we take into consideration. I’ve been doing this for 20 years. Entrepreneurs are built one by one—not “here’s a book, follow these steps.”

Q: What do you enjoy the most about your work?

Seeing that look in people’s eyes when they get it, that they understand they can do this. It’s spectacular. Hearing their stories, being part of their journey, and seeing them succeed as entrepreneurs is the reason that makes me work so hard for them. You’re going to make mistakes, but you have to learn from them and move on, and we tell that to them so that people can have a real perspective of what this is and not a romanticized idea of it.

This is very personal to me. I started Centro para Emprendedores because I failed at my first venture. I was sad, depressed, and made huge mistakes. I felt like a failure. There’s no book, chapter, or segment of entrepreneur class that talks about when you fail. So, I started the company from the perspective of the human behind the business and the mistakes and hiccups along the way. We start with the person—not the money they might make. I can’t picture myself doing anything else. I’ve been blessed because I found what I love to do, and that I’m able to be able to do what I do.



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We’re looking at startups focused on sustainable development goals and working to help families escape the cycle of poverty through career opportunities and jobs that allow them to grow.

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ILONA & IRINA Znakharchuk

Mango passionfruit coconut. Raspberry chocolate. Berry vanilla. With all the amazing cakes, tarts, and more at Solodko Boston, it might be hard to choose just one. That's because Ilona Znakharchuk and her sister, Irina, create desserts that exude elegance through timeless, classic aesthetics, and delicious ingredients. "We focus on creating things that are as delicious as they are pretty," Ilona says. Welcome to Solodko's world of edible art.

Solodko, "sweet" in Ukrainian, was founded during Ilona's sophomore year at Boston College. After seeing the beautiful desserts in their native Ukraine, she and her sister saw a distinct lack of them in the Greater Boston area, so they set out to introduce Eastern European desserts to their local community. They sourced and adapted recipes from a Ukrainian pastry chef and developed their own unique menu through careful trial and experimentation. Today, at their new location in Brighton, Massachusetts, they create custom cakes for special events,

and pay homage to their roots by offering Medovik, the classic Ukrainian honey cake. As they prepare for the grand opening of their storefront and cafe, Solodko has already been featured in *Gusto Journal* and provided desserts for the 2022 John F. Kennedy Library Foundation May Dinner, where Ukrainian president Zelenskyy was a 2022 *Profile In Courage Award* honoree. "It was truly a humbling experience to be able to represent Ukraine with our desserts," Ilona says.

We sat down with Ilona to learn about her culinary journey, where her inspiration comes from, and just how sweetly business is going.



How long have you been in the culinary field?

I started in 2019, my sophomore year in college. I baked on the weekends and posted to Instagram, and orders came in from all over campus. They called me the "macaroon angel." I started to do more research on running a food business, but it was difficult to find information on permits and licensing. After reaching out to the director of Boston College Dining, and receiving some information from him, I thought, "How am I going to do all this?" But then a friend told me about the Boston College Shea Center's Accelerator Program for student startups. I participated in the program in 2020, and in 2021 we obtained our first commercial kitchen. At the time, my sister and I both worked in finance, and that really helped us with the administrative and financial aspects of running

Co-Founders

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We focus on creating things that are as delicious as they are pretty.

a small business. As much as we're artists at heart, we're also entrepreneurs. Creativity and business become more satisfactory when they go hand in hand.

Where do your ideas come from?

They come from anywhere. I look at cake as edible art. An artist can make a painting inspired by a nature scene and it's the same with cake. I was really into fashion growing up, so I sometimes see a beautiful dress in a store, and it inspires me to design a cake. The texture on a wall, a piece of architecture, anything. Cake as edible art is a fairly new idea; it's uncommon to view something so temporary as "art," but what goes into creating a cake is as involved as what goes into creating a painting or sculpture. There's another layer of complexity too, because it has to taste amazing! Music has also been a big part of my life, and it's similar to baking in that there are multiple moving parts. It takes timing and patience to assemble all these pieces into a cohesive whole. My sister constructs the individual parts while I usually assemble the final product.



Can you share one of your favorite cake designs?

We love gold. A lot of our cakes have edible gold accents. How often do you get to eat gold? We also work a lot with textures. Sometimes we use really unique tools. For example, to get our velour cake effect, we use a spray gun made for painting walls. Our kitchen often looks like we're doing construction with all the tools!

What inspires you?

My sister and I are determined to be successful. Our parents came from Ukraine and sacrificed so much to give us this opportunity. Whatever we do here has to make them proud. Another motivating factor is helping and inspiring other people. When a soon-to-be mother beams at her baby shower cake, it's so fulfilling, and we're very thankful for the opportunity to brighten someone's life. It makes all the hard work worth it. We also find joy in mentoring others. Recently, a friend wanted to open her own food business and was just as overwhelmed as I was three years ago. It was satisfying to share what I had learned throughout my journey in order to help her in her endeavors.

SOLODKO

• BOSTON •

JERRY WARD

1045 Real Estate

1045 Real Estate is the epitome of what can happen when knowledge meets innovation. Combining years of experience from various sectors of commercial real estate with deep familiarity and connections throughout the industry has proven to make their unique business model work. In 2018, three real estate professionals got together to respond to an RFP from a large national grocery retailer. They were up against the biggest firms in the business, and they knew they needed a unique offering. Because they had personal experience with grocery real estate already, they understood the major pain points for this company from a real estate perspective. Perhaps the largest being expenses pain on owned and leased real estate maintenance and accounting.

What 1045 Real Estate proposed was something that the market had not seen before. They figured out a way to convert these necessary property management expenses into income, transforming a fixed cost center into a revenue generator. It was a novel concept to say the least, and some were skeptical at first, but it has proven to be a winner for all involved. How do they do it? Well, that's the secret sauce and they aren't sharing the recipe any time soon.

In the last four years, 1045 has grown from a dozen or so staff to over 100 team members in 14 states across the U.S. Due to the success of their core property management business, 1045 has been able to expand to meet clients' needs in other capacities as well. Using their entrepreneurial spirit and innovative approach with the intention to always add value to properties, rather leased or owned, 1045 has created business lines for lease restructuring services, common area maintenance (CAM) reconciliation, alternative revenue and specialty leasing, as well as company representative management.

That's where portfolio director, Jerry Ward, comes in. He and his team take on all the internal real estate responsibilities for a different subset of retail clients. They work directly with large retail operators, performing site visits for leased and owned locations, and working directly with the retail general managers to handle any facility maintenance issue. Work orders, maintenance, and anything else the location might need are managed by team members but controlled and tracked using cutting-edge software for maximum efficiency and response time. Jerry and his team also keep clients up to

date with customized monthly reports. "It saves them money in the long run," Jerry explains. "They can focus on operating their core business instead of the burden of the facility management details." 1045's flexibility and personalized plans also mean that they offer alternative revenue options. They find specialty leasing opportunities to increase revenue on clients' owned locations and work contracts to lease space for car charging stations, Christmas tree lots, firework stands, etc., 1045 handles the entire process and the clients get to add significant value to their investment.

We sat down with Jerry to learn more about what he's bringing to 1045, and his plans for the future.

Tell us a little about your background.

I'm originally from Northern Scotland, but have worked in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Russia, so I've seen corporations of all kinds grow and diminish all over the world. I have a global insight many people don't, which translates into various business and finance scenarios. When I was just starting out, my experience in the Royal Airforce taught me to be unassuming and to work smart, that is really what gave me a competitive edge as I was working my way up through global corporations. Where I was from, the oil industry was predominant and being able to translate my RAF attitude

into the oil industry was also unique, as it tends to be a bit of a rougher culture than other industries. I spent 15 years rising through the corporate structure and mobilizing services around the globe. When I decided to leave the oil industry I had gone as far as I could with my company, finishing off as country manager

(functions as a CEO for the specific country). I managed massive operations with many moving parts and huge budgets, which was a phenomenal experience. I strived to create solutions for expensive logistical challenges, much like I do today in the facility management capacity. In 2015, I was ready for the next chapter, so I evaluated my skills from a completely open angle, and I realized that commercial real estate management, and asset and property management would be a good progression for me. At first, I managed several large portfolios; hospitals, medical schools, and college campuses. But when the opportunity came to be part of something innovative and entrepreneurial, I jumped at the challenge. Coming from the huge corporate world into more of a 'start-up', I was excited to create something from the ground up. I understood both ends of the same street, where we are coming from and where we want to be. I'd say the skill I apply the most often is my tenacity, I keep working until we find the right solutions.



“ We work on all sides; real estate, ownership, landlord, development, and tenant, and as our clients grow, we are able help them scale by adjusting expenses and costs.

Portfolio Resource Director

You're managing 1045's newest division. What does that entail?

The new division's concept places professional property managers as a type of "sub-contractor," speaking directly with retail company managers and staff to manage day-to-day or long-term facility and real estate issues—again letting the business focus on the business and not the real estate. We work on all sides; real estate, ownership, landlord, development, and tenant, and as our clients grow, we are able help them scale by adjusting expenses and costs. For example, when have other locations in the same market, we will leverage vendor pricing.

How do you and 1045 differentiate yourselves in the market?

Our flexibility allows us to provide far superior service. None of our processes are cookie-cutter—they're all customized, and that allows us to be extremely nimble. We do a thorough analysis of what each client really needs and create a customized plan based on their goals for their business or portfolio. It doesn't matter if we're representing an investment group, a landlord, or a corporation, everything is tailored. We also have boots on the ground at every location, so we can stay as involved as we need. As opposed to other companies, who have managers assigned to properties from a big central office, we have people within driving distance of each property. I personally stay very involved with the properties I manage and have weekly meetings with their teams.

What are 1045's plans for the future?

Right now, my division is focusing more on vertical integration, working start-to-finish with clients, as



early as location identification phase. 1045, as a whole, is growing more robust throughout the marketplace, working together with our investment fund partner, Essential Growth Properties. Also, working more and more with investment groups who have smaller to mid-sized portfolios, helping them grow through vertical integration and buying retail centers. A big part of our growth model and value proposition is giving people the opportunity to add value to their owned properties and increase efficiencies and reduce expenses on leased locations.

Can you share a particular philosophy that drives you and your work?

My motto is "When you focus on problems, you get more problems. When you focus on possibilities you have more opportunities." You may have heard that before... I didn't make that one up myself. [laughs]

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Biswanath Patnaik

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I have a passion for finance overall and I have never wanted to do anything else.

For about a decade, Biswanath Patnaik enjoyed a successful career as a banker, holding positions in a number of financial institutions, but in 2009, he set his sights on entrepreneurship. “I made the decision to strike out on my own and opened several companies in India and then bought two other companies; one of them was an RBI-licensed company and the other was a BSE-listed company. I continued running those until 2014,” he said. “I have a passion for finance overall and I have never wanted to do anything else,” he added.

Today, as CEO of BNP Investments LLC, an asset management and investment banking company he founded in 2018, based out of London and Dubai, Biswanath provides clients from around the globe with a range of highly effective financial and corporate solutions that include trade finance, working capital, financing for M&A, growth capital for business, and investment initiative. With an eye on efficient turnaround time and 100% accountability, he works tirelessly to ensure their success. At the same time, he’s passionate about philanthropy and works just as hard to provide those less fortunate with resources and opportunities.

We spoke with Biswanath to find out more about his work in the financial field and why he thinks it’s so important to give back.

First, tell us about your journey to start BNP.

After getting my degree in 1999, I worked as a banker until 2009, and then opened and successfully ran several businesses until 2014. The market was saturated in India by that time, so I moved to the U.K. and used that capital to get into the trade finance business in London. I worked as an independent consultant and then started my own successful

venture capital firm in 2016. I then invested in UK- and Europe-based companies, which are currently valued at \$300 million USD and are in the process of getting listed on the NASDAQ. While I started my current firm, BNP Investments, in 2018, I also have two other finance companies as well—one listed on the London Stock Exchange and another one is an FCA-listed company. Our current assets under management are more than 500 million euros. My company is listed on the AFRINEX international stock market (Mauritius), and we’re being considered for several prestigious governments’ disinvestment programs.

What makes BNP different from other asset management and investment firms?

One major difference is we have a strong line of credit, robust products such as monetizing sovereign and corporate bonds, and MTNs, and excellent mechanisms in place that allow us to successfully achieve our clients’ goals. Another important factor that sets our firm apart is our fast turnaround time, which makes clients happy because they

don’t have to wait long to get funds. Also, most firms do regular funding by using the standby letter of credit or bank guarantee, but because we specialize in these aforementioned products, we can provide greater potential returns.

What do you enjoy most about your work; what drives you?

Basically, I’m a workaholic and I love doing what I do! My business has grown so much now with multiple investments in many segments such as healthcare, fintech, retail, green solar renewable energy, and I’m very focused on every one of my companies. My core subject is where I made my money



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Biswanath is passionate about philanthropy and works just as hard to provide those less fortunate with resources and opportunities.

and invested in these verticals where my funds are growing, but I'm also into gold refinery and bullion trading in Dubai. For me, it's about making very dignified money and very successful ventures, allowing me to give back to others as much as I can.

Tell us more about your philanthropic involvement and some of the causes you're currently supporting.

I'm heavily into charitable activities in India and UNESCO. As chairman of the International Committee of Social Action Foundation, I have undertaken the responsibility to educate 500 underprivileged young girls, so I donate funds every year to make sure they are educated and have the opportunity to graduate with a secure job as a nurse or as a teacher. I've been doing this since 2009. I also donate to RBKL, which provides needy, orphaned children with education, lodging, and boarding, and I give money every month to make sure these children are fed properly and cared for in a loving environment.

Biswanath Patnaik holds an MBA, LLB, and a BA in economics. He is a 2022 recipient of the Top 10 Unstoppable Business Leaders by The International Magazine (TIM) Pride of India Award under the technology innovation category.

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Another important factor that sets our firm apart is our fast turnaround time, which makes clients happy because they don't have to wait long to get funds.





Kal K. SAHOTA

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Crowdsourced solutions happen fast, allowing organizations to keep up with the pace of business and market change while also fueling and supporting **the future of work for innovators.**

With a passion for open innovation informed by 25 years in corporate finance, Kal K. Sahota is working with stakeholders and organizations to identify the opportunity for open innovation within their strategic plans. As the CEO of HeroX, she is building and driving an overall growth strategy that has the company poised to be the #1 crowdsourcing platform partner in the industry. Her team is 100% global and virtual, and Kal is located in Vancouver, BC Canada.

Kal started her career in finance with HSBC Bank Canada. By the age of 26, she was heading up the HSBC mutual fund valuation team. In 2003, Kal joined the Standard Life mutual fund wholesaling team. After almost eight years, she left her position as sales manager for Western Canada and the corporate world to join Westward Advisors, a small boutique tax and estate planning firm. She worked closely with the co-founder to drive growth in the business, and after a few record years, found herself at a crossroads. Her accomplishments to date were all very rewarding, but she couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing.

Intrigue and curiosity led Kal to HeroX, a tech startup in the crowdsourcing space. In just one meeting, she knew that the organization was perfectly suited to where she wanted to be—making an impact at the intersection of business, technology, and the future of work. Kal joined HeroX in June 2015 with a focus on driving revenue growth. Inevitably heading up operations, she pioneered the adoption of open innovation as a strategy across multiple industries and received the *Intercon Top 50 Tech Visionary Award* in 2019. In July 2021, the board appointed Kal president and CEO of HeroX.

Q: How does HeroX work?

HeroX is a crowdsourcing platform that supports organizations in hosting prize competitions (*check out HeroX's Metaverse and the Future of Flight Challenge with Airbus, for example*). The concept of crowdsourcing is very simple but extremely powerful. It's been around for decades, but its use in everyday business is still gaining momentum. If organizations are blocked with solving a business issue, or are quite simply looking for new ideas, they come onto the platform and host a challenge. They clearly articulate what they are looking for and invite anyone to submit an idea or

President & CEO



HeroX is a crowdsourcing platform that supports organizations in hosting prize competitions

solution in exchange for a prize, which is typically monetary, but not always. The platform is turnkey, giving organizations everything they need to run a successful challenge. The overarching logic being, instead of limiting yourself to your in-house team or direct contacts, you take it to the global crowd; over 3 billion people connected online, oftentimes referred to as innovators.

Q: Can you share one particularly memorable story of a client who was helped by HeroX?

NASA was able to obtain the design for a rover that would withstand the hellish temperatures of Venus through a \$30,000 prize challenge on HeroX. It was equivalent to the work of three senior project teams, one that would have cost millions, and the winning teams provided them with five designs that met 100% of the requirements. This is what's possible when you take your challenges and cast them out to the global crowd. NASA has literal rocket scientists on staff, and even *they* crowdsouce.

Q: What compelled you to leave a career as a financial services leader to take the helm of HeroX?

Making an impact in real time is both rewarding and intoxicating. Crowdsourced solutions happen fast, allowing

organizations to keep up with the pace of business and market change while also fueling and supporting the future of work for innovators. And I get the pleasure of working side by side with an extraordinary team to build, develop and drive the growth of the organization. It's the culture that compels me. Our team shows up every day in service of one another. Cultivating a strong, collaborative, and supportive company culture is one of the pillars of HeroX.

hero^X

Q: Tell us some of the guiding philosophies that have helped you along the way.

Show up authentically, every day. And be the best version of myself—a constant evolution! I anchor my foundational thinking in humility. If you are always open to learning and growing, then humility must be within the fabric of your being. Looking to and leaning on family, especially my husband, whose love and support has helped to shape who I am today.

Q: What drives you, Kal?

Crowdsourcing removes all barriers to participation and purely focuses on the best idea, regardless of the credentials; by design it creates a level of fairness. That is where my passion lies, democratizing opportunities for all citizens of this world.

Raheel Qureshi



iSecurity
A Calian Company

Partner, Cybersecurity, Risk & Advisory Services

When Raheel Qureshi envisioned heading up a cybersecurity firm, he was driven by a relentless passion to protect organizations from cybercrime and data theft. This was in 2010. Fast forward to today and iSecurity has grown from a staff of two to 200+ team members. Whether it's large or small financial institutions, insurance companies, hospitals, or government and defense organizations, he and the team at iSecurity Consulting work tirelessly with every client to ensure their critical technology infrastructure is safe from hackers and other outside threats. "It's every entrepreneur's dream to be able to grow the talent in their team and provide the best client experience," Raheel shares. "I feel privileged to guide our team, and in the process, I learn a lot. It is all about the collective to keep our clients protected."

With a minority of organizations having the capability of shielding themselves from a sophisticated cyberattack, Raheel and his team spend a lot of time building the client relationship to define a solution. It's an integral part of their approach that combines a deep understanding of the client's environment as a precursor to presenting a cybersecurity and technology strategy. "In short, we listen, we assess, we act, and we protect. Our ideal situation is to be able to identify a threat *before* it penetrates your digital walls. This allows us to rectify weakest links prior to carrying out any ongoing monitoring and detection services."

We spoke with Raheel about his background, what differentiates the company from others, and what his hopes are for the future generation of cybersecurity professionals.

What makes iSecurity Consulting unique from other cybersecurity companies?

We think of cybersecurity as a lifecycle covering 4 phases: assess, build, detect, and protect. Assess an environment based on the operating business, build or deploy a custom cyber solution, monitor threats, and detect them. When a client comes on board, we encourage them to let us take care of the entire lifecycle, providing a *holistic* approach to cybersecurity. Many organizations in this field simply provide an evaluation, but

we go way beyond that. We gather critical information about the problems they are having and the challenges they face, compliance and cyber insurance needs. We do a thorough assessment, then build a roadmap to prioritize what needs to get done, and in what timeframe and budget. Then, we make our recommendation. It might be for a CISO (Chief Information Security Officer), or for virtual cybersecurity architects and personnel, or a combination.

“ We listen, we assess, we act, and we protect. Our ideal situation is to be able to identify a threat *before* it penetrates your digital walls.

Tell us more about how you help companies counter cyber-attacks.

We offer round-the-clock managed services to actively monitor threats, i.e., tracing hackers and going into the Dark Web. We anticipate attacks while keeping our clients informed of emerging and imminent threats. In the case of a breach, we perform incident response that includes forensic analysis and pinpointing the source of the breach to safeguard the organization going forward. Our approach is extremely proactive. We outsmart the hackers.

How did you get into cybersecurity and how has the industry evolved?

My background was in computer engineering, so the transition to data protection and cybersecurity seemed natural. My initial focus was on the health care industry. With health care being a prime target for hackers, I wanted to create an ‘ecosystem’ that would allow medical professionals access to patient records in a secure environment and ensure patient safety.

Looking back, it seems like the more we expanded, the more need arose. More people were contacting us because they were in critical situations and couldn’t solve issues internally — systems down, inaccessible data, demands for financial ransom into the millions. Where digital warfare is concerned, people need fast and efficient assistance to recover swiftly with minimal loss. This will always be a crucial service because, as technology evolves, the threats become more sophisticated, and you have to be on top of your game to deliver real and lasting value.



Recently, your company went through a successful acquisition. Tell us about this.

Our concept was well-perceived in the market. We were able to grow the company to a certain level and wanted a strategic partner who could help expand our vision further. This allowed us to sell iSecurity Consulting to a broader, publicly traded company. The benefit of this acquisition is that we now have global reach and have been able to tap into multiple new verticals overnight.

What are your hopes for the next generation of cybersecurity professionals?

We need to give future generations more opportunities to train in the areas of digital cybersecurity. This includes developing an educational framework for advanced cyberthreat risk management. Cybersecurity leaders also need a trusted forum, where they can collaborate and exchange information at a continental and global level.



Julie Reby Waas

“

*When we come together in
friendship and strength, we create
a beautiful tapestry.*

Art called to Julie Reby Waas long before she can remember, flowing first as primitive doodles from a child's imagination, then as abstract drawings that adorned her sixth-grade homework papers as well as every paper and sketch book she could get her hands on. It took her through law school and nearly four decades as an attorney. In 2021, Julie's passion burst wide open during one of the darkest periods in recent history, the COVID-19 pandemic, turning this once-upon-a-time doodler into an artist whose work has been exhibited in galleries in London, New York, Madrid, and her native Miami—in less than a year.

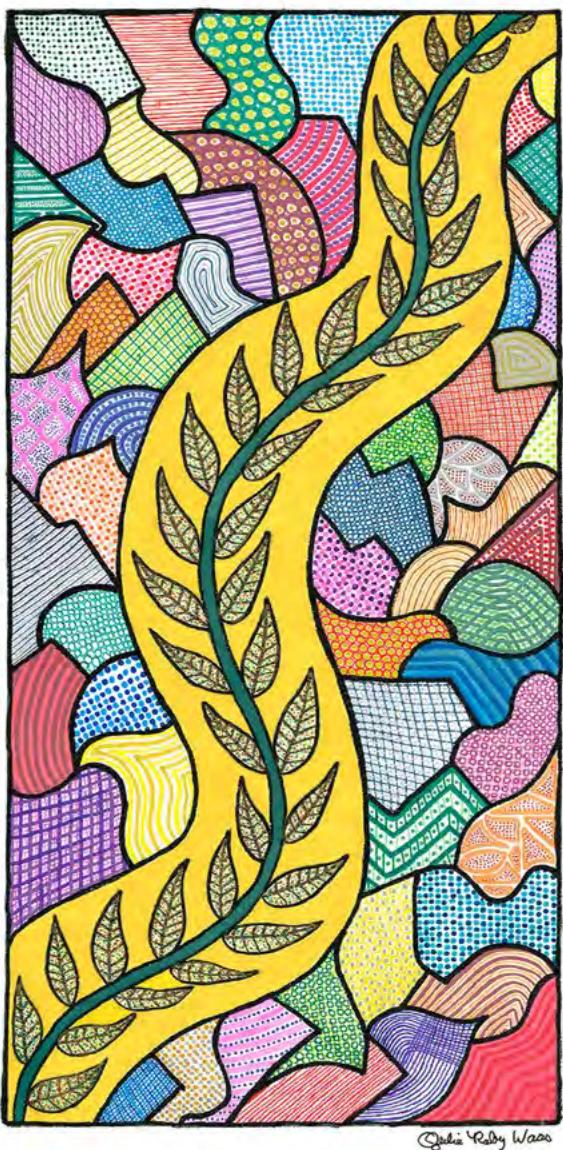
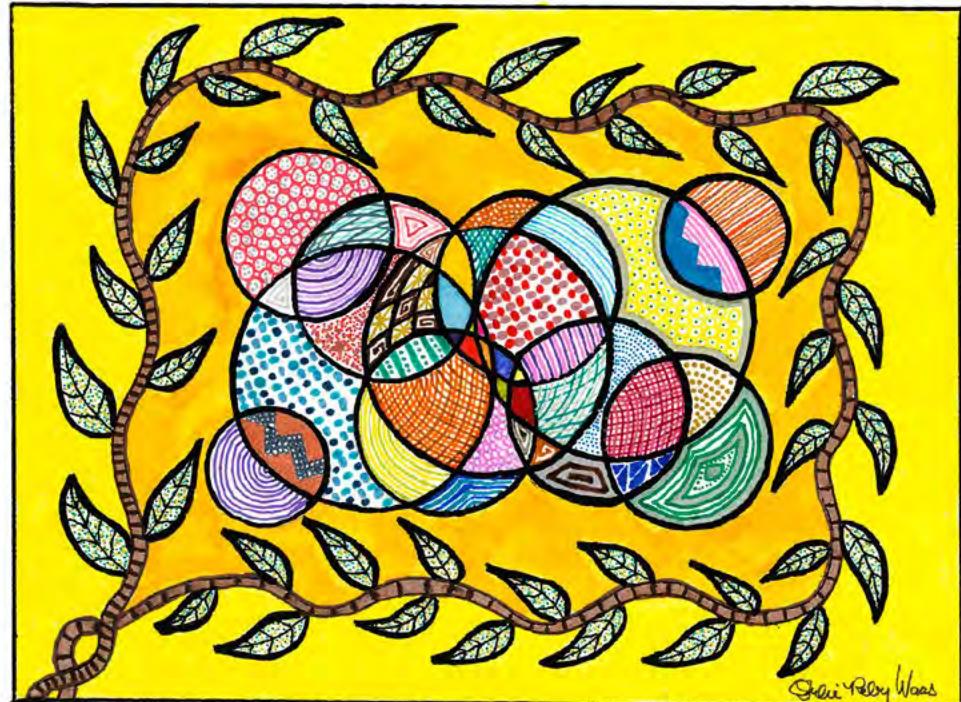
While her artistic ascent is breathtaking, Julie's inspiration was born purely from a desire to bring joy into her life and the lives of others during the long isolating, stressful time. Her brightly colored geometric patterns and shapes were a welcome reprieve—in both form and meaning. "The designs serve as a way to bring order, harmony to my somewhat disordered life, you could say," Julie explains. Three recurring symbols appear in her work—vines, Venn diagrams, and jigsaw puzzle-like designs—each coming to life through vibrant acrylic and oil paint pens, accented with watercolor paints. These symbols represent strength, friendship, connection, common ground, and fragments coming together to create a bigger picture, reflecting her belief that everything and everyone is interrelated in some way. Julie's meditative patterning and bold colors come straight from her mind's eye: "I call it intuitive art because it just comes out in my imagination—I grab a paint pen and go, and nothing else exists in the world, just me and my drawing."

As a welcoming public adorns their homes with her original abstract artwork, prints, and merchandise through her website, Intuitive Abstract Art by Julie, she's also been invited to exhibit in several virtual exhibitions and will be exhibiting at the Innsbruck International Contemporary Art Fair in Innsbruck, Austria, as well as at 2 galleries in Miami during Art Basel 2022. Julie also will be featured in *Voices of Tomorrow Art Book* in 2023 and has been selected to be awarded the *Faces of Peace Art Prize* by *Contemporary Art Curator Magazine*. At the same time, she continues her work as assistant vice president and associate general counsel at Baptist Health South Florida (BHSF), deftly handling almost all areas of workplace law for South Florida's largest health care system and its 26,000-plus employees. "I enjoy both art and law, and the balance brings me joy and fulfillment," she says. And underlying it all is her belief in human interconnectedness, "When we come together in friendship and strength, we create a beautiful tapestry."

Julie is represented by Agora Gallery in New York City and Monat Gallery in Madrid, Spain, and has also been featured in Disruptors Magazine's Top 20 Disruptors.

“

I call it intuitive art because it just comes out in my imagination. I grab a paint pen and go, and nothing else exists in the world, just me and my drawing.



Three recurring symbols appear in her work—vines, Venn diagrams, and jigsaw puzzle-like designs, each coming to life through vibrant acrylic and oil paint pens, accented with watercolor paints.



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MICHAEL

White

Founder
& CEO



My training allows their employees to learn globally recognized best practices and how to apply them in ways that align with their organizational needs, which lead to better deliverables.

"How can I help you?" It's a phrase heard often, but it means something different for the students of Dr. Michael White. That's because when people with all levels of business analysis experience join The Business Analysis Doctor, LLC, they know they'll emerge from the program at a new, much higher level.

With over 10 years of business analysis experience and multiple certifications from the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA), Michael certainly knows a thing or two about certification exam preparation! His students have a 98.6% first-time pass rate for their certification exams, which is one of the world's highest. CEO and founder of the company, Michael is also the primary trainer, working with hundreds of adult learners and the companies they work for.

Michael has developed a learning model for his IIBA-endorsed programs that incorporates knowledge transfer, practical application, science-backed learning methods, and interactive elements. The program accelerates time to certification success, with an average of 60 to 90 days, and provides continuous support via email and social media with a 24-hour response time.

We caught up with Michael to learn more about how he's helping so many professionals reach the next level in their career.

What compelled you to found the company?

I was once in the position of the customers I currently serve. Well-known training providers were exorbitantly overpriced, but the more affordable ones just weren't providing quality service. I realized there needed to be a high-quality but accessible resource. The structure was also very limiting. Being a lover of learning, I'm well aware that different people have very different learning styles and should have options to accommodate them. That's what I want to bring to the customers I serve today. Also, I wanted to break away from the stereotype that certifications are just about taking a test and getting the credential without putting the theory to use. That's why I created certification programs with practical application requirements in addition to exam preparation.

What differentiates you from other trainers besides price and quality?

One of my major distinguishing factors is the amount of blending I do in my course structures, so students don't get fatigued during our live courses. I mix the presentation of theory with hands-on application, so they learn at a deeper level. They'll pass the exams, but they'll also learn skills to use in their professional life. It's also a major confidence booster for the participants.

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How can this benefit individuals?

We break down concepts so people can understand them and use them in their daily work, improving performance and effectiveness. It increases their confidence, allowing them to achieve better results, which in turn provides more credibility and greater career potential. It also helps them maintain best practices throughout their organizations. I tell people all the time that certification provides a global benchmark, so regardless of their organization, they'll stand out.

What about companies?

Many companies don't offer extensive training programs. Their employees are often taught the steps of a particular activity, but not why it's important. I take the time to help them fully understand the *why*. My training allows their employees to learn globally recognized best practices and how to apply them in ways that align with their organizational needs, which lead to better deliverables.

Tell us about some of your certification classes.

I offer both live and on-demand IIBA Certification courses, as well as a monthly membership version, which presents the content in small chunks. They all have access to a study groups on social media as well as discussion forums within the learning platform. Currently, my offerings include IIBA certification training and resources for the CBAP, CCBA, ECBA, AAC, CBDA, and CPOA.

My courses are structured to appeal to various learning styles; part of the methodology is to help people find their own style. This is especially important for working and established students as it allows for more flexibility, and the price range means our services are more accessible.

What is the main goal of the work you do?

I've taken these courses in the past and had not-so-great experiences, so I want to be as much of a resource as possible for people going down the same path. I want to build the next generation of highly effective business analysis practitioners. So many business analysts suffer from imposter syndrome and aren't achieving the goals they want to. I want to be part of the movement toward a generation of highly effective business analysis professionals.



My courses are structured to appeal to various learning styles; part of the methodology is to help people find their own style.



THE BUSINESS ANALYSIS DOCTOR
thebadoc.com

Founder & CEO



The Retreat, is changing education with its VR and augmented reality, where learning takes place inside interactive classrooms in the metaverse.

Chad Silverstein is a successful entrepreneur driven by the desire to help others succeed. He's been leading and coaching individuals and teams for as long as he can remember. Chad started his first business in 1997, out of his apartment, before graduating from The Ohio State University. His company, Choice Recovery, Inc. was recognized as a *Top Workplace* winner for over a decade, twice being ranked the #1 Business to Work for in Ohio. As an industry outlier, Chad built technology that eventually led to launching his second company, [re]start, a career development platform that connects people to meaningful employment opportunities. Chad recently sold his first business on its 25th anniversary and he's now starting the next expression of his serial entrepreneurial journey.

CHAD Silverstein

In 2018, Chad started using Playbook Builder. An online training and development platform that he eventually invested in, became a reseller of, and has now become a partner of, working side by side with the founder.

In 2021, Chad discovered Genius X, an innovative tech company whose new app, The Retreat, is changing education with its VR and augmented reality, where learning takes place *inside* interactive classrooms in the metaverse. As a visionary, Chad was immediately inspired by the opportunity to participate and join Genius X as a course creator, lead investor, and now a board member. He looked to his own learning and experiences that enabled him to succeed and has launched three educational courses now available for purchase inside the Oculus headset. Chad sat down with us to share more about his journey.

Q & A

Q: The underlying driver of nearly all your companies is the desire to help others succeed. Why is this important to you?

I started pursuing professional development opportunities early in my career and have been blessed to learn from so many incredible entrepreneurs. I love giving back and feel I have a responsibility to do something with all these great tools, resources, insights, and knowledge. Sharing my experiences and seeing how it's been able to help so many others make me feel like I'm on the right path and doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.



I specifically designed my courses around career development, entrepreneurship, and leadership because these topics are generally not taught in school, and they should be.

Q: Your newest endeavor is Genius X and its virtual reality education app, The Retreat. Can you share some of the benefits of VR learning, the types of courses offered, and how people can participate?

I'm really excited about virtual reality and being one of the first coaches to launch courses in the metaverse. Our new app, The Retreat, is one of the first educational experiences people can engage with inside the Oculus. Until now, gaming, fitness, and health have been their focus, but now that coaching and training is possible, people will get a chance to learn and grow in ways they've never been able to before—online from home—and feel like they're with someone one-on-one. I specifically designed my courses around career development, entrepreneurship, and leadership because these topics are generally not taught in school, and they should be.

Q: Tell us about Playbook, how it helped you, and how you're helping other businesses succeed by using it.

When I first started my first business, I had no clue what I was doing. It's hard starting and running a company, and you often feel isolated when you have chronic problems that keep coming up. I have never come across a tool like Playbook. I use it to train employees before they start, streamline all of my core processes using video, text, and screen share tutorials, and I leverage the communication tool and use it externally for my sales and marketing efforts, which works extremely well now that everything is being shared digitally. With Playbook, I never have to repeat myself, nor do I have to worry about one person being the only one who knows how to do something and fearing losing them. I "Playbook" everything and make sure everyone who will benefit gets access. I stopped working in one of my businesses and was still training new people years later who I never met. It's become a way of running my business and allows me to integrate everything I need for all my companies.

Q: Let's talk about [re]start. This was your second successful venture, but really the first one in which your visionary instincts and determination to help others came together. What compelled you to start this company and how are businesses benefitting from it?

[re]start is my magnum opus. I created the company inside my collection agency in 2013 because most of the people we

called told us they couldn't afford to pay their bills because they didn't have enough money, or because they weren't working. So, we figured, why not try to help? It made a lot more sense than chasing them. I pulled one of my collectors out of her position and told her to start helping people find new jobs. It didn't take long before my entire team caught the buzz. When COVID hit, I built a multi-user platform app that connects jobseekers with a career advisor. I didn't realize it at the time, but [re]start was having a much bigger impact than I could have imagined, and once people started sharing their experiences, I knew we had something special. It helped us attract better employees, more clients, and created a ton of great marketing assets because the best kind of marketing is when other people tell your story for you. Today, I get to share [re]start with other companies who care and want to help their customers when they fall behind financially. It's a win-win for everyone.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your work, Chad, or what drives you?

I love finding better ways to do everything, especially when things don't make sense. It's my natural reaction to find solutions when something leaves me shaking my head wondering why it's being done a certain way for so long. Whenever I hear someone say "it's always been done that way" I can feel changes coming. I'm always thinking of new ideas and even though most aren't that great, occasionally, I hit a home run.



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BRAD Potter

President &
Founder

"Exceeding customer expectations at every opportunity." This is the motto and key differentiator of Brad Potter's commercial cleaning company, HaroClean. With special emphasis in the office, medical, and the industrial post-construction sector, HaroClean, founded in South Florida in 2016, combines the power of technology with a signature client-centric approach anchored by the idea of providing the highest level of service and custom cleaning packages for every account they serve. Through the latest handset technology and software, built specifically for the commercial cleaning space, the company offers real-time communication that includes photos and updates for every project and on-site consultations, where clients can obtain an estimate for custom-designed programs tailored to their specific needs and budget. From office and window cleaning to commercial floor care, Brad and his team of professionals are passionate about their work, and it shows. "Our field teams love what they do and take pride in delivering results every day," he shares. "At the end of the day, it's a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction."

With teams located throughout Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties, HaroClean has grown rapidly

to serve the increasing demand across the three-county area, which is a testament to their continued success. Their roster of satisfied clients includes builders and white-collar professionals, along with those from the medical, industrial warehouse, and technology sectors—and for each of them, Brad's team is dedicated to providing the highest level of personal service. "We take care of our clients and staff, many of which have been with us since the beginning," he states. "We're incredibly sensitive to work-life balance because we want our team to be able to enjoy their lives and families, while also building a strong foundation for the future." Prior to launching the company, Brad spent 25 years in the wireless sector and combined his tech expertise and his passion for cleaning to build HaroClean from the ground up, while working full time as a regional manager for a company in that sector. "What I enjoy most is the relationship that I have with my team," he shares. "We really are a family and seeing them thrive and working together to make our clients happy is what drives us every day."

Brad is certified with the Global Biotech Advisory Council and International Sanitary Supply Association.

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APRIL White

Not many people would describe their company as an “anti-agency,” but April White, founder and president of Trust Relations, absolutely would. That’s because she and her team are working to reinvent how PR is done. “We’re trying to do things differently from the traditional industry, both in company culture and approach,” April explains. Trust Relations is the next evolution of public relations, offering holistic solutions and integrated marketing communications that allow their client companies to not only make an impact in the present, but grow and transform for the future.

Since founding Trust Relations in 2019, drawing on her 18 years of public relations and journalism expertise, April has led the way for a new approach to all things PR. She creates nimble, proactive “dream teams” for clients. These teams work to inspire and encourage them to demonstrate brand value through authentic actions. Her integrated approach goes deeper than other firms to uncover not just the how of a strategy, but the why. She also works to build the best company culture possible, one of inclusivity, support, and respect for all, leading as an example to clients. “Building a brand starts at the top—and within,” April says. “Leaders need to work on themselves first in order to build the brand they ultimately want.”

And it’s working. Trust Relations has doubled in size and revenue every year since its founding and is showing no signs of stopping. To date, the agency has served over 150 clients across the globe, ranging from startup companies to marquee brands alike.

In addition to reimagining PR, April is a regular contributor to *Forbes*, *Newsweek*, and *Entrepreneur*. She also recently presented her first *TEDx Talk*, covering the importance of authenticity in life and in business, and was named the winner of a gold *Stevie® Award* in the *Most Innovative Woman of the Year – Advertising, Marketing & Public Relations* category.

April holds a B.A. from Iowa State University and has continued studies in Columbia University’s master’s program in strategic communications.

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President & Founder



Trust Relations is the next evolution of public relations, offering holistic solutions and integrated marketing communications that allow their client companies to not only make an impact in the present, but grow and transform for the future.

PETE



Founder & CEO

With more than 20 years of leadership experience in the public and private sectors, Pete Kristofferson founded Global Trade Alliance of America, Inc., in 2021. Based in Washington, D.C. and New York City, the organization is a service-oriented import and export trading company that helps accelerate the exchange of goods and services. Through comprehensive partnerships worldwide, from shipping logistics to U.S. government-backed trade finance, Global Trade Alliance of America has developed networking capabilities for profitable international business. Their dedicated experts and community managers are available to offer advice during every stage of importing activity including the area of import and export trade financing alternatives. Serving as an effective advocate of mutual business interests, Global Trade Alliance has worked with hundreds of clients around the globe. Their state-of-the-art technologies use machine learning and cloud-based services with social networking capabilities, comprehensive content, and corporate advisory. With a philosophy rooted in extensive market knowledge and personal relationships, the objectives of each entity involved are carefully evaluated to help ensure flawless and profitable transitions.



GLOBAL TRADE
ALLIANCE OF AMERICA

As the leader and CEO of the thriving firm, Pete oversees the organization and works to maintain strong, positive relationships with elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels. He also provides assistance with international cooperation, diplomatic relations, lobbying at the local level in the strategic area of Washington, DC, and throughout the United States and Bulgaria. "It makes me happy to have such a great atmosphere around me, where I'm able to travel and get more deals done successfully with my business partners of the world," he states. "Bringing positive energy with my lobbying from officials, politics, governmental professionals, and diplomacy is really what I enjoy most." Pete helms a triad of other ventures as well, serving as president, CEO, and co-founder of Acdaris Inc. and Pete Luxe-Worldwide Capital Media Group, Ltd. He's also president and co-founder of Global Trade Automotive Alliance, Inc.- an innovative electric car corporation.

Pete holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar." He's an executive board/advisory council member at Executive Programs for School of Business at George Washington University and the University of Richmond and is currently pursuing a PhD from the University of National and World Economy.

Kristofferson

As the leader and CEO of the thriving firm, Pete oversees the organization and works to maintain strong, positive relationships with elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels.

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Austin KIRTLEY

“ One of the ultimate reasons we started this company was to help people find success in the businesses they set out to build. ”

Differentiating yourself in the vast food and beverage industry can be a challenge even for the savviest of companies. Fortunately, they all have an experienced, innovative ally in KESI Management. This Indianapolis-based management company serves everyone from startups and family-owned businesses to billion-dollar companies, providing them with insight and problem-solving to help them bring their dreams into reality. Agnostically leveraging automation and technology, co-founders and managing partners, Austin Kirtley and Mehrdad Erfan, create personalized plans to drive sustained, scalable growth. Their dedication has earned them a 95% retention and return rate and has seen KESI grow over 100% each year since its founding in May 2020.

Austin Kirtley brings over a decade of experience in large-scale fresh produce distribution, RTE manufacturing, and the industrial greenhouse industry to KESI. He cultivates relationships with clients and drives innovation through strategic consultation. His multitude of different experiences and being exposed to a host of different facilities, companies, and cultures, each with its own unique challenges, allows him to see not only the bigger picture, but the parts that make the whole. “One of the ultimate reasons we started this company was to help people find success in the businesses they set out to build,” Austin says. “Most clients and partners have something holding them up and one of the most satisfying things we do is help them remove those barriers to achieve success.”

Mehrdad ERFAN



Mehrdad Erfan is the other half of KESI, covering the responsibilities of a traditional COO and CFO and managing the company’s largest accounts. He has over a decade of experience in the manufacturing industry, with a large portion specifically in produce manufacturing. He’s handled facility design, layout optimization, automation, product flow management, and client-facing negotiations in both union and non-union environments and across various departments and disciplines. Mehrdad’s background in data and engineering allows him to draw on multiple methodologies to drive growth and deliver value. “My greatest satisfaction is seeing the client’s vision come into reality, seeing them happy it’s running, working, and done,” he says.



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Stephanie Malia Hutch



President

“ Owning a small business can be challenging, and sacrifices are required, but the opportunity to build a company capable of advancing technology and advancing my community was too great to pass up.

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Stephanie Malia Hutch has spent most of her professional career working in the federal contracting space, primarily supporting Department of Defense (DoD) agencies, including the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Army. With two parents who were prior military and owned a government contracting firm, she worked side-by-side with them, helping with everything from administrative duties to HR, business development, strategic planning, and executive management. In 2020, Stephanie took all the knowledge, experience, and insight she gained and founded Makai LLC, an engineering and technology company focused on supporting government customers and industry partners tackling critical national security challenges. The firm specializes in the modernization of wired and wireless systems and provides professional engineering services focused on data management, cybersecurity, and mobile network communications. Currently, Makai is focusing on 5G R&D and is working alongside DoD customers to solve tactical communications challenges.

The decision to leave the family business wasn't an easy one, but it was meaningful. Stephanie is native Hawaiian, but due to her parents' military careers, never actually lived in Hawaii. "I always wanted to connect with and serve the Hawaiian community," she says. So, she applied for, and was accepted into, the Small Business Administration (SBA) entity-owned, 8(a) Program, a business development program for minority owned businesses. "Owning a small business can be challenging, and sacrifices are required, but the opportunity to build a company capable of advancing technology and advancing my community was too great to pass up," she says.



Makai is a subsidiary of the Kekoa Foundation, also founded by Stephanie, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Hawaiian community through education, business, and community advancement programs. Her innovation and lifelong experience have earned her considerable recognition, including the *40 Under 40*, *Meritorious Service*, and *Women's Appreciation* awards from AFCEA International. She also volunteers in leadership roles with the Native Hawaiian Organizations Association, the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum, and the Native Alumni Association at UPenn. "I'm so thankful I'm able to serve two invigorating and fulfilling missions: supporting national security and the Hawaiian community," Stephanie shares. "I can't think of anything else I'd rather do."

Stephanie holds a BA from UPenn and a master's certificate from George Washington University.

Eli Tanenbaum

With projects ranging from private aviation and NFTs to event planning, artist management, and NFOC's NFT apparel brand, JEMX is leading the way in innovation through unique projects that will leave a lasting impact on both the digital and physical world.

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Imagine experiencing the sights, sounds, and energy of Las Vegas nightlife, exploring cities or tropical resorts you've never been to. Now imagine being *immersed* in it without ever leaving your home. *This* is Synergy City (or "Syn City"), the Key2 Metaverse Entertainment City brought to you by the visionary entrepreneur and co-founder of JEMX, Eli Tanenbaum—and it's turning the definition of "a night on the town" on its head.

Syn City is in a breathtaking metaverse where people can attend virtual casinos, events, concerts, and festivals while buying or earning NFTs and cryptocurrency through scavenger hunts and competitions. Whether a solo trip, gathering with friends, or meeting new ones, Syn City is *the* digital destination for everyone. "It's a great place for people to socialize, connect, and engage while escaping their real-world surroundings," Eli explains. Syn City is part of an entire Key2 ecosystem that also includes Key2 Events, Key2 Experiences, and the Key2 NFT project, all housed under JEMX.

The Key2 NFT unlocks the doors to the entire Key2 ecosystem, providing its customers, or "Key-Holders," exclusive benefits, discounts, accommodations, and premium access to world-renowned nightclubs, hotels, casinos, restaurants, special events, and private Key2 Lounges. Key-Holders will be issued a Key2 Credit Card to collect rewards for actively participating in their real-world and virtual ecosystem, which can then be redeemed at their partnered locations. Launching in Miami, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, NYC and San Francisco with a New Year's Eve event in each, Key2 is ready to grant their customers the literal keys to the city of their choosing.

Key2 represents the first tokenized membership program that unites consumers with prominent businesses in entertainment, hospitality, travel and web3 through real experiences, opportunities and rewards. But more than that, it's the culmination of the passion and business savvy of a serial entrepreneur, who started his first venture at 25 years old, all while pursuing *and* receiving a juris doctorate from the University of Miami School of Law. With projects ranging from private aviation and NFTs to event planning, artist management, and NFOC's NFT apparel brand, JEMX is leading the way in innovation through unique projects that will leave a lasting impact on both the digital and physical world.

PETER G. BOWEN



Driven by the opportunity to make investments across diverse industries that will have high societal impact, Peter Bowen leverages the knowledge gleaned from his own entrepreneurial pursuits to help others. He began his career 15 years ago in hospitality operations, which transitioned into management consulting - primarily the restructuring of hotels. Thereafter, he served as general manager at Sonder, where he launched the company's New Orleans market, writing the company playbook for launching new markets as it grew to over 1,000 units from its \$1 million startup budget in just two short years. In 2022, Peter joined Dirks Companies as chief administrative officer, managing their disaster response, hospitality/real estate, and construction services/landscaping divisions. "For me, it was really an opportunity to continue my entrepreneurial passion while finding ways to give back," Peter shares.

66

We prioritize our investments into minority-owned businesses that we can propel through capital, experience, and back-office services to help scale rapidly and avoid traditional pitfalls of entrepreneurship.



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Dirks Companies is intently focused on the development and evolution of the human experience, with a primary objective to help and grow social entrepreneurial endeavors. "We prioritize our investments into minority-owned businesses that we can propel through capital, experience, and back-office services to help scale rapidly and avoid traditional pitfalls of entrepreneurship," Peter states. Focused on investments that benefit society, such as renewable energy and disaster relief, the company's previous investments include Energea, Clearworld, and PosiGen, among others. With special emphasis on early-state startups and small, minority-owned companies poised for growth, the organization has served dozens of companies to date.

Prior to joining Dirks Companies, Peter launched consultancy, PostScript Hospitality, and scaled the company through acquisition by Hotel Asset Value Enhancement (HotelAVE). The organization grew to over \$8 million in revenue, tripling client ROI for projects executed. Major clients included Four Seasons and Omni Hotels. Peter also served as deputy chief administrative officer for the City of New Orleans, founding the Office of Business & External Services (OBES), where he helped execute the mayor's vision of transforming New Orleans from the "city of N.O." to "the city of Yes!"

Peter holds an MBA in hospitality and agribusiness from the University of Guelph and a bachelor's in hotel administration from Cornell University. He's both a certified sommelier and certified in FEMA ICS 100, 200, 300, 400.

Luke Fleury

**CEO &
Founder**



Luke Fleury has been a contractor and real estate developer with his company, Fleury Properties, since 2017. He eats, sleeps, and breathes real estate, and in just five years, has done more than \$50 million worth of real estate developments. That incredible, continuing success is in part due to Luke's diligence in finding the best deals on services and materials. "It can translate into millions in revenue," he explains. But he knows well that finding the best pricing can also be a hassle, with countless hours of scouting out the lowest rates on projects and materials, as he's faced the exhaustive task himself. He knew that contractors and developers everywhere must be facing a similar challenge.

Tired of wasting time searching for deals, in December 2020, Luke co-founded Dibbs Technology, and in the spring of 2022, launched the iOS and Android app-based marketplace designed specifically for contractors. The marketplace connects buyers and sellers of services and materials making it easier to find the right items at the right price and in the right timeframe. "A lot of contractors are inundated with projects," Luke says, "and the process often requires multiple searches, which takes a lot of time." Dibbs allows for extra customization and ensures that postings reach a wide network of contractors,

suppliers, homeowners, and more, while simultaneously reducing friction in the bidding, buying, and selling processes. By being able to connect these tradesmen, suppliers, and homeowners, users can source bids more efficiently saving time and money on all sides.

Dibbs is available to homeowners, contractors, and suppliers across the U.S. After less than a year in operation, the Dibbs app is already being used by over 1,000 contractors, several hundred suppliers, and several hundred homeowners. Dibbs also won the American Business Association's *Stevie Awards Startup of the Year* for 2022 and was featured in a national Google Play campaign highlighting new apps in the U.S.



Luke may not have a tech background—his degree from the University of Rhode Island is in economics—but he knows what people in real estate and construction need on multiple levels. "I made this app easy to use for contractors like myself who are hesitant to use technology," he says. "These issues are close to my heart."

LALIT VERMA

Chairman



With a range of holdings spanning various industries, Lalit's current focus is on new technology investment and supporting startups in AI and manufacturing.

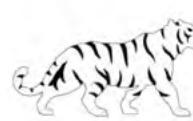
Lalit Verma is a risk taker and dream maker who's taken countless aspiring entrepreneurs to new heights. By trade, he's a mechanical engineer with an MBA in finance, but by nature, he's a trusted mentor and advisor who's also an entrepreneur, investor, and expert innovator. For many, he's their golden ticket as a visionary leader, who has helped numerous companies turn multimillion-dollar revenues in record time. He's been named a 2022 Global Leader by CNBC and Global Leader of the Year by AsiaOne. He's also the recipient of the 2019 Excellence in Financial Leaders Award and the Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Samman

Award from the Ministry of External Affairs-India. In 2016, he founded the holding company, L Capital and Investments, Inc., where he's currently invested in 16 companies estimated at \$200 million, including Pee Safe, Redcliffe Lab, Nile Automotive, JNV-Areca Railways and Defense, CP Manufacturing, Mangum Plastics, and CASHe. With a range of holdings spanning various industries, Lalit's current focus is on new technology investment and supporting startups in AI and manufacturing. For him, it's about partnering with companies to help them move forward.

Lalit currently serves as a governance board member for Fight Cancer Global and a board member for the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. He's also chairman of the board for Mariposas, a nonprofit in Mexico that empowers young women in rural communities. Prior to starting L Capital Investments, he spent almost two decades in the automotive industry, working for heavyweights, including Honda, Bombardier, Mando, and GM, in roles that saw him in Japan, Australia, China, Korea, Europe, Mexico, and

the U.S. In 2013, Lalit launched his own tier 1 automotive supply company, Sakthi Automotive Group. In just five short years, the company posted an annual revenue of \$700 million. Over the course of his storied career, Lalit has built multiple successful businesses, taken regional companies to the global marketplace, and given numerous startups their wings to fly. But what he enjoys most of all is meeting new people, discovering new perspectives, and experiencing different cultures.

Lalit holds an MBA in finance from the Institute of Management Technology, and a BTech and diploma in mechanical engineering from the Delhi College of Engineering and Utter Pradesh Technical Education Board, respectively.



**L CAPITAL &
INVESTMENTS**

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Steven Highfill

As founder and CEO of LawFi, Inc., Steven Highfill is leading the pack with the mission of bringing financial inclusion to the legal system. “There’s a pervasive access to justice gap in our society. Most people have too much income to qualify for legal aid but still can’t afford legal services. The legal system works well for the rich but remains inaccessible to middle-class families living paycheck to paycheck and the poor” he shares. “We’re working to fill this gap for the people in the middle.” Headquartered in Jacksonville, the development-stage company is inventing a new class of loan assets called “Legal Fee Loans.” The company is working to transform the lawyer procurement and payment experience with the first-of-its-kind legal fintech lending platform. Designed to empower more inclusive access to legal services, the platform delivers financing options for the financing of legal consultations, retainers, legal fees, and invoices. “We’re creating a lasting loan program that changes the lives of legal consumers and business owners who, until now, could not find financing options to secure legal services when facing legal emergencies or important legal matters,” Steven explains. With partners that include banks, credit unions, and other distribution partners, LawFi’s legal fee loan options will be embedded in law firm and lawyer practices and offered at the Point-of-Service through a large network of legal merchants.

As a 34-year veteran certified personnel consultant specializing in law firm mergers and acquisitions, Steven started out as a stockbroker before getting into legal recruiting. Having obtained all his licenses at just 19 years old, he was one of the youngest stockbrokers in the country at the time. When the market crashed in 1987, he switched gears and became a lobbyist for Associated General Contractors before working as a legal headhunter and dabbling in technology along the way. Steven took his first step into the space when he licensed the exclusive rights for the vertical use of the technology behind flipdog.com before it was later purchased by monster.com. “It was at that time that I fell in love with technology. Now, at LawFi, we are integrating the best open banking, credit, employment, and financial technology with alternative data to create a highly unique credit decision engine and customized legal fee loans. We are also using deep web extraction technologies to create the most accurate database of lawyers and unique legal merchant data,” he states. “We’re leveraging our deep knowledge of the

legal industry and new ABA and state bar rules that allow lawyers to refer clients to third-party financing sources for the first time in the history of the profession.” As Steven likes to say, “Carpe diem.”

Steven holds a Certificate in FinTech from Harvard University and a CPC designation.



“We’re creating a lasting loan program that changes the lives of legal consumers and business owners who, until now, could not find financing options to secure legal services when facing legal emergencies or important legal matters.

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Meet **Sarah Barkwill**

Sarah Barkwill is the founder and CEO of Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions Corp., a Canadian-based firm with a global reach that helps businesses align with their overarching objectives. Founded in 2020, the firm brought in six figures during its first year alone with a diverse roster of clients in various business sectors—a clear testament to not only the company's success, but Sarah's commitment to helping enterprises thrive. The privately owned firm champions the idea of a supportive employee culture, where happy employees generate satisfied customers and more profit, with independent consultants who view employee engagement as a critical component for the overall success of an organization. As such, they partner with clients who recognize the value of investing in the employee experience, operating under the pretense that client successes and their own are essentially one and the same. With special focus on companies who count employees among their greatest assets, Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions provides bespoke programs for each business based on their unique objectives.

The process starts with a business assessment session to better understand the company's strengths and weaknesses along with their strategic objectives. From there, the team at Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions analyzes the information and uses it to curate tailored programs that increase employee engagement, productivity, and profitability. Prior to launching the company, Sarah's experience as an executive director of human resources as well a senior HR consultant has given Sarah an intimate understanding of the priorities of larger organizations, with regard to talent management

Together, Sarah and her changemakers are empowering organizations to reach their full potential while maximizing profits.

Sarah holds a B.A. with honors from Queens University and an HR Management Certificate from Ryerson University.



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**Founder
& CEO**

and shifting company culture. Her extensive experience serves as the foundation for her latest professional endeavor. Now, as the leader of her own flourishing firm, Sarah leads her team of talented culture designers, and engages with clients at the strategic level, while effectively managing every aspect of the business. Together, Sarah and her changemakers are empowering organizations to reach their full potential while maximizing profits.

Brian J. Esposito

Ranked among the world's top 10 CEOs for 2020/21 in *The World CEO Rankings Awards* by Adria Management, LLC, Brian J. Esposito, the founder and CEO of Esposito Intellectual Enterprises, LLC (EIE), is an award-winning serial entrepreneur and business leader. He is a core part of the innovative team that built Nodle—the world's largest wireless network and ecosystem of connected devices, as well as Turncoin, a registered SEC digital security that shares 100% of the revenues generated from its TheXchange's VirtualStaX platform with Turncoin holders. TurnCoin is the only revenue sharing digital security that derives its value and yield from the sale of VirtualStaX. TheXchange is the First Global Talent Exchange and a one-of-a-kind platform that is set to completely reimagine and disrupt the global fan economy. TurnCoin is presently sitting at just under a \$15B valuation and has the full support and investment from icons such as Drew Brees, Patrick Mahomes, Randy Jackson, David Meltzer, Luke Bryan, Von Miller, Cam Jordan, and many more.

One of Brian's early businesses ranked among *The Fastest-Growing Private Companies* by *Inc. 5000* for six consecutive years. In December 2019, as well as August 2022, he was featured in *The Corporate Investment Times*, the next-gen investment magazine in the Middle East. In 2022, he co-led the development and launch of ChainTech Labs, licensed and registered out of the DIFC in Dubai, UAE. ChainTech Labs holds NFT project sensations and communities such as BAPES/BAPESCLAN, CubeX, Apiens, and Bloodlines. It also developed a revolutionary NFT airlines rewards system in partnership with Etihad Airways. With over 20 years of experience in high-profile executive roles involving complex business challenges and high-stakes decisions, Brian founded Esposito Intellectual Enterprises (EIE) in New York in 2013. Wholly owned by Brian, EIE currently consists of 90+ entities, 150+ joint ventures around the world, and operates in over 25 industry focuses. There is just one degree separating any industry or market that Brian may want to enter and do business in. With a technique that he spent years perfecting, Brian connects not only the right people, but the right people at the right time. "Integrity is at the core of who we are and what we do at EIE. We strive to do good business with good people," he says.



ESPOSITO INTELLECTUAL ENTERPRISES
LLC
TIME IS OUR MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY

in the beauty, fashion, technology, music, entertainment, charities, government, transportation, blockchain, crypto, Web3, Metaverse, IoT, eSports, and hotel development industries, as well as others. Brian's specialty is taking a company's vision and launching it into the market with the correct team and resources to ensure its success. "Time is our most precious commodity," he says. "I have the ability to be a connector, but I also know when to stand back and let the magic happen, and to ensure that I am part of the upside of bringing those parties together."

When potential partners come to Brian for assistance, he joins them with a company, or companies, within his holdings that will be the most beneficial for them, and if they need to raise money, he can open those avenues through this vast network. "In this chapter of my life, this is what I love to do. I utilize my experiences, relationships, resources, and



assets to work with establishments from start-ups to *Fortune 500* companies—helping them create new opportunities and self-sustaining business models that can grow from positive cash flow, eliminating the need to raise capital," he says.

Brian's job is to protect his integrity and that of the firm's holdings, projects, partners, clients, employees, and investors, while delivering value and win-win situations. "This means that I'm a man of my word, no matter what," he says. Unafraid of creating and seizing business opportunities, expanding into new markets, and launching innovative products and services, Brian also understands the importance of knowing who *not* to do business with. "Making money is a byproduct of doing great things with great people, and you can damage your reputation, integrity, and network by dealing with the wrong person or getting involved in the wrong situation," he explains.

Brian's commitment to helping entrepreneurs extends beyond the walls of Esposito Intellectual Enterprises. He has participated in hundreds of podcasts, expert panels, live interviews, and webinars, in which he shares his journey and experiences. "I talk about the nitty-gritty and the reality of how hard it is to own and manage a business, dealing with banks and partners, etc. This really resonates with the listeners, the realness of it," Brian says. "Everyone can be an overnight success if you were to wake up each day a little smarter, a litter wiser, and little stronger than the day before." — Brian J. Esposito.

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ARTHUR Zenian

— Founder & CEO

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the global healthcare system to its core. Thousands of doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, and engineers worked tirelessly around the clock. Arthur Zenian and enBio were there, delivering best-in-class clinical/biomedical equipment maintenance and management, temporary BMET staffing, and of course, ventilators—just as they'd been doing since he founded the company in 2008. "We make a difference by being there for our customers when they need us, not when we need them," Arthur says. This is the founding principle that's guided his 26 years in the biomedical engineering and health care technology management fields—a philosophy that pushed him to found prior multiple successful biomedical service firms including Strategic Clinical Engineering and Binovia. "I love what I do," he says. "I wanted to be in medicine and I like biomedical engineering, so this is a culmination of those two passions."



enBio™
MAKING HEALTHCARE HAPPEN.

“ Our team is passionate about health care and want to contribute to successful patient outcomes every day. ”

It was this combination of heart and science that allowed enBio and their 140 employees to help usher over 200 hospitals nationwide, surgical centers, clinics, and some of the largest health systems in the nation through one of the greatest challenges in modern times and beyond. Through enBio's services, health care centers can collect patient information to deliver accurate patient care. To meet the unprecedented demand during the pandemic, enBio expanded to meet the growing need for their full suite of biomedical and specialized services, and they did it all without compromising quality and customer care.

"Our team is passionate about health care and want to contribute to successful patient outcomes every day," Arthur says. "We helped guide our clients successfully throughout the pandemic and we couldn't be prouder of our team's commitment." In 2021, enBio was recognized as *Business of the Year* by the California Legislature Assembly.

Arthur has been featured in the *San Fernando Valley Business Journal*, *24x7 Magazine*, and is a featured writer for *Entrepreneur*. He holds a BS in biomedical engineering from California State University Northridge and a BS in business and management from Woodbury University.

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Sara Arbabha

“

I love hearing all the positive feedback from people, and seeing how happy they are with not only my jewelry, but our customer service.

Inspired by the alluring image of the majestic Mediterranean, Gemma Azzurro is a line of luxury silver jewelry founded by Persian designer Sara Arbabha. Referring to the Mediterranean Sea, “Gemma Azzurro” means “blue gem,” which speaks to the shimmering shades that are ever-present in the branding, from the product packaging to the actual pieces themselves. The enchanting aesthetic of the ocean lends itself to the unique look and feel of the entire collection, which is anchored by hues of blue and white that are reminiscent of a summer vacation on the sandy shores of Saint-Tropez. Her signature “Evil Eye” line features this protective talisman, a universal symbol that has always been part of her culture. “Growing up, we’d hang them for good luck, so when I saw the trend emerge in the U.S., I wanted to create a line of jewelry around this,” Sara shares.

With a master’s degree in psychology and no background in the jewelry business, Sara started Gemma Azzurro in 2014. “It was one of those things that happened accidentally,” she explains. The timing was perfect, and through



Founder & Designer

Instagram, her line took off. What started as a hobby-turned-side-business has since grown into a thriving enterprise with a global reach and interest from both national and international buyers. Today, Sara’s distinctive designs enriched with bespoke details can be found in TJ Maxx and small boutiques across the U.S.

While Sara focuses on managing this successful one-woman business that she single-handedly built, her passion for design and seemingly limitless creativity remain as alive as ever—as does her personal attention to her customers, for whom she goes above and beyond. Gemma Azzurro’s mounting compliments from delighted, gem-adorned consumers across the globe stand as testament to that. “I love hearing all the positive feedback from people, and seeing how happy they are with not only my jewelry, but our customer service,” Sara says. “This is what really drives me.” Eight years ago, she founded the brand with an essence that “makes people want to travel.” Little did Sara know that one day her elegant bejeweled “eyes” would themselves travel to spread joy and beauty the world over.

Mahsa Ghavamian

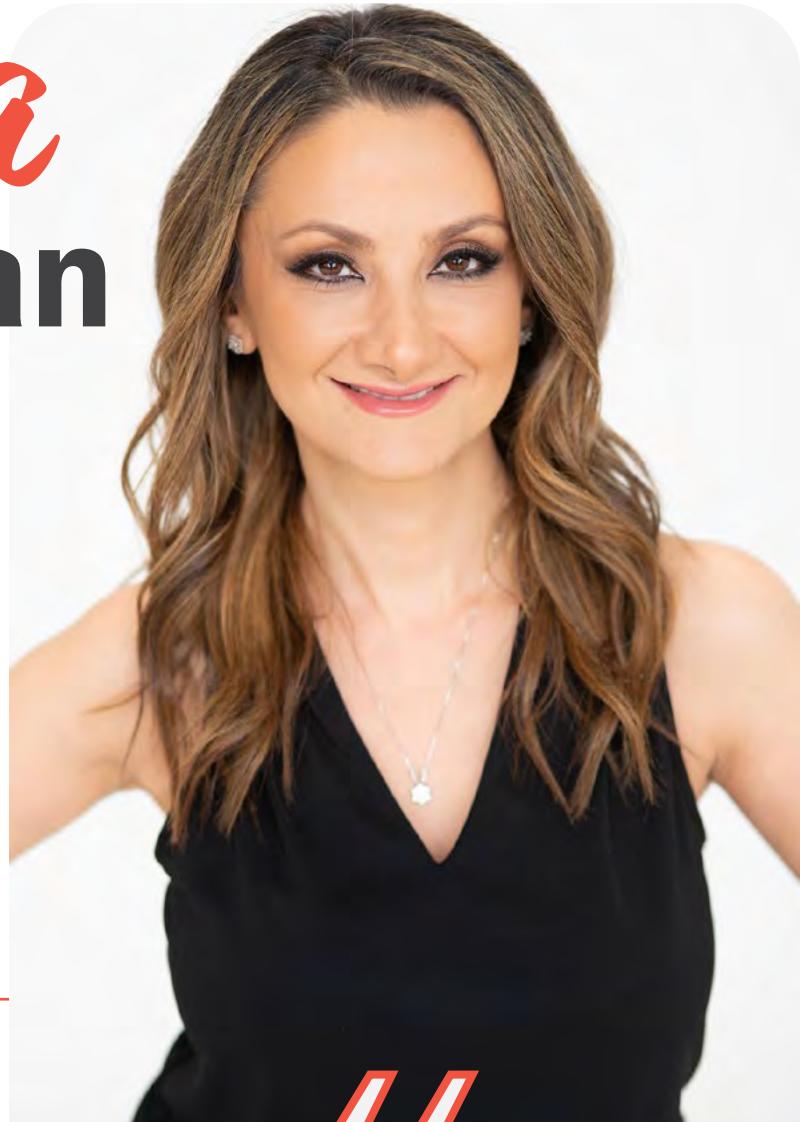
When Mahsa Ghavamian started painting with her daughter, she assumed it would just be a hobby. But when she saw her then-seven-year-old daughter's joy at her own blossoming artistic skill, Mahsa knew this was something more. "I thought, if we can do this together and have so much fun, why not create a space where everyone can do the same?" she says. So, in January 2019, Mahsa launched Canvas n Cup, leaving behind the comfort zones of the corporate and nonprofit sectors, where she'd worked for over two decades since graduate school. Today, that "space" stretches across the country and beyond bringing people together through virtual painting sessions, and the company has grown into an international art supply wholesaler.

Founder & Owner

Canvas n Cup, located in Westborough, Massachusetts, offers a variety of creative courses, including acrylic painting, ceramics, and more for artists of all ages. They run summer and after-school programs for kids, as well as company outings, parties, and events, and have hosted companies like Google, Facebook, and the Mayo Clinic. When the pandemic hit and businesses everywhere shuttered their doors, Mahsa refused to give in and abandon the artistic community. She launched virtual events to bring creativity and joy to people anytime, anywhere, during that difficult time, and teach them that creating art doesn't require expensive materials. "When there was no canvas available anywhere, I taught people to paint on cardboard boxes via Zoom," Mahsa says. "We had a blast!" They also hosted virtual events for universities like Harvard, MIT, and in-person events with over 400 participants at University of Massachusetts in Amherst.



www.canvasncup.com



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What kept me going was believing I was offering joy and comfort to families during hard times and seeing them enjoy themselves. I believe in doing good in the world.

After experiencing the supply shortages during the pandemic, Mahsa was inspired to break into wholesaling, offering artist-grade supplies to studios and individuals at a fraction of the retail cost. She even left painting kits on doorsteps during the pandemic so people could keep creating and held virtual painting sessions to keep people engaged and connected. "During COVID, many people threw in the towel, but I'm proud that I never did," she says. "What kept me going was believing I was offering joy and comfort to families during hard times and seeing them enjoy themselves. I believe in doing good in the world."

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MEGAN Broccoli

Megan Broccoli is the founder and CEO of Voi, a company that's changing the way corporations manage their vehicle fleets. Founded in 2019, Voi is the only automated violation management solution that simplifies the process of finding and resolving parking, camera, and toll violations across the nation. "The reality is, we all get parking tickets and traffic violations, and I knew there had to be a better way for people to stay on top of this before it even becomes an issue," she states. The entire process is not only innovative, but also completely automated. "What many people don't think about is the fact that one fleet could be exposed to hundreds of agencies that all have a different way of reporting their information," she states. "We take these fragmented systems and homogenize the data so that it's both readable and actionable." In doing so, the company effectively creates interoperability between various agencies through software that connects with authorities to track and handle fees, such as tolls, with efficiency and immediacy before they even have the chance to become violations.

Given Voi's success right out of the gate—immediately turning a profit in its first month—it seems people were just waiting for Megan's revolutionary idea. Today, the firm's growing list of clients include commercial enterprises, ride-sharing and rental car companies, and delivery and logistics fleets. It's no wonder Megan earned a spot on the elite list of *Top 30 Miami Female Entrepreneurs* and has been featured in *Forbes*. Prior to launching Voi, Megan worked in the utility scale solar industry for a couple of years after college, which was where the idea for her company was born. "It started as a model to serve individuals years before, but we pivoted to serve companies and businesses," she shares. It's safe to say her company has since changed the entire landscape of fleet management, and for the better.

By enabling the ability to monitor an entire fleet of vehicles for parking tickets, speed, red-



Founder & CEO

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What drives me is creating efficiencies and making things that people have to deal with every day a bit easier by using technology as a solution in order to simplify their lives and create more peace.

light and bus camera violations in real time, Voi gives businesses the power to act quickly before a situation escalates, ultimately allowing companies to avoid costly penalties that often include late fees, booting, impounding, and registration holds. The company actively manages toll accounts to ensure an entire fleet is accurately represented with payments that are always up to date. It also works to match every citation to the driver who had the vehicle at the time the violation occurred, making every attempt to hold the driver liable, then transferring the liability within the issuing agency. The end result for Voi clients? Significant savings and invaluable peace of mind. "Our customers see a 30% to 50% decrease in what they were paying for tickets and tolls because we're proactively dealing with this on their behalf," she states.

While Voi continues its upward trajectory, Megan's motivation remains as pure as it was the day the unique vision for the company first emerged. "What drives me is creating efficiencies and making things that people have to deal with every day a bit easier by using technology as a solution in order to simplify their lives and create more peace," she shares.

Megan has a bachelor's degree in finance from Florida Atlantic University. She's currently on the board for Florida Organic Growers where she's served as president since 2016.



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JAMES SAPIRSTEIN

James Sapirstein knows what it's like to roll with the punches and not let a few knockdowns deter him from striving and succeeding. After moving to Brooklyn from Argentina, he became the first of his family to graduate from high school and go to college. He was immediately attracted to the pharmacy field because it continually gave him new opportunities to discover new medicines and help countless people. He graduated from the Rutgers University College of Pharmacy, earned an MBA from Fairleigh Dickinson, and launched into a remarkable 37-year career with top-performing pharma companies such as Eli Lilly, Roche Labs, Bristol Myers Squibb, and Gilead Sciences, serving in nearly every role from sales to general management to CEO in locations around the world. As he gained valuable medical and social insights into developing medical products for the people who need it most, James put it to work, from navigating global pandemics to establishing a life-saving organization, and, most recently, leading a gastroenterology company, First Wave BioPharma, which aims to develop therapeutic products to serve unmet medical needs around the world. But it's a budding success story that almost never happened.

In 2018, James had essentially retired to a quiet life in Florida, when he received a phone call in 2019 from AzurRx BioPharma asking him to take the helm as CEO. He accepted and, 18 months later, acquired another company and renamed the new entity, First Wave BioPharma. The company develops pharmaceutical products designed to alleviate chronic ailments. For example, niclosamide

reduces the inflammation of ulcerative colitis and delays the disease's progression. "We believe niclosamide has the potential to treat several inflammatory bowel diseases including Crohn's disease," James shares. In addition, they also have adrulipase, a product for treating a life-threatening digestive disorder faced by cystic fibrosis and chronic pancreatitis patients.

While he's enjoyed an enviable career that might have many leaders seeking the spotlight, James' humility contradicts his remarkable accomplishments. "I'm a pharmacist first and foremost," he says. "I really care about patients and want to put medicine out there that actually works." This is also why he was involved in a number of philanthropic projects like Secure the Future, which he founded 23 years ago. This community of medical professionals has been working to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and has saved millions of lives. He was also integral in launching Viread and Truvada, crucial drugs for those living with HIV.

"My biggest motivators are the small victories," James says. "When we receive good data that we've spent years fighting for, that keeps me going." He also loves to see the growth of his team and colleagues. "Some of my hires have moved on to become CEOs themselves," he says. As someone who honors his own beginnings, watching people overcome hardships, be that be a chronic illness or a humble origin, and go on to live successful lives and help others, this is what drives James every day.

NAHOM Assefa

Driven by his ambitious nature, Nahom Assefa works towards increasing the value and success of communities countrywide one property at a time. His interest in real estate was enhanced while he was working full-time as an IT specialist at one of the largest Fortune 500 companies in the world. Just one month into his role with Bank of America, he launched Nahom Buys Homes in October 2019. A few months later, he executed his first deal as an independent real estate investor, followed by a second. Nahom left the corporate world to pursue real estate full-time—and he never looked back.

Based in St. Louis, Missouri, Nahom Buys Homes specializes in providing valuable services in the real estate industry, working with buyers, sellers, and investors. To date, they've transacted over a million dollars' worth of deals across St. Louis, with plans to enter the Houston market by year's end. "We seek out properties with the primary objective of enhancing their neighborhoods and communities, by either personally rehabbing them or finding investors that can work towards significantly increasing their value," Nahom explains. "We make the process convenient, simple, and enjoyable." While the company is currently focused on single-family homes, they're working towards plunging even deeper into the commercial space market, including apartment homes and retail commercial buildings.

“ What I love about my job is getting to help people every day. **”**

"With every deal we do, we go into it with this intention: How can we provide service and value, and in what ways can we do this?" he shares. "We look to partner with local investors, not compete with them." Nahom also puts special emphasis on developing networks with other investors and collaborating with local realtors to sell properties. While his role involves a great deal of negotiating with buyers and sellers, and working with private and hard money lenders, underlying it all is knowing that he's making a difference in the lives of others. "What I love about my job is getting to help people every day," he says. Nahom plans to build schools in his native country of Ethiopia by using the network and influence he's amassed through his business.

Nahom holds a bachelor's degree in information technology from the University of Missouri.

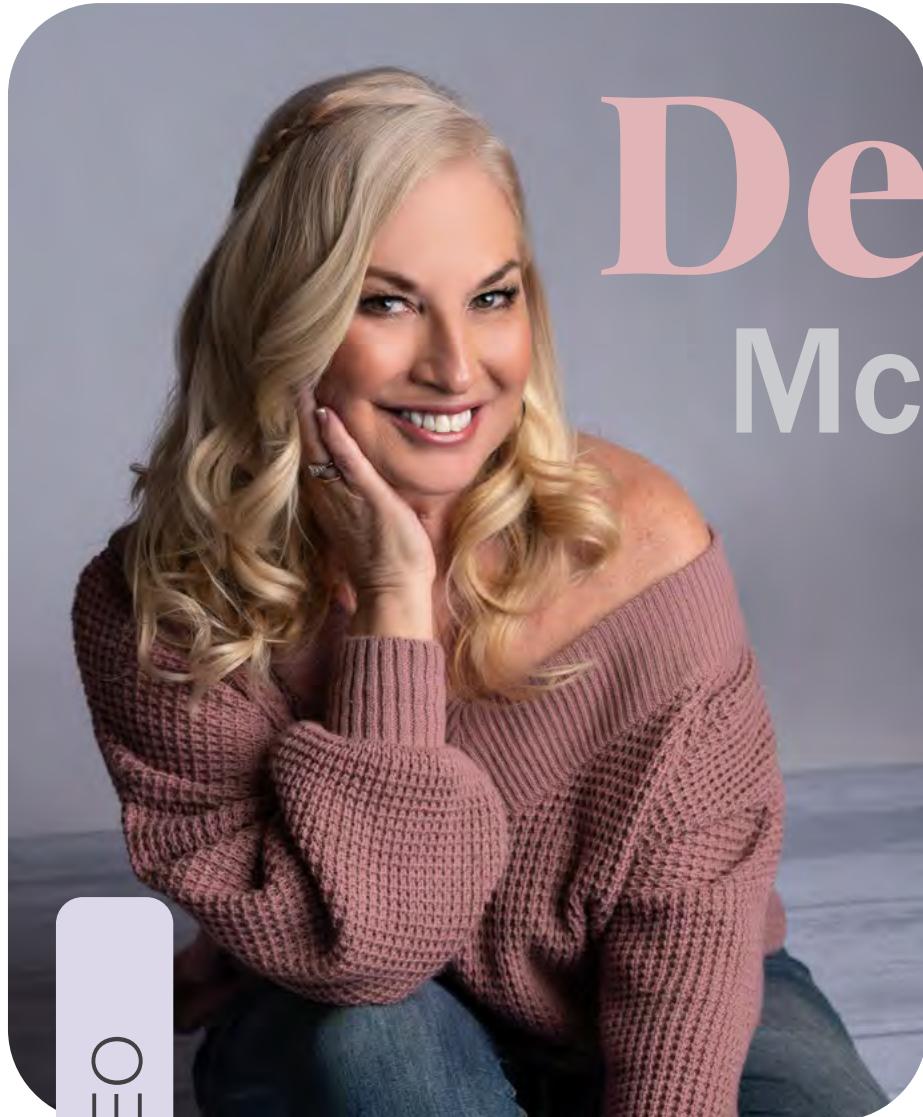


Founder & Investor

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Founder & CEO



Debbie McCarthy

Long before influencers were a thing, Debbie McCarthy was already there as the original. She's a recipient of the *2018 Sierra Nevada Powerful Women Award* and was named the *2019 Promotions Person of the Year* by the *American Advertising Federation (AFF-Reno)*. Most recently, she received the *2022 Reno-Tahoe Ace Award for Outstanding Individual Marketing Professional*. Debbie is a food, travel, and wine blogger who's a huge proponent of finding your voice and never giving up. Her individual journey started about ten years ago during a period of life changes. She'd given up a decade-long career as a parish life director at a local church to care for her sick father. As he regained his health, he would accompany her around town while Debbie had her

camera in hand. Soon, Debbie became a photographer for various local newspapers, taking photos for the community and nonprofit events. It brought her tremendous joy, and she became known as the "girl around town." Fittingly, her hashtag became #abouttowndeb.

When America Matters Media asked her to take photos for their radio station, she leaped at the chance—for free—to post the audio and pictures on her Facebook page. Then the CEO invited her to chime in on the radio. As someone who used to stutter, Debbie had been told she wouldn't make it, and while she overcame it, the idea of talking on the radio was entirely different. But this woman takes on any challenge in her path, so she did it anyway! She was then offered her show, *Chick Chat*, which Shamrock Communications picked up, followed by new partnerships, and she became a co-founder of Northern Nevada's only women's lifestyle magazine. Her latest venture is a weekly podcast, *City Talk with About Town Deb*. Debbie is a bright light in the community and beyond as the founder and CEO of a growing brand. Led by her motto, "Remember, together we're one heart," she created a campaign to give back to the health care and essential workers during the pandemic. She's also partnered with Crystal Basin Cellars in El Dorado County, sharing her branded wine labels with the community, where she donates a portion of profits to The Northern Nevada Children's Cancer Foundation.



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Julie

Bednarski

"If you focus on happiness and goodness, everything will organically grow from there." This is the mantra of Julie Bednarski, founder and CEO of Healthy Crunch. As a registered dietitian and trained chef, Julie has devoted her entire career to making people happy and healthy. She started her company in 2014 to bridge the gap between healthy and tasty foods. With over 60 products in movie theaters, grocery stores such as Sprouts, Walmart, Loblaws, Shopper's Drug Mart, Rexall, Costco, London Drugs, and independent retailers across the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East, Healthy Crunch is on a mission to innovate everyday foods. From Rice Crispy squares to granola bars, dark chocolate superfoods, seed butters, trail mixes, coconut chips, and chia jams, everything they make is allergen friendly and school approved. But it's more than just delicious foods; it's an entire movement of healthy bites that are lower in sugar and higher in fiber—think nutritious *and* delicious.

It all started with Julie's passion for kale chips coupled with a dream and the vision to make healthy snacks for friends and family. Within just a few years, it all came to fruition—though not without its challenges. In the beginning, starting a company was "sunshine and rainbows," but then Julie experienced the all-too-common obstacles of being a female business owner. "It was very hard to get funding, or even be taken seriously, so being able to succeed and overcome the struggles is something I'm really proud of," she shares. And she should be. Healthy Crunch is one of only 2% of women-owned businesses to break \$1 million annually. While this accomplishment is awe-inspiring, Julie measures her success not in dollars, but in knowing that their products are making people feel good and happy. As for the journey to get here, well, Julie wouldn't have it any other way. "Everything happens for a reason. Being an entrepreneur is a roller coaster, but it's about resilience and pushing forward," she explains. "As they say, happy crunching!"

Julie attended culinary school in New York and holds a master's degree in nutrition communication and a bachelor's degree in applied human nutrition.



Founder & CEO

Julie measures her success not in dollars, but in knowing that their products are making people **feel good and happy**.



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ANNA Victoria Ting PASTORES



Executive Director

“

Everyone is held to a higher standard, and we're so passionate about the care we provide to our senior residents.

a nursing home. From there, she worked as a health and wellness coordinator, then health and wellness director at an assisted living community. Thereafter, Anna joined Oakmont as their health services director before taking the helm as executive director last July—at just 27 years old. “Assisted living is a rewarding and undervalued field,” she explains. “Working with seniors is a calling for me, and I’m grateful to make any impact I can on their lives.”

Anna oversees the directors within the community, handling daily operations and resolving concerns within the physical and overall plant of the community, while ensuring the senior residents are happy and well cared for. But for Anna, it’s much more than that. It’s about helping the residents and her team achieve their goals. “The interactions I have either with residents or team members, are about making a difference, by providing high-quality care and being authentic in who I am.” While she humbly attributes her success to the residents and team, it’s her authenticity and nurturing nature that serve to set the tone for the entire community. “I love what I do because of our mission and the expectations we live by,” she states. “Everyone is held to a higher standard, and we're so passionate about the care we provide to our senior residents.”

Doing the right thing, even when others aren’t watching is a guiding principle for Oakmont of Orange’s executive director, Anna Victoria Ting Pastores. The California-based company says they are “excited that one of our executive directors is being recognized for this reward especially from a community that was honored with the 2022 Best of Senior Living Award by A Place for Mom. Every team member at any of the 63 communities under the Oakmont Management portfolio are held to a high standard of excellence not available at other senior communities and we are proud that Anna is being acknowledged for exemplifying those values.”

“Our community, residents and team members are amazing,” Anna shares. “Our team is full of great, hardworking individuals, and we take pride in work that we do.” Now an advocate for senior care for eight years, Anna’s career began as an LVN in

TYLER Dooley

“ I want to provide a product that benefits people and allows them to live a healthy lifestyle, while still tasting amazing.



Founder & CEO

When Tyler Dooley needed a pick-me-up, he found himself at a loss. He wasn't a coffee drinker, and all the coffee alternatives he could find were loaded with sugar and artificial ingredients. “I wanted something that gave me an energy boost without the junk,” he says. The obvious solution to someone with a lifelong entrepreneurial streak? Create your own! Tyler founded Wake Up Water – a healthy, alternative way for people to get their daily caffeine. As someone dedicated to a healthy lifestyle himself, Tyler wanted to share his “Better Fuel, Better You,” vision with everyone. “When I see people consuming a lot of poor-quality food, I want to change that,” he says. “I want to provide a product that benefits people and allows them to live a healthy lifestyle, while still tasting amazing.”

Wake Up Water has roughly the same caffeine as a medium cup of coffee, electrolyte levels of the leading sports drink, and 100% of your daily value of vitamins B3, B5, B6, and B12, which provide extra, sustained energy throughout the day. The combination of energy and hydration make it the perfect pick-me-up. “We took the caffeine concept and blended it with the hydration element to create a truly unique product,” Tyler says, “something that energizes you while also hydrating you. We don't claim to be healthy and then hide artificial ingredients from customers, we truly are a better option.” Tyler encourages everyone to read the ingredient lists of the products they purchase.

Wake Up Water was formulated and bottled as a ready-to-drink item when it hit shelves. But just four months later, despite great initial success, they would have to rethink everything when COVID-19 swept through the world. Tyler realized that with people staying home and out of stores, he would need a better way to

get the product into people's hands. In just a few months, he realized that Wake Up Water could exist—without the water. In April 2021, he debuted a powdered version in stick packs, which were easy to ship team and convenient for customers, who could add their own water as needed. “We had to pivot and start from zero again, but I viewed it as a great opportunity,” he says. That pivot was a challenge, requiring the reimaging of not only the product, but the packaging and marketing. But in a true testament of “fortunate favors the bold,” Tyler came out the other side with an even more popular product and promising business model.

WAKE UP WATER

Creating Wake Up Water and keeping it going even through a global crisis has been an impressive accomplishment. Tyler, who, just like wanting to reinvent starting the day, also wanted to reinvent what a successful career looked like after deciding that “traditional” career paths weren't for him. He wanted to forge his own path and create something beneficial for others. And to that end, he wants to share even more. In addition to providing healthy products to consumers, he's excited to share his experience and expertise with those looking to build their own business and career, and help other people achieve their lifelong dreams through advisory and mentorship.

Co-Founder & CEO



Colin Lacy

Looking at economists' predictions, Colin Lacy and Dr. Stephanie Santoso were concerned: young people are predicted to be economically worse off than their parents, and inequality of opportunity, particularly in relation to parental wealth, still prevents so many youths from actualizing their dreams. "If people of color, women, and those from low-income communities became inventors and entrepreneurs at the same rate as men from high-income households, innovation in the U.S. would quadruple," Colin says.

In 2021, they co-founded MakerUSA, a nonprofit incubated in the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE). MakerUSA's mission is to build stronger pathways into careers in making and entrepreneurship, including advanced manufacturing, computer science, alternative energy, and the skilled trades. Colin serves as CEO and Stephanie as president. Six months later, over 52 institutions across 24 states applied to partner. Applications have come from community and technical colleges, HBCUs, tribal universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and community-based makerspaces, among others. MakerUSA embeds locally recruited program managers at partner sites to lead on projects that the community has defined. "Imagine if every community college had teams exclusively focused on



MakerUSA

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION & SOCIAL MOBILITY

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LI: MakerUSA / Colin Lacy / Dr. Stephanie Santoso

Co-Founder & President



Dr. Stephanie Santoso

empowering students on maker-related career pathways," Colin says. Stephanie and Colin each draw on extensive experience in the educational arena. Stephanie, with a PhD in information science from Cornell, served as Senior Advisor for Making at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy from 2014-16, helping develop the Nation of Makers initiative, broadening access to makerspaces and maker education across the country. Colin earned his master's in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and has served as an elected school board director and chamber of commerce president in rural Colorado. He was a founding leader and former executive director of Makers + Mentors Network, a community of STEM ecosystems serving over 200,000 students.

"We're excited about the diversity of communities eager to partner," Stephanie says. "We love bringing people and organizations together that might not have connected before, in ways that surface new ideas and solutions." Similarly, Colin is excited about building a new kind of workforce. "At scale, MakerUSA program managers would become a new national workforce, exclusively focused on growing pathways into maker careers and entrepreneurship within our most marginalized communities."

TOM Mavrou

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You have to keep on believing in what you're doing and in yourself to make it happen.

With over 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry, Tom Mavrou has mastered the art of making the perfect grilled cheese. His company, Meltwich Hospitality Group, Inc., is the fastest-growing grilled cheese concept in North America. It's not a fad, it's a *trend*. With 35 locations and another 40 scheduled to open before the end of the year, Meltwich is a quick-service restaurant dedicated to forever changing expectations in an unexpectedly exciting environment. Known for crafting the most modern, comforting, cheese-centric food around, Meltwich is concentrated on melting cheese—think Philly cheesesteaks, cheeseburgers, and, of course, their main star, the irresistible grilled cheese sandwich.

Together with his wife, Barb Kiss, Tom launched the company in 2015. It's since turned into a full-blown family affair. During the onset of the pandemic, it was just a husband-a-wife team chasing a dream. They drove across the country, sharing their passion for food with the world. They brought their son, Jordan on board to assist with the business, and now, he's the senior operations manager. As the company grows, their team continues to expand with their other son, Joshua, as national construction manager. But they'll tell you that their path to success hasn't been an easy one. "It's been a struggle to get where



Chief Operating Officer

we are," Tom explains. "But witnessing the resilience of this team through the pandemic, and how they put their heart and soul into it is our greatest accomplishment."

MELTWICH
food co.

Prior to launching Meltwich, Tom had an extensive career in the restaurant industry. He started working in his family's restaurant business at a young age, before going to college. Tom knew in his heart that school wasn't for him and eventually took over the family business and grew his portfolio. As he saw changes in the industry, he got into real estate with those ventures always funding his activity in the restaurant industry. Along the way, people told him that he would never make it, but Tom continued in relentless pursuit of his dreams, which have come to fruition because he had the courage to keep chasing them. "You have to keep on believing in what you're doing and in yourself to make it happen," he says.

Next? Meltwich America—Coming in 2022.

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Co-founder
& Partner



JODY TRAPASSO

The White House. Presidential campaigns. C-suite executive. Global law firms. Angel investor. Board member. Charitable foundation. Community partnerships. Advisor to the International Olympic Committee.

Jody Trapasso's 30-year career has spanned them all. That's why one client calls Jody "Renaissance Man."

He co-founded New Paradigm Agency, a cutting-edge public affairs and advertising firm that is an innovator in combining traditional public affairs with disruptive data and digital techniques on important policy and social issues. Senior executives turn to Jody as a trusted advisor on environmental, social, and governance matters. His success combines vision and focus. "Success comes

from simultaneously understanding where things need to be six months from now and six hours from now," Jody says. "And never confusing motion with progress."

Believing today's challenges can be solved by innovation, Jody is an angel investor in and informal advisor to disruptive early-stage companies bringing transformational change to pressing social needs such as Veda Data Solutions, which is revolutionizing the health care data market.

Senior executives turn to Jody as a **trusted advisor** on environmental, social, and governance matters.

Board service is also how Jody drives dynamic change. He serves on the board of advisors of the Seton Hall University School of Diplomacy and International Relations, which trains the next generation of diplomats, global philanthropists, and business leaders. President Clinton appointed Jody to an advisory board that assessed the impact of international trade on U.S. communities.

Strengthening communities is a hallmark of Jody's career. He created a ground-breaking corporate volunteer program and built community partnerships to address food security, urban revitalization, environmental justice, and increased access to higher education. Jody was one of 11,500 everyday American heroes selected to participate in the Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Torch relay based on their community service. Jody's sense of community comes from his father, who rallied a small town against impossible odds to build a new community house, which nearly 60 years later remains the center of activity in town. "My father inspired people to build rather than tear down. That's a lesson for these polarized times," Jody says. "Choosing community over division is how we rebuild the strength of our nation one neighborhood at a time."

NP NEW PARADIGM
AGENCY

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Landon Fielding

For many employees, the most desired offering by employers is their benefits programs, and in an era of the Great Recession, as companies everywhere struggle with retention and labor shortages, this has never been more important. Yet, when faced with myriad medical and benefits plans, HSA and FSA contribution options, employee benefits can be incredibly confusing. As a benefits consultant for a decade, Landon Fielding co-founded Brite in 2020 to simplify what he saw as an unnecessarily time-consuming and complicated exercise. Just over two years on the map, and the company already serves benefits brokers, insurance carriers, and employers across the country, totaling over 1 million eligible employees located in 2,500 cities all over the world. Add to that the fact that Brite is only the sixth company in Utah history to be accepted into Y Combinator, the largest VC-backed accelerator program in the world,



Co-Founder & COO

“ Brite has removed every hurdle for an employee to engage in benefits education! This is why we have seen the success we have. We are simplifying benefits for everyone.

and it's difficult to call their success anything less than remarkable. With Brite's innovative software, what once took a week for employees, takes a mere 10 minutes, and for companies, insurance brokers and carriers, the time to build out the benefits package education is slashed from six weeks to an hour.

"Over my career as a benefits consultant, I would strategize with employers about the benefits they should offer employees, and we'd implement innovative solutions aligned with company objectives," Landon explains. "But those programs never saw the success they should have, because

we didn't have a way to help employees understand the value of those offerings. That's why we created Brite."

Brite's innovative software teaches employees about the benefits they have available through their employer, and then Brite's algorithm produces personalized benefits recommendations, such as health insurance, pet insurance, FSA programs, identity theft, and other company perks. And just like that, Brite is simplifying the benefit selection and enrollment process, one click at a time.

"Brite has removed every hurdle for an employee to engage in benefits education! This is why we have seen the success we have. We are simplifying benefits for everyone."



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RYAN LISSACK

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Realize Me brings all that health and performance data together in order to provide a comprehensive view of an individual and uses intelligent technology to help users understand their data, leading to deeper insight.



Ryan Lissack has played a *major* role in building multiple successful companies over the course of his storied career. In 2006, he started his first company, Koral, and moved to San Francisco. The following year, it was sold to Salesforce and he spent the next five years working there in various roles, including leading mobile engineering. In 2012, he moved to Los Angeles to join Maker Studios as CTO. In 2014, they sold to Disney, where Ryan spent a few years integrating the companies before co-founding Rival in 2016, which was acquired by Live Nation in 2020. After Rival, he joined MedMen as CTO and then interim CEO before taking a sabbatical. A health and fitness aficionado for more than three decades, Ryan's approach to this field had become more data-driven, and while wearable devices provided a significant amount of data, the information lived in silos, making it difficult to gain meaningful insight. Determined to change this, Ryan founded Realize Me in 2021, a technology startup in the health and fitness space that offers advanced analytics for health enthusiasts.

"There are a number of companies in the space, and most focus on a very specific set of data," Ryan explains, "Realize Me brings all that health and performance data together in order to provide a comprehensive view of an individual and uses intelligent technology to help users understand their data, leading to deeper insight. It is their command center for health and fitness." The platform supports users' progress towards their goals through the collection, analysis, and visualization of data, and members receive significantly discounted access to resources such as lab testing and supplements. Realize Me is currently running a beta program before launching next year.

As a serial entrepreneur with three prior successful exits, Ryan is passionate about building companies and creating technology. "I believe it's important for founders of early-stage companies to be generalists who are willing and able to do anything the company needs to be successful. One of the most important skills is knowing how to bring together a team of exceptional specialists," he states.

Ryan holds a B.S. in Computer Science from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa.

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TODD GROSS

Todd Gross enjoyed an illustrious 20-year career in finance as a head trader for renowned firms like Morgan Stanley and Cooper, Neff & Associates, and as a fund manager earning the title of *Best Commodities Manager* by *Barclay's Hedge* and authoring a book in 2013. He also founded and helmed multiple successful companies of his own. After amassing considerable experience in real-time predictive analytics, Todd decided to apply his skills to saving people's lives.

In 2019, Todd co-founded Quantaira, Inc., with Noah Clay, who started the Nanotechnology Center at Harvard, Cornell, and UPenn. Quantaira uses real-time predictive analysis to make clinical care safer, effective, and more efficient for both patients and health care providers by providing a comprehensive view of biometrics. Today, Quantaira is enjoying growing interest from international hospital systems, and continues



Co-Founder & Chair

Quantaira uses real-time predictive analysis to make [clinical care safer, effective, and more efficient](#) for both patients and health care providers by providing a comprehensive view of biometrics.

to attract best-in-class talent. "The caliber of our people is truly remarkable," Todd says. His colleagues include the world's fourth-ranked cybersecurity expert and the former dean of George Washington University's Medical School. Their Patient C.A.R.E. (comprehensive access for remote evaluation) platform allows providers to observe patient biometrics from multiple medical devices and collect it into one place, all remotely, so they can easily monitor patients, all in real time.

The idea came when Todd learned about baby socks that record vital signs and prevent sudden infant death via data collection. "Data is becoming a growing part of medicine," Todd, who now serves as chair of Quantaira, explains. And there's a personal reason behind everything, too: both Todd and Noah watched their fathers pass away on ventilators. Based on these experiences,

they originally focused on pinpointing when patients should be taken off ventilators. With the rise of COVID, they expanded their scope to help even more people. Because their C.A.R.E. platform synchronizes biometrics with medications, the result is speedier care that saves money while alleviating the very real threat of burnout for providers—resulting in better patient care. Reflecting on his shift in focus, Todd is most happy that his work is directly helping people. "I spent over two decades trading commodities as a professional," he says. "Now, with my own company, I can benefit people directly with what I'm doing. It's very gratifying and drives me every day."



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LEE Belzberg

Co-Founder



Lee is merging his business expertise and passion for wellness to **make in-home Pilates more accessible with a lightweight, space-friendly, seamless design.**

Every morning, he visualizes where he wants to be, and how he can achieve it. He takes 20 minutes to himself to say affirmations and listen to a podcast—usually on his morning walk before the workday begins. He's a strong believer in the idea that movement helps benefit our mental state, and he's a fierce advocate for self-care. Meet Lee Belzberg, the co-founder of Frame Fitness, who's raising the bar with a revolutionary Pilates reformer that's transforming the way Pilates is practiced. Lee began his career working as a financial advisor at London Life, where he helped clients with wealth management and pension programs. He later partnered with The Consulting House and Summit Wealth Advisory Group, where he drove business to new heights with an innovative method of consolidation that brought substantial cost improvements for clients. Today, along with Frame Fitness co-founder, Melissa Bentivoglio, Lee is merging his business expertise and passion for wellness to make in-home Pilates more accessible with a lightweight, space-friendly, seamless design. As they prepare for the public unveiling of Frame, the buzz is already growing. Named among *Built In LA's* 2022 *Startups to Watch in 2022*, the company has garnered the attention of A-list entrepreneurs and support from investors and fitness industry pioneers Mark Mastrov and Michael Bruno that saw them quickly surpass their initial \$5 million funding goal.

Cutting-edge and modern, Frame was designed to elevate any space, with patent-pending technology that amplifies the workout experience. Offering digitally connected, instructor-led Pilates with on-demand and live classes, it's already been named *Best Reformer of 2022* by *Women's Health* and has been featured in *POPSUGAR*, *Well+Good*, *Men's Health Journal*, *Forbes*, and a multitude of other publications. It was also one of three brands named to Jaclyn Johnson's venture capital firm and brand incubator, New Money Ventures. In an industry that hasn't been disrupted in over a century, the time is ripe for innovation, and Frame Fitness is doing just that. The key, according to Lee, is simple: "Life is short. Surround yourself with people that elevate you and you will achieve more!"

Lee holds a BA in political science and government from Dalhousie University.

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Cindy Machles

CO-FOUNDER/CEO



Cindy Machles has long been a leader and pioneer.

While part of the big-conglomerate world, she took an entrepreneurial approach as one of the first to apply marketing principles from consumer-packaged goods to healthcare. This ultimately revealed an unmet need that inspired her to create and lead an independent operating unit within WPP that developed branding exclusively for prescription products.

Seeking to disrupt the industry once again, she joined forces with long-time copywriting partner, Alan Rothenberg, to envision and launch Glue Advertising in 2013 as a more strategic, innovative, nimble, and accountable communications company. Glue verticals include prescription products, devices, diagnostics, and OTCs, B2B, financial services, online gambling, and food and beverage. Its unique, hands-on model has been appreciated by clients and industry watchers alike.

Glue has been recognized as a top 20 NYC agency since 2017 and a top digital agency on a global scale!

In 2019, Cindy got out in front of the latest trends, taking on the role of U.S. consultant to Singapore-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) media company, SQREEM. And now, with the additional title of chief marketing

Cindy has been recognized as a trailblazer on women's issues.

officer at SecureCHEK AI, she is revolutionizing how advertising collateral is developed—at the push of a button. This will save marketers millions of dollars and months and months of time that can be reallocated to reaching and influencing their target audiences sooner. Finally, as an adjunct to Glue, she is in the process of building yourmededge.com, a network of healthcare experts who bring consumers the latest trends and discoveries from the floor of major medical meetings in language they can understand.

Cindy has been recognized as a trailblazer on women's issues. She was featured in two books—*Surrounded by Awesome Women* and *Founded by Women: Inspiring Stories from 100 Female Founders*—and served as a keynote speaker at the nationally-recognized, *Founded by Women Conference*. She is an avid mentor to start-ups—as a founding steering committee member of Chicago Booth Angels Network and an advisor to young companies within University of Chicago's prestigious accelerator, The Polsky Center.

While Cindy is known more for her agency background, she began her career on the client side in brand management at Revlon, Clorox, and Johnson & Johnson.

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glue

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RYAN MYERS



CEO

Ryan Myers's career has always been about making people's lives better. As CEO of SparkRise, he's continuing his mission. SparkRise is a premier digital community that unites causes, companies, celebrities and engaged activists, collectively empowering them to spark change. The SparkRise model is designed to benefit nonprofits and empower activists at no cost to them. Sponsors receive an ROI equivalent to traditional advertising campaigns, while donating funds and raising awareness for the nonprofits they support. Both entities gain relationships with newly engaged supporters and customers. "Nonprofits need more innovative and effective ways to generate funds, and we're grateful to be able to fulfill that role," Ryan says.

An entrepreneur for 15 years, Ryan was a founding member of Flaggpole in 2012 and led the company's M&A by SparkRise in 2020. Now, with Brad Koepenick and Nancy Davies, he leads the company's

mission to benefit nonprofits and schools across the U.S. Ryan draws on years of experience in marketing, branding, and strategic planning with organizations such as the American Cancer Society, before moving to his role as VP of marketing for a financial company where he tripled lead growth and led it to a *Best Place to Work Award*. He then entered the startup world with TalentSpring, which was acquired by Talent Technology, then co-founded Grocery Cart Savings—winner of NWEN's *Startup of the Year Award*, and Flaggpole, which was acquired by SparkRise in 2020.

SparkRise's campaigns range from digital media campaigns to live special events, like the recent "Val's Potluck Movie Night featuring *Top Gun*." Hosted from Val Kilmer's HelMel Studio, the event was held in person and streamed live in support of the USO, with participation from 15 celebrities, along with brand co-sponsors, who gained considerable visibility. "Brands spend billions on advertising, but though SparkRise campaigns, they achieve these same results, but more importantly spark real change in communities across the globe.. Through SparkRise, they get the same ROI, but benefit from cause marketing exposure, celebrity visibility, and best of all, the money goes to support great causes."



SparkRise is a premier digital community that unites causes, companies, celebrities and engaged activists, collectively empowering them to spark change.

For Ryan, it's about leaving the world a better place for future generations. "Our team is deeply committed to making a positive difference in the world through campaigns ranging from planting trees to those supporting our Vets" Ryan is excited about their recent roll out of profile pages on their website because now people can track their philanthropic impact and help drive significant change, which is exactly Ryan's vision.

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Q & A | RICK Abbott

Navigating the health care system is stressful for everyone, but for the millions of Americans with multiple chronic conditions, it can be a nightmare. Rick Abbott, a 20-year veteran of the healthcare field, knows this all-too-well. He also knows that a little love, empathy, and compassion can make a lasting difference in the lives of people who need it the most. That's why in December 2021, he launched Lyn Health, a "human-centric" health care firm tailored to those with polychronic conditions. With a combination of virtual and in-person care, they provide customized and holistic clinical, advocacy, and care coordination services, collaborating with employers, health plans, and providers to be a much-needed enhancement to the current care environment.



Working only in healthcare since college, Rick was most recently VP of product and market solutions for Premera Blue Cross, chief growth officer at Imagine Health, and also has a decade of experience in startup leadership, making him perfectly suited for the role of CEO and co-founder of Lyn. And that's evident in how, in less than a year after launching, Lyn Health is already seeing customer growth across regional and national health plans, health systems, and Fortune 500 employers. Rick has been named a *Top 25 Emerging Leader* by *Modern Healthcare*, and a *2020 Disruptor of the Year* by *Puget Sound Business Journal*. "The current system is failing those who need it most, and I believe we can no longer sit idly as more and more people struggle to find the support they need," he says.

Rick, how is Lyn's Care Circle simplifying health care delivery for people with chronic conditions?

People with multiple chronic conditions deal with burdensome, disorganized, and disintegrated services. Lyn's Care Circle is a multidisciplinary, coordinated group of physicians, behavioral health practitioners, and nurses, who work collaboratively to simplify health care and unburden patients so they can focus on what matters most—their families and their lives. People enroll through their employer or health plan, and we work in a personalized manner to meet their health and well-being goals. In doing so, we restore hope to many who have been left behind by the traditional healthcare system.



How can people benefit in terms of cost?

People with polychronic conditions have a higher likelihood of being hospitalized and have more complex treatment regimens. Lyn ensures their treatments are aligned to the specific needs of each and every patient. Because we're always available via phone, text, or video, we can serve our patients in a manner that meets them where they are at, each and every day.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

The fact that we're helping people that have been left behind by our current healthcare system. We're restoring hope to people who are struggling not just from a medical perspective, but oftentimes in other aspects of their life, and to be able to help them see a path forward is endlessly fulfilling. I've been fortunate to learn from so many incredible mentors throughout the years, and my constant focus is "paying it forward" to help develop and inspire the next generation of health care innovators.

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Sandy Moll



Founder
President
& CEO

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We're able to help clients get clarity on what they want, not just in our services, but in the big picture of life.

Sandy Moll has 25 years' experience in the financial service industry. She's guided six financial institutions through acquisitions, led 10 system conversions, participated in systems development projects, worked with Consent Orders as well as all the everyday needs in all areas of organizations. As the founder of Advanced Business Solutions, LLC, she is at once a visionary entrepreneur and a financial services expert who has walked in the shoes of her clients and understands the needs and challenges of both her industry brethren and business leaders. Underlying it all is her unyielding passion for serving others. "When I started this company, I did what every successful person did. I followed everyone's guidance, and quickly realized that I was miserable, and I hated it," she shares. "God put this in my heart, so eventually, I stopped listening to everybody else and just listened to Him. Together, we focused on our foundational mission to serve others." Designed to help businesses reach their fullest potential, ABS is a Kansas-based consulting firm that helps companies in the financial service industry thrive.

Sandy founded the company in 2008 as Applied Banking Solutions with her husband and three partners. Later, it became Advanced Business Solutions to reflect the complete line of expanded offerings curated for the clients they serve. With



**Advanced
Business
Solutions**

tailored solutions for improving efficiencies and bottom lines, ABS helps business leaders stop worrying about minutia, and focus on the people. Their full suite of offerings includes interim and permanent staffing, regulatory compliance reviews and consulting, accounting and technology

support, lending, and credit solutions. As president and CEO, Sandy sets the direction and strategy for a company driven by an unwavering commitment to helping people. "We're able to help clients get clarity on what they want, not just in our services, but in the big picture of life," she explains. "We provide resources they don't have, and we always give a hand up." As the founder of three successful companies and a business owner outside the financial services realm, Sandy's mission to see others succeed extends beyond the walls of her own ventures. She's penned numerous articles for publications, including *Forbes*, and is a sought-after speaker, sharing her expertise and wisdom with people across the country.

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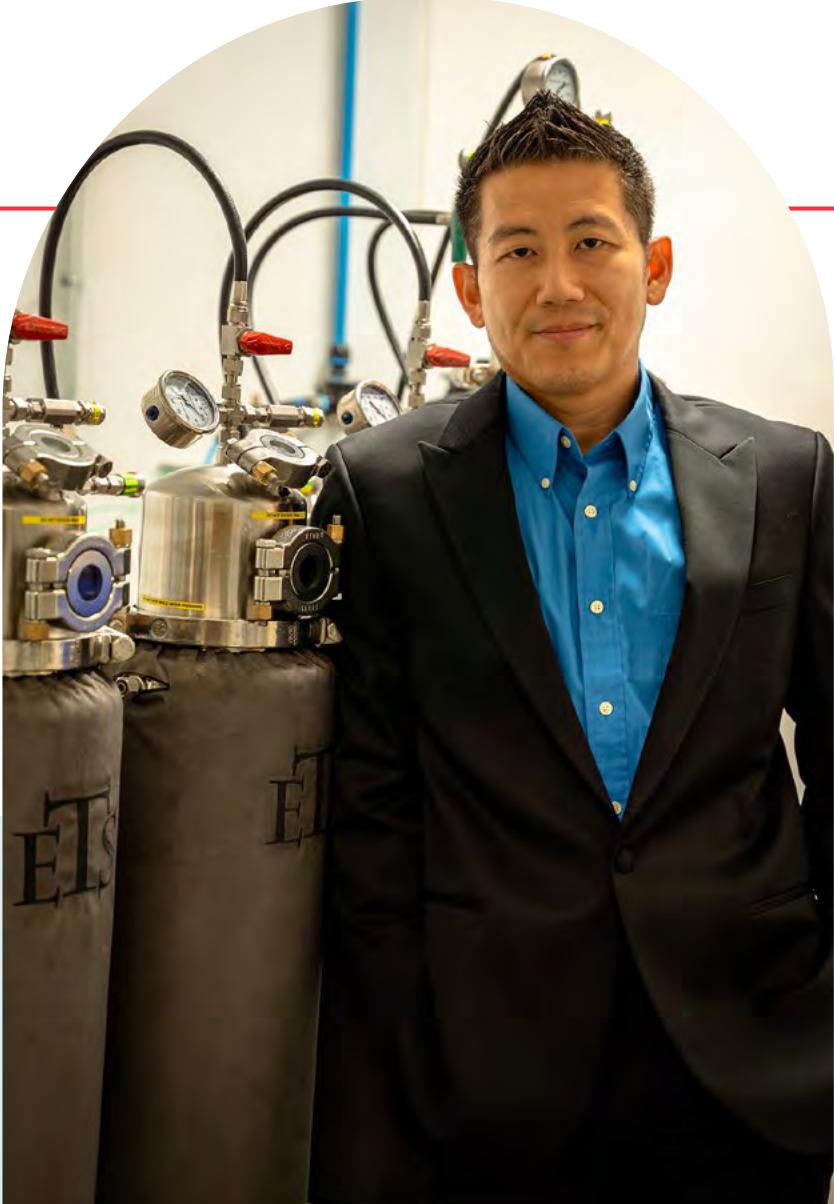
JERRY Wang

Jerry Wang was working a comfortable, nine-to-five job as a scientist at Novartis, focusing on molecular biology in diagnostic product development, and publishing articles on cancerous gene mutation detection, among other topics. In 2015, while still with Novartis, he started his first business, and in 2017, he made the decision to jump full-time into entrepreneurship. He's never looked back.

Today, Jerry is the president and founder of NXLVL. With operations officially launched in early 2022, their cannabis delivery platform offers unique delivery options for cannabinoids, such as a water-stable powder and a water-

NXLVL is unique in that instead of focusing on licensing, production, and sales, Jerry and his team focus on **R&D, technology, and innovation.**

soluble nanosyrup. They partner with a growing roster of health care industries, including cancer treatment and hospice centers, to supply fast-acting edibles to those who need them most, as well as to emerging CBD markets around the world. They also offer CBD and cannabis products directly to consumers, which are available nationwide online; and in California, they offer THC products. What's more, the delivery system is personalized for each patient based on genetic profiling and their own personal preferences. NXLVL is unique in that instead of focusing on licensing, production, and sales, Jerry and his team focus on R&D, technology, and innovation. "I think it's more impactful to bring in technology to enhance delivery and



absorption for end users," Jerry explains. "That's why I started the company, to provide services specifically in this area." And they're not just serving their own customers—NXLVL also helps companies customize, brand, and deliver the products to their own unique specifications.

In addition to NXLVL, Jerry has also founded several other companies. NXLVL, LLC, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is an indoor cannabis cultivation company that grossed \$300,000 in its first six months of operation in 2022. Costera Consulting, Inc., assists with cannabis business and licensing needs, and has launched retail franchises in multiple Los Angeles locations. Finally, Lakewood Holdings, LLC, is in the process of obtaining its retail license to become a vertical cannabis company in Long Beach, California. And through all of these ventures, Jerry helps others rise as well. "In the beginning, it was about hitting goals, but now it's about the people," he says. "Bringing someone else up and coaching them to be a leader is the most rewarding thing."

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“

Delivering a positive ROI
on all projects is very
important to Emory and
our clients.

”

the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce's *40 Under 40*, the National Leadership Cohort, National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education K-12 Working Group, and the Arkansas Military Affairs Council.

“I've watched many tech companies lose sight of what's important— people. They focus so much on tech, but that's just a tool,” he states. “We focus on the people, whether employees or the people we partner with. When we automate processes, it's not to reduce jobs, it's to allow people with limited resources to focus on higher-impact and higher-value opportunities.” As the hands-on CEO of Emory, GB specializes in strategic planning, talent development, corporate growth, and digital transformation, working with community and corporate leaders on designing and implementing strategies to help build stronger technology ecosystems through tech talent development, strategic partnerships, and community engagement. “I wanted to build a company that not only helps the companies we serve, but also the communities in which we operate, he says. “Helping people and our clients grow is what drives me every day.”

GB Cazes

Founder & CEO

Partnerships. Community. People. Problem-solving. These are the ideals that Emory Solutions was built upon. Emory Solutions is a leading technology partner that delivers custom software and data solutions for small- and medium-sized companies. Headquartered in Northwest Arkansas, Emory's experienced team serves a growing number of clients across America's Heartland.

Emory Solutions takes a “people first” approach when partnering with its clients. “Every business has challenges and we solve them by listening to and investing in our clients so that we're able to truly understand their needs and provide solutions to ensure they achieve their goals,” G.B. shares. Emory also has a well-defined methodology it follows when working with clients. This methodology not only identifies root critical issues, but also ensures that we deliver solutions on time and on budget. “Delivering a positive ROI on all projects is very important to Emory and our clients,” says G.B.

And they couldn't be in better hands. With over two decades of experience, GB is a technologist and *Arkansas Power Player* with a passion for helping businesses tackle their most pressing challenges. He's built a cyber research park in Northwest Louisiana and the national model for cyber education. He's also been named to

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Jennifer Berk Weisman

Designer & CEO

Whenever Jennifer Berk Weisman took her twin boys shopping for swimwear, she was endlessly frustrated at how poorly many shorts fit. She recalls, "I didn't understand why they only sold volley shorts or fixed-waist boardshorts for kids." While most might shrug it off, Jennifer, who majored in textile design at the Fashion Institute of Technology, knew she could design better swim trunks. After all, this is the woman who designed her own prom dress. "Realizing the need for adjustable waist swimwear was my eureka moment, so I created it myself," she says. That's how Just Bones Boardwear was born.

Jennifer invented a design for an adjustable waist boardshort, and by 2011, she had samples. The novelty of the boardshorts and the void in the market sparked immediate interest among retailers, giving Just Bones Boardwear a fighting edge against well-established brands. Even getting hit by a car in 2012 couldn't stop Jennifer, who used the shocking event as inspiration to move forward with her new business. She met with patent examiners while recovering, earning her first patent in May 2013, and her second in 2014.

Today, Just Bones Boardwear is thriving, with Jennifer leading the way as designer and CEO. They've expanded into swimwear for men, women, girls, and toddlers, all in fabrics Jennifer designs herself, and with her patented waistband that keeps them in place even in the roughest seas. Her design won TasteTV's Best Swimwear of 2016 Award



Creativity drives Jennifer, whether it's keeping shorts up or building an entire business. While enjoying success, she also embraces the adversity that has allowed her to grow.

for special functionality, out of thousands of entrants, and Just Bones Boardwear was worn throughout SyFy original movie *Ghost Shark*. Jennifer also penned a memoir, *Sink or Swimwear*, about her experiences running her company while recovering from her accident, and has appeared on multiple podcasts discussing her inspiration, her book, and breaking into a male-dominated industry.

Creativity drives Jennifer, whether it's keeping shorts up or building an entire business. While enjoying success, she also embraces the adversity that has allowed her to grow. "Nothing great has ever been achieved by staying in the same place."



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Michael C. Brooks

Chief Executive Officer



As CEO of Law Enforcement Officers Health Services, he leads an organization that makes a tangible impact on the lives of law enforcement families.



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Michael Brooks dedicated his life to doing the right thing, even under the most challenging of circumstances. With an unwavering moral compass, stemming from his service in the U.S. Air Force, Michael has impacted thousands of lives throughout his career. As a flight control specialist, he was responsible for repairing or releasing aircraft for takeoff. He once refused to release a plane that had a malfunction while preparing for Desert Shield, potentially saving the crew members' lives, which earned him the Air Force Achievement Medal for meritorious service.

Now, as CEO of Law Enforcement Officers Health Services, he leads an organization that makes a tangible impact on the lives of law enforcement families. LEO Health Services connects the heroes of law enforcement to the heroes of medicine, ensuring that officers have access to the right care at the right time. The company offers a popular physician membership organization that supports all police officers and provides special benefits for members. Michael credits the medical professionals who join with enabling medical advocacy to thousands of law enforcement families, often during difficult times, as the membership dues provide the necessary resources that provide for free services.

Previously, Michael was elected county commissioner of elections. While doing the right thing in politics was not always popular, he steadfastly defended democracy, nonetheless. Michael worked with the STOP DWI program, where he developed relationships with numerous police agencies to reduce drunk driving fatalities. He went on to work in pharmaceutical sales as a central nervous system specialist, where he began to understand the disparities that exist in accessing care.

Then, as director of the State Trooper Surgeons in New York State, Michael developed relationships with physicians and administrators of major hospitals to build a healthcare navigation process. The program sparked interest in other states, and today, LEO Health Services is serving law enforcement agencies nationwide.

Michael credits the realization of his goals and dreams to his wife and fellow executive board member, Jillian Mayott. Her belief in him, but especially her business and financial expertise, have fueled this successful venture. John Samuels, CEO of Better Health Advisors, completes the executive board, offering more than 25 years of experience in healthcare access and ER Management.

DARRELL Fertakos

Boundless Innovations and DreamLand Productions, founded by Darrell Fertakos, a three-time award winning social entrepreneur, prolific inventor, innovation scholar, consumer insight specialist, ideation and invention expert, continuously inspires the world to invent together without limits. Inspired by the *Thomas Edison Papers* and famous inventors, Boundless Innovations is now recognized as one of the world's most innovative companies by Innovationsoftheworld.com.

Darrell, a prolific designer of new products in thirty industries, was featured on *The Jay Leno Tonight Show* designing a similar product to what later became e-cigarettes (10/04) selected out of 4,200 for an invention award in The History Channel's *Modern Marvels InventNow Challenge* (5/06), for the design of a mobile payment app prior to the App Store. Darrell also appeared on ABC's *American Inventor* as NYC finalist inventing a smart airbag helmet (2007), and showcased on Discovery Channel's *PitchMen* TV show with his smart AR glasses invention (4/09), prior to Fortune 100 companies. Darrell's one-of-a-kind talents as an award-winning product developer are recognized by National Inventors Hall of Fame, Rothman Institute of Innovation, History Channel, NJ Tech Council, and globally.



In college, 2004 Darrell conducted an invention experiment hoping to break Thomas Edison's peak year creativity record of 106 patent applications filed in 1882, to serve the public good. "With the help of mind-machines, I began to design 389 ideas for new products, TV shows, and ventures within days and after filed at patent office," he explains. "During this experiment, I also designed similar products in part to what Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, SnapChat, ClubHouse, Square, Apple Pay and FitBit later became, even Smart Glasses and Web 3 innovations." Darrell also shares he created similar TV show formats to what later became *Shark Tank*, *America's Got Talent*, *Dancing With The Stars*, *The Profit*, and 500X more product, business and TV show concepts "most facts verified by patent attorneys at CoffyLaw," he adds.

To execute, Darrell reached out to Fortune 100 companies hoping for help to co-develop new products and TV shows. "I sadly encountered 'no unsolicited idea' policies that made it near impossible to share my ideas and talents with companies who could have benefited the most," he says.

Social Entrepreneur, Prolific Inventor, Innovation Scholar, Consumer Insight Specialist, Ideation & Invention Expert



As a positive change catalyst inspired by Harvard's open innovation research, which teaches companies grow more when working with inventors to co-develop and market new products, Darrell built one of the first open innovation social networks, and, he explains, "co-created hit TV show *PitchMen*" to help inventors. "These ideas, upon co-execution, helped inventors commercialize new products, resulting in awards won, patents granted, millions of new product units sold and billions in sales results on TV, online, and in retail," he adds. Darrell also aided in the design and marketing of bestselling consumer products and helped local inventor of Clamp Champion become a top seller on QVC three years in a row. "Companies can acquire, license, invest, or hire as a proven innovator who believes in win-win deals and a collaborative innovation process to develop the best new products and TV shows possible, to serve the world. So contact us today!"

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HARPARAM



Chief Executive
Officer

Sandhu

With carefully designed carbonation for a unique drinking experience and ingredients with maximum bioavailability, it is free of carbs and sugars, and comes in two flavors: Original and Organic Lemon. "It's a clean, healthy product that can make a difference in your overall well-being," Harparam shares. SKN H2O is currently available in over 50 medical spas, grocery stores, wineries, and wellness centers, and the company's expansion plans include the addition of resorts and hotel spas, as well as international distribution to retail chains.

With a full skincare line on the horizon, Harparam remains focused on creating products from clean and sustainable ingredients, sourced from all over the world, with maximum bioavailability. "Our goal is to make SKN H2O the preferred beverage for the skincare industry," he states.

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Dr. Harparam Sandhu always had a passion for creativity and innovation. After completing medical school in India, he moved to the U.S. and continued his education in the fields of medicine, skincare, nutrition, and business at the University of Washington and UC, Berkeley. With research experience and a few patents under his name, the academic has since leveraged his extensive knowledge and education to create something for the benefit of others.



Harparam is the founder of SKN H2O, a carbonated beverage that nourishes the skin from the inside, out. "Skin is the largest organ of the human body and most of the skincare field is focused on *external* skincare," he shares. And so, with the support of his wife, Ashley Sandhu, Harparam launched the California-based brand with the tag line, "Rethink what you drink." The premium luxury sparkling water is infused with Resveratrol—the same compound famed for the health benefits of wine. "There's plenty of research and data showing the benefits of Resveratrol," he shares. "It's one of the most potent antioxidants known to man. Not only does it help with breakage of collagen and elastin, but it reduces the effects of oxidative stress, and has cardiovascular, anti-aging, and cognitive benefits," Harparam adds.

SKN H2O has been featured in *Women's Health*, *Medium*, *Athleisure*, and *Poosh* by Kourtney Kardashian.

Mike Boyle had an 18-year career in marketing behind him, with experience as an account executive that led him to partner. In 2004, he left the C-suite, took his wealth of expertise, and founded Unrestricted MKTG, a full-service marketing agency on a mission to transform the client-agency relationship through authentic, next-level leadership, creative excellence, and effective execution. Driven by digital platforms, technology, and a team of marketing experts, Unrestricted MKTG has the unique ability to take the process through to the final stage of delivery, handling the warehousing, shipping, and logistics, to make sure retailer products end up on store shelves and available. “From creation to promotion to fulfillment, there are no restrictions on what we can do for our clients,” Mike says.

After nearly two decades of delivering this kind of high-touch service, Unrestricted MKTG has amassed hundreds of clients across the country, with a focus on mid-sized businesses, as well as corporate enterprises like General Mills and Fortune 500 companies. For each of them, Unrestricted MKTG creates bespoke solutions to help their clients’ revenue grow. For Mike, this is what it’s all about—helping people thrive, in both his professional and personal life. He’s actively involved with Jared Allen’s Homes for Wounded Warriors, which helps injured military veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Shooting Star Foundation, helping to raise funds for children with special needs. “While we enjoy serving our clients, when we can make an awesome impact on someone’s life, that’s pretty cool,” Mike shares.

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20 04

UNRESTRICTED
MKTG

He's a prolific inventor with more than 30 patents, an engineering expert with more than 25 years' experience, and the entrepreneurial powerhouse behind three companies. If anyone knows how to spot a good idea and bring it to market, it's **Edwin De Angel**, and as founder and CEO of Invention Matters (formerly Essential Technologies), he's been doing it for over a decade. Edwin and his group of subject matter experts, patent attorneys, and licensing experts provide specialized expertise in intellectual property, development, positioning, and patent filing. Their mission? To help usher inventions and IP from genesis through patent acquisition and into the future.

While their clients include Intel, Intellectual Ventures, and Praetorian, Edwin is a champion of smaller tech companies, and the firm's unique model gives them an advantage. Invention Matters® works with companies during critical times: product launch, M&A transactions, patent infringement, penetrating a new market, and technology licensing. As Edwin helps inventors transform ideas into success stories, he also leads a pair of other thriving ventures—Angel Real Estate and Invention-AI.

Edwin holds a PhD in electrical and computer engineering and an MS and a BS in electrical engineering. He's a licensed product management professional, certified licensing professional, IEEE senior member, and member of Business Network International.

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Invention Matters®



Teresa Friesen has been a champion for elevating women's voices for over a decade. In support of this quest, she co-founded SheMate in 2021. Headquartered in Nebraska, SheMate is a virtual platform that connects women in sports with the young people who look up to them. With hundreds of subscribers—including high school girls, parents, coaches and school administrators—the company is increasing visibility and representation of women in athletics. "Status quo right now is about 95% of sports media coverage goes to males, which is a missed opportunity," she explains. "We're making a change in that space." SheMate helps female college athletes meaningfully monetize their skills and experience while providing young people with customized, empowering content and parents and coaches with strategies for better athletic development—all from women who know the collegiate athletics realm best. Given the enormous response, it would seem SheMate is the change that female athletes have been waiting for. Over 1,400 have already applied and 200 are currently working with SheMate.

Prior to starting SheMate, Teresa was a social worker and most recently a college professor. As someone who's dedicated her career to helping others, her goal is to increase access to wellness through tech. SheMate was developed in pursuit of this mission. "We're focused on increasing on-screen, positive female representation and creating safe and empowering experiences in young peoples' digital world," she states. "We are a community where women *thrive*."



Teresa holds a BSW from Creighton University and an A.M. from University of Chicago.

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Convenience, connectivity, collaboration, and coaching are the four C's that form the core principles for which Castle Connolly Private Health Partners was built on. Founded by **Dean McElwain** and John Connolly in 2014, the company is a leading concierge medicine and wellness support company with a passion for changing the lives of both physicians and patient members. As innovators in the concierge medicine space, the New York-based firm has led the way in developing and implementing concierge medicine programs with a fully integrated wellness offering, navigation services and world class marketing. The company prides itself on their selective partnerships with leading physicians and a continued focus on supporting the special relationship that exists between each doctor and their patients.

With a career in health care that spans over 35 years, Dean is a problem-solver who's driven by the ability to collaboratively create success with his team. Prior to launching Castle Connolly Private Health Partners, Dean was the CEO of Peak Health Consultants, a nationally respected and sought-after consultancy in the healthcare development space. Dean led the way for many physicians and organizations who transitioned to the membership model of practice as well as numerous deployments in the orthopedic and revenue cycle/compliance arenas. A serial entrepreneur, Dean started his own chain of sports medicine and physical therapy clinics at just 25 years old. Located throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts, he owned and operated the clinics while finishing his master's degree and doctorate in physical therapy and health care administration. "I enjoy complex problem solving, creating value, and focusing on reproducible positive health outcomes", Dean shares.

Dean holds a PhD in physical therapy with a concentration in healthcare administration.



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Prior to launching his clothing business, **Dylan Rheault** spent nearly a decade as a professional baseball player for 5 MLB organizations and was also a member of Team Canada. Now, he's at the helm of Unaltered, a clothing brand that tall, athletic guys can relate to.

As a professional athlete-turned-entrepreneur, Dylan is taking tall men's clothing to new heights—literally and figuratively. "Building something that people want to be part of and being able to provide clothing that gives these tall guys confidence is what really drives me," he says. And he should know—at 6'9", Dylan always struggled to find clothes that fit.

In November 2020, after an injury put his professional baseball career in question, Dylan set his focus on this unmet need. He bought a sewing machine and taught himself to tailor. Before long, he had customized his entire wardrobe. Impressed by his newly redesigned and perfectly fitted clothing, friends and teammates began asking him to design for them. This sparked the idea for a retail clothing line and just one year later, Dylan was open for business.

Originally named Tall & Tapered, the first line was produced in collaboration with a clothing designer, who helped Dylan create the clothes he'd envisioned. After launching with bespoke pants, followed by t-shirts, which immediately sold out, Dylan took it across the finish line with a new name—Unaltered—and a brand that delivers a tailored fit right out of the box for men over 6-feet tall. Unaltered is unquestionably a *homerun*. Sold online, as well as in pop-up shops, gyms that train professional athletes, major league clubhouses, and across Instagram, tall men everywhere are looking sharper than ever before, and they have Dylan Rheault to thank.



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With a dedicated focus on "data-based approach for developing business strategy," **Martha Razo** helps take businesses to the next level. She serves as CEO of Guero Pallets, Inc., and co-founder of SOLiX Services, where she creates holistic strategies that include marketing, operations, and finance. "Unfortunately, it is often that companies only look at each part individually, but successful businesses have these three pillars aligned in their strategy and execution," she explains. With a master's degree in applied mathematics and over 10 years of experience, Martha is a business multiplier who's like a golden unicorn in her own right.

As the strategist-in-chief for the clients she serves, Martha makes data-driven decisions that help businesses grow. She also works to understand the unique skill sets of employees and helps implement incentive-based models while helping companies effectively expand their marketing efforts. Her strategies involve teaching them how to better understand clients and their needs. In the financial arena, she analyzes spending and helps companies reduce expenses and costs over time, introducing programs such as QuickBooks and Oracle. For many, Martha is the "hidden figure" launching rockets into the stars. She helped one company expand profit margins from 5% to 35%, even during the midst of a global pandemic. As part of her own master plan, Martha is currently in pursuit of a PhD in industrial engineering with a focus in process mining. "Hard work is not enough, passion is not enough—strategy based on data is the key to success," she states.



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Did you know that by the time people get alerted by today's smoke alarms, they typically only have two minutes to get to safety? **Gregory Stewart** & SAAM, Inc. does, and they're on a mission to save lives and improve health. After 12 years running large P&Ls at Fortune 500 Asia Pacific companies in Shanghai and Singapore, Gregory returned to his native U.S., co-founding SAAM in 2019. With the goal of increasing fire safety response time, they've developed the next generation of home smoke alarms. "Existing technology is over 50 years old and obsolete; they are suited for houses of days past whereas todays home emit caustic gases that will kill you quickly, therefore it is paramount you have more time to evacuate the house," he says. "We've transformed the dumb smoke detector into a better, much faster, more responsive, interactive smart device that will literally save lives."

Currently scheduled to be available in 2023, there's a portable device for people away at school or traveling, inspired by the tragedies of hotel and dorm fires. There's also a hardwired device, which can be connected to the SAAM app to measure other airborne dangers like pollen, mold, and allergens. Response has been overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic—before even hitting the market. Independent fire testing facility Worcester Polytechnic Institute found the products greatly exceeded current day devices, so much so, they've caught the attention of multiple top companies. "I'm so thankful to be part of an outstanding team at SAAM focused on saving lives through enhanced technology," Gregory says.

Gregory holds an MBA from the University of Notre Dame and has won various awards from GE & Rexel centered around managing large P&Ls and business development.



As co-founder and CEO of Greenly Mortgage, **Azeem Moazzamuddin** combines technology with lending to deliver memorable customer experiences . With over \$36 million of loans transacted to date, the Cleveland-based business serves clients throughout the state. Founded in 2022, the technologically advanced firm automates underwriting and loan processing to reduce closing times and create a better experience. With this in mind, Greenly is also focused on building out a fully digital blockchain mortgage that allows for the use of cryptocurrencies. "There's a high demand for the ability to use cryptocurrency to obtain mortgages in the smaller market, and the tech behind it allows for digital processing of traditional mortgages," he explains. "That's really where I see the future going, and we're working to streamline the process and make it more enjoyable."

Prior to launching Greenly Mortgage, Azeem helped to start and scale multiple companies and served as a vice president of operations in the mortgage industry, where he received the *Love Our Clients Award* in 2018 for customer satisfaction. It is precisely his commitment to helping people that has driven him throughout his six-year career, and, ultimately, what compelled him to start a company devoted to transforming the lending experience. "During my time as a banker, I realized the process was convoluted and painstaking, and it led me to dive more into the tech side and figure out a better solution for borrowers," Azeem explains. "That I'm able to help build better communities, this is what drives me every single day."

Azeem holds a bachelor's degree in IT management.

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During the midst of an oil price war and the onset of a global pandemic, petroleum engineer **Zayman Villegas** did what very few were doing—he launched a business. While his initial vision wasn't to build an engineering consulting firm, that's exactly what happened. "What started as a way to make ends meet materialized into job opportunities for a group of intelligent, like-minded individuals," he explains. During college, Zayman interned at Devon Energy for 2 summers and Statoil before working as a pumper, and an engineer for Saguaro Petroleum. In 2020, he founded Fiducia Energy Consulting, where, as president, he leads a Texas-based team of petroleum and mechanical engineers with over 20 years combined experience in the oil and gas operator and service industry.

Located in the Permian Basin, the firm specializes in contract operating, field development strategy, and turnkey implementation, along with state and federal regulatory compliance. With a proven track record for executing multimillion-dollar technical projects from concept to completion utilizing systems that meet or exceed functionality, production, and reliability targets, they've completed over 150 projects for a dozen clients to date. And they're just getting started.

Zayman holds a bachelor's degree in petroleum engineering from Texas Tech University, where he's a member of the Petroleum Engineering Industrial Advisory Board and was keynote speaker at the 2021 Texas Tech Petroleum Engineering Senior Dinner. He was formerly the senior operations engineer for Saddleback Exploration, a private equity-backed start-up E&P. Zayman is currently the engineering & business manager for Saguaro Petroleum and Return Disposal.

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Fiducia Energy Consulting

Syed Wafa is a first-generation immigrant from Bangladesh. He grew up in the Middle East and attended college at University of Toronto. Following graduation, he pursued a career in the United States. Despite facing numerous challenges as an immigrant, he persevered and continued to follow the American Dream. His hard work led him to his first job at BNY Mellon. He has since held successful leadership roles at start-ups and Fortune 500 companies, such as Booz Allen Hamilton and Bloomberg.

Syed's ambitions for success have been ingrained since an early age. He recounts winning a gold medal in a national martial arts competition during his childhood, where he was the youngest competitor in his bracket. He describes the importance of being resilient in the face of adversity and using such experiences to drive personal growth.

Currently, as head of the consumer electronics strategy and enterprise project management office at Samsung, Syed drives strategic initiatives and brings new ideas to life. He credits his growth as a leader to the culture at Samsung. He has achieved significant professional accomplishments at Samsung; notably, he pioneered the first-ever TV subscription program in the consumer electronics industry.

Syed is deeply committed to driving societal impact across communities. His passion arose during an internship at Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, where he studied microfinance under the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Muhammad Yunus. Today, Syed mentors children in local public schools and advises nonprofit organizations on improving access to technology in underprivileged societies.

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SAMSUNG



Arun Prasad has business in his veins. It's how he managed to get Priyaa Groups, his family's apparel business in India, where he's worked from the age of 16, a \$2 million annual income and two new locations as their director. Now 24—and a firmly planted New Yorker with a master's in industrial engineering from NYU—Arun has his eyes set on helping enterprise grow their businesses with blockchain, and founded Money Convey, LLC, in January 2022, to do it. "Blockchain technology is an emerging digital resource with growing applications in various industries such as BFSI, government, healthcare, and others," he explains. "We're a combination of Deloitte and AWS in providing consulting and technology services, respectively."

With a focus on health care, IoT, and energy sectors, and a growing number of clients, Arun is already being consulted by companies for his expertise in Blockchain, Crypto, and NFT applications. Meanwhile, Arun continues to build the technology that allows businesses to grow and thrive without the constraints of redundancy, long waiting times, and defects while ensuring and improving security, traceability, interoperability, and accessibility. "What drives me is the ecosystem, the community of startups, entrepreneurs, and visionaries we're building to serve people in every corner, every neighborhood, everywhere," Arun says. "The vision to be the next big thing is what drives me every day."

Arun also holds a bachelor's in mechanical engineering, master's in industrial engineering and published a research paper in IAEME.



MONEYCONVEY

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As a leader in data intelligence, **Megan Ingram** combines the human touch of storytelling and the hard science of data to craft marketing campaigns that showcase businesses and brands the way that they deserve. After a 10-year digital marketing career with agencies like FleishmanHillard, Finn Partners, and Edelman, and winning a *YouTube Shorty Award* in 2016, Megan founded Ingram Digital Consulting in 2020. The full-service digital agency creates digital campaigns by combining design with research-based data strategy. "A lot of agencies talk about data, but don't lead with data," Megan explains. That's why she leverages keyword research, audience and market insights, conversation analysis, competitive review, and influencer identification to craft a truly authentic story. "I believe we've created a methodology that helps brands identify the right story to resonate with audiences," she says. "It's a balance of both data and human intelligence."

Megan and her Digital Outlaw team of vetted flexible talent have worked across many brands and verticals with non-profits, startups, and Fortune 500 companies, including the American Veterans Center, Blue Bird, and the National Policing Institute. Using data mining to craft a video strategy, Megan helped the American Veterans Center increase their views and subscriptions by 400%. "My passion is helping clients tell awesome stories using data and social intelligence," Megan says. "For me, it's about connecting the data to the people, and I really enjoy helping clients tell better stories and reach more people."

 **INGRAM DIGITAL**
consulting

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Chad Addie knows it's difficult to build a creative career from the ground up because he's done it himself. Today, as the CEO of Karben Studios, he's helping imaginative minds in myriad fields establish their own dreams via coaching, SEO, graphic design, and marketing. Founded in 2016, Karben Studios encompasses Karben Marketing and Karben MGMT. The marketing branch serves multiple companies with graphic design and marketing services, while the management side represents artists like the Milwaukee Bucks' official DJ, DJ Shawna, and LA-based pop singer, Tanner Howe. Chad's multifaceted background gives him insight into what his diverse client base needs. While studying graphic design and marketing in college, he founded his first company, a clothing brand, where he worked with musicians, UFC fighters, models, and even Miss Teen Chicago. The brand gained national and international acclaim and helped to catapult his entrepreneurial career. He's worked across a wide range of industries over the years from startups to Fortune 500 brands. Along the way, his skill and expertise have earned his agency numerous awards for web development, digital and social media marketing, graphic design, and more from Expertise.com, DesignRush, and VVerge. Driving it all is his passion for seeing businesses and artists flourish and achieve their goals, and he's driven to help make that happen for every client that comes along. "I wanted to be more than just a graphic designer or marketer. Now I help people grow their passions and dreams. As an entrepreneur, I take great pride in that."



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KARBEN
MARKETING

Valdet Zuteja is the founder and CEO of Relia Insurance Group in Illinois. With an emphasis on insurance risk, the brokerage partners with carriers such as Nationwide Insurance, Travelers, MetLife, Safeco, Chubb and Berkshire Hathaway to provide coverage in the areas of auto, home, small commercial business, workers compensation and trucking insurance. "When people work with us, they get treated like VIPs," he shares. It's this level of truly personalized service that Relia is known for. But what many people don't know is that Valdet's unwavering commitment to help others flourish comes from a deeply personal place. In 1998, he traveled to the United States from Macedonia when he was just 18 years old. He was fluent in five languages—Albanian, Turkish, Croatian, Macedonian, and Serbian—but didn't speak a word of English, yet he was determined to create a better life for himself and his family. Today, Valdet leads a thriving insurance enterprise heralded for providing not only the fastest service possible, but the best value. "People often need immediate quotes. They don't want to wait three days. Our clients can text us, call, or email, and we're always here when they need us," he says.

Valdet began his professional career as a mortgage consultant, but as he gained increasing insight into insurance side of his work over a decade, his desire to own his own agency grew. In 2014, he left the mortgage world and joined Nationwide Insurance as an agent in their Glen Ellyn, Illinois, office. "My goal was to master every aspect of the industry," he shares. In spring of 2016, his entrepreneurial dream came true when the company announced they were shuttering their office. Valdet pivoted and launched Relia Insurance Group, and the rest, as they say, is history. "I believe things happen for a reason," he says. "I thank Nationwide Insurance every day for their decision to close our office."

Valdet holds an associate's degree in computer programming from MATC.

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RElia
INSURANCE GROUP



A global advocate and relentless crusader of promoting mental health, **Nabhit Kapur**, from India, envisages a world that is free of mental health stigmas and taboos. Through his exemplary work, indefatigable spirit, and passionate endeavours, he has brought impactful, transformative changes in several parts of the world including the African continent and Micronesia.

Nabhit is a psychopreneur, author, TEDx speaker, and globally decorated ambassador of mental health and peace with numerous recognitions globally. He is perhaps the youngest psychologist in the contemporary world and the only one from India, leading this remarkable movement to make mental health a household name.

Although they are based in New Delhi, India, Peacfulmind Foundation is present globally. Their vision is to make psychology a household term by teaching others about peace, culture, and well-being. Accordingly, PMF offers training and workshops, a global mental health forum for youth, and mental health karaoke, etc., in the mental health domain.

Through Nabhit's work toward freeing the world of mental health stigmas and taboos, he was able to develop a strong connection globally. For his exceptional work, he has been featured by various online news panels and print magazines like *Cooperate Investment Times*, *Exelon Magazine*, *Forbes*, *The Week*, *Statesman*, and *Daily Hunt*. His recent video highlighting the idea that mental health can become a global pandemic in the near future has gained significant viewership on social media and is being published as an article by various media platforms.



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KC DeMaree is a licensed Realtor® for eXp Realty, an innovative technology brokerage boasting a fully immersive, 3-D cloud office environment. With in-depth experience in technology, business, and real estate, she boasts a proven history of not only rising to challenges but of also seeking them out. Today, KC continues to thrive as a result of her relentless drive to help others succeed.

At eXp Realty, KC partners with clients and advises them on real estate decisions (including but not limited to the luxury market and relocating professionals) and works to expand the team through recruiting and mentoring other realtors.

"I'm licensed in AZ and CA, but as a member of an international brokerage, I'm not constrained by the local market because I have colleagues whom I can partner with to make sure my clients and their referrals are well taken care of," she explains.

Prior to joining the brokerage earlier this year, KC garnered a vast range of knowledge and first-hand experience in the business, technology, and real estate industries. While she learned to make data-driven decisions in business school, her previous positions at Facebook and Google in Silicon Valley refined her technical aptitude while working in human resources and recruiting equipped her to become a skilled negotiator.

Since becoming a real estate professional 10 years ago, KC has become a thought leader and has been featured in numerous well-known publications. "I've had the honor of working for some of the world's top companies, and eXp Realty is my pick in terms of limitless opportunities, so I plan to level up from here," KC says.

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With close to 20 years of global business expertise garnered through both public and private industries, **Philipp Binder** brings a wealth of analytical and technical qualifications to his role as president and chief operations officer at I-MED Pharma, a Canadian company specializing in dry eye diagnosis, management, and treatment solutions. After a 15-year career in aeronautical engineering, Philipp changed course and entered the medical device industry. “It was a big change, but one that I was happy to make. I had always been in a very corporate environment and wanted a more entrepreneurial type of role that would allow me to build something and be something different,” he says. “At I-MED, I realized there are unlimited possibilities.” While finance is his primary focus, Philipp can also be found helping in the company’s warehouse, engaging in philosophical discussions with the R&D team, and lending a passionate and insightful viewpoint in the sales and marketing department.

Under Philipp’s leadership, I-MED Pharma has expanded its global footprint into 30 countries and is now considered the number one Dry Eye company in Canada. I-MED Pharma is committed to advancing the science of dry eye. They are an innovation company who does all their own research and development, as well as manufacturing, which gives them complete control of their products and allows them to maintain the highest level of standards. A key value proposition of the company is that it sells directly to eye care professionals as opposed to selling on-line or to pharmacies, which makes I-MED Pharma very appealing to their target audience.

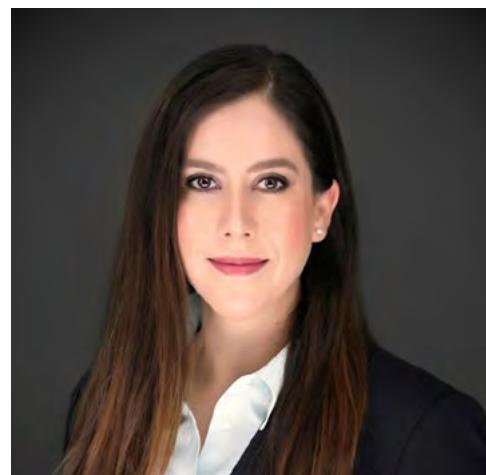
Philipp began his career at I-MED Pharma in 2016 as director of operations and quickly advanced to vice-president, and subsequently to president and COO. Today, he oversees the company’s operations with a focus on finance and business development, while also being responsible for implementing corporate strategy. With master’s degrees in both engineering and finance, Philipp has extensive experience in risk management, quality control, and product management. Born and raised in Austria, he speaks German, French, and English. Philipp’s multicultural and multifaceted background makes him the perfect fit to guide the company’s international expansion going forward to achieve their vision of becoming the most important ocular surface disease company in the world.

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Hailing from a long line of public servants, **Yolanda Apalategui Lugo** grew up learning about positions ranging from public safety to the legal industry. Inspired by this, Yolanda pursued her own career in the field. Earning a bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree in public administration, both from San Diego State University, Yolanda became the first female college graduate in her family. Since then, Yolanda’s career has grown into 20 successful years of government public service.

After getting her start at the San Diego Superior Court, Yolanda made it her mission to pursue excellence. She went on to gain a vast amount of experience in both the local and state governments, including policy and leadership roles at the City of San Diego and the California State Legislature. While serving the legislature as deputy chief of staff, Yolanda oversaw the management of two offices that provided nearly one million residents with government access. Today, Yolanda serves as the director of government and community affairs for the San Diego District Attorney’s Office, a newly created position where she has the unique opportunity to provide policy advice and strategic direction on issues that impact public safety and the impact public safety policies have on the community. Yolanda also serves as the bridge between DA’s office, the 18 cities and San Diego County Board of Supervisors.



In pursuit of this mission, Yolanda has been instrumental in elevating the DA’s message to underserved and hard-to-reach communities while building trust and meaningful partnerships. She works on policy and projects focused on crime prevention and victim protection in the areas of workplace justice, human trafficking, and the opioid epidemic. She also leads an effort to empower justice involved individuals with information in support of criminal record relief. With a myriad of responsibilities stretching from internal coordination to community collaboration, Yolanda’s work makes an immense difference in providing access to justice to all.

Yolanda sits on San Diego State University’s Alumni Advisory Board and participates in the university’s mentorship program. She is also a member of Women Give San Diego and MANA DE San Diego.

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When **Sarah Evans** found herself creating an international nonprofit, she was the first to admit she had no idea what she was doing. But as a self-described “overachiever,” she pushed forward anyway, because the goal of getting clean water infrastructure to rural, developing areas was too important to give up. “My family thought I was crazy for dropping a career to work on the other side of the planet, but I had a feeling my skillset could make a difference if I persisted.” And so she did, founding Well Aware 12 years ago—to great success. Since inception, the nonprofit continues to thrive, providing clean water and infrastructure to over 100 communities in East Africa. But she didn’t stop there. Once she realized how often clean water infrastructure breaks down in these regions, Sarah set her sights on changing the industry and founded a for-profit branch, Well Beyond, garnering sector-wide traction. “So many well-meaning organizations are working toward clean water for all, but most of these water systems fail. I didn’t see many people being proactive about this ‘Hidden Crisis’ and was compelled to take action, so we launched Well Beyond.” The Well Beyond App offers remote diagnostics and maintenance for off-grid water systems and is accessed directly by community members using the well. Getting real-time technical expertise, they can maintain the infrastructure via cell phone, reducing the need for outside technicians and getting ahead of issues to avoid costly repairs later. This patent-pending tool is the first of its kind and is already getting water systems back up and running within hours (as opposed to weeks), preventing long delays without water in places where it’s the only source. Today, the Well Beyond App is available worldwide and her background in law and securities has been extremely helpful in getting the businesses globally recognized. *Fast Company* recently recognized them in their *Ideas That Change the World* issue, the latest in a long line of international awards.

Sarah maintains positions on multiple prestigious boards like the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, and has been featured in Forbes, The New York Times, and many other publications.

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“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” - Chief Seattle. This is the guiding principle for SmartSort Technologies, Inc., co-founder and COO, **Cris Luce**. With the goal of becoming better stewards of the planet and its resources, the company is on a mission to solve sustainable materials management for a circular economy. By harnessing the power of patented AI software and hardware, SmartSort is revolutionizing the waste management space to address the problem of contamination and cost head-on. “We significantly reduce contamination, which permits the material to be reused in the manufacturing of goods or composting and, in turn, reduces cost,” he explains. SmartSort’s patented system for digital out-of-home post-consumer waste diversion directs and educates people on where to dispose of their trash—and in the simplest way. The display resides on the back of a trash can which has three options —recycle, compost, and landfill—essentially eliminating the guesswork of where to deposit your trash. It even features a data analytics and reporting component for the facilities.

The company is putting these innovative systems out for free, with an option to purchase and take part in the new revenue inflows the system introduces with advertisers. When it comes to developing efficiencies in material waste management, SmartSort Technologies is on the cutting edge as a leader in zero-waste to landfill solutions. «The problem with sustainability is that it has not been economically sustainable—until now,” Cris says.

Cris is on the board of both the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling and Keep the Colony Beautiful.



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Dirk Downing has focused his entire career on mental performance. In 2017, he obtained a PhD in health education and promotion specializing in sports psychology. The same year, he founded Zoning In: Peak Performance Coaching, which offers individualized approaches to mental mastery through performance psychology consultation. Dirk coaches people on how to be more consistent, deliver under pressure, overcome setbacks, and avoid burnout. "These individually tailored workouts are carefully crafted to boost performance in creative and highly effective ways," he explains. From athletes to coaches and business entrepreneurs to a variety of performers, Dirk has already helped hundreds of people nationwide to raise their game. And as a former competitive golfer and the author of "Train Your Brain: Your Path to Peak Performance," *Winning Mindset: Elite Strategies for Peak Performance*, he knows of what he speaks.

Prior to starting his own business, Dirk served as a mental performance coach for D1 athletes at the University of Missouri, and for high school athletes. He's since worked with collegiate golfers who have gone on to join the PGA, and high school athletes who have gone on to successful collegiate careers. Dirk also developed the mental training seminar "Building a Mental Golf Bag" for amateur golfers nationwide. As someone who helps others overcome mental obstacles, Dirk finds fulfillment in helping people maximize their performance. Game up.

Dirk holds a PhD in health education and promotion and an M.Ed. in sport and career counseling psychology from University of Missouri.

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Hadarou Sare is an award-winning research scientist and the founder and CEO of SpaceTIS. Named a *Top 10 Aerospace Company* by *Aerospace and Defense Review Magazine*, the company develops cutting-edge space technologies, including novel reusable and affordable rocket launch systems using water as the propellant, innovative thruster technologies, robotic spacecraft for in-space asteroid mining, rover for mining water on Mars and on the Moon, small satellites for earth and space exploration, space telescopes for exploring planets and small bodies in the solar system. With teams in the U.S., Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, Hadarou and his group of passionate innovators are leading the world into the future. In tandem with his own venture, for the past six years he's worked with NASA, where he developed algorithms that were applied to satellite images and used to find water on Mars. He worked with the Mars exploration group at NASA and helped NASA to select the best landing site for the 2020 Mars Rover Mission. He later joined the small bodies group at NASA and work on identifying scientific priorities and opportunities for the exploration of asteroids, comets, interplanetary dust, small satellites, and trans-Neptunian objects.

Driven to make the world a better place, Hadarou has also worked alongside other scientists and engineers on NASA's planetary defense goal, helping to protect our blue planet from dangerous asteroids that could cause catastrophic damage to the Earth. He is currently a research scientist at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center developing a robotic spacecraft for asteroid mining. As he continues his ongoing endeavor to invent and develop innovative technologies that have never been built before, Hadarou is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland College Park.

Hadarou started his PhD in aerospace engineering at SUNY University of New York before transferring to mechanical engineering at the University of Maryland College Park. He holds both master's and bachelor's degrees in planetary sciences from SUNY University, as well as a bachelor's in science and technologies and a master's in geomatics from the Higher Institute for Space Studies and Telecommunications.



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Victor Guadarrama is the co-founder of Versa Consulting Firm, which helps small businesses stay competitive in the ever-changing marketplace. The Las Vegas-based company specializes in the areas of organizational change, marketing, and transformational leadership for a growing number of clients nationwide. But he and co-founder Kerry Toribio are much more than the leaders of a thriving enterprise. They are passionate champions of small businesses and agents of positive change keenly focused on strategic planning and growth. “We go down deep into the organization to identify where they are now, where they want to be, and what needs to change to get them there,” he states. “Then, we put systems and processes in place and develop the marketing and advertising plan to help them achieve their goals.”

As someone who has been in the hospitality industry for over a decade, Victor comes from an entrepreneurial family who owned a restaurant for over 25 years. He’s traveled the country putting on real estate events for future investors, garnered experience leading cross functional teams, and also worked in the sales department at two resorts on the Las Vegas Strip. Now he’s bringing it all together to help promising enterprises flourish. “I’ve seen firsthand what small businesses go through. Helping them to succeed and thrive, that’s our hearts, our passion lies.”

Victor holds a bachelor’s from the University of San Diego and a master’s from Pepperdine University. He’s also a certified NLP practitioner.

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For 15 years, **Jereis Khawaja** worked up the ladder at a billion-dollar company in the oil and gas industry, from entry-level to vice president of global sales, until he decided to follow his passion of smoking meat. In the digital age, he realized a huge opportunity to disrupt the BBQ industry. Access to Texas BBQ was very limited to consumers across the USA, and his calling was to close the gap.

In 2020, Jereis took a leap of faith and started Truboy BBQ to provide an authentic Texas barbecue experience for everyone to enjoy in the comfort of their home. This fully e-commerce company draws its delicious products from Jereis’ own expertise in smoking meat over the years. Growing ~400% in 2021 and projected ~500% growth this year, Truboy now ships high-quality smoked meat, including halal options, delivered right to the doorsteps of people across the U.S. and Canada in just two days. This is made possible through a carefully designed chilling and packaging process that keeps the meat fresh and flavorful, all delivered in reusable materials. And it’s clear that consumers across North America are gobbling it up and asking for more.



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Besides the explosive growth, Truboy BBQ was named one of FedEx’s *Top 100 Small Businesses* in 2022. They also partner with charitable organizations benefiting children’s education and cancer research. Jereis’ love for food shines through every bite. “Eating has always been social for me, so sharing my BBQ with people has been truly rewarding,” he says.

David Craig is a decorated war veteran who served almost two decades in the United States Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. For 15 of those years, he worked for Mercedes, where he played a role in planning the delivery of the engine and transmissions for the BR167 projects, which is now their fourth-generation SUV, and did the assembly planning for the EVA2, which was the company's first electric vehicle in the United States. He's a skilled strategist, management consultant, planner, and implementer who is committed to the service of others. In 2019, David retired to a quiet life. Or so he thought. As he watched companies struggle with a skilled workforce shortage during the pandemic, he could not stand idly by. In August 2020, he launched Eminence Consulting & Business Solutions to help them—and it took off. The company develops advanced administrative, operational, and technical processes designed to assist clients with achieving their business vision. Founded on the premise of providing transformative client solutions, the firm leverages a unique combination of data analytics, critical thinking, strategic planning, and agile project management methodologies. Their growing number of clients is a testament to the company's success working with automotive suppliers and distribution centers nationwide, including Volkswagen, ThyssenKrupp Automotive Systems of America, Weidmüller Interface, and International Automotive Components.

Eminence's unique problem-solving approach serves as an anchor for a business that garnered a reputation for turning problems into working solutions. It's one that combines David's breadth of experience as a former operation and project manager, SAP consultant, and senior project engineer with the ability to identify issues that might be holding a company back. "By applying present and future trends, I can give clients a competitive advantage and provide sustainability," David explains. "I treat the problem, not just the symptoms because if you solve the problem, you also cure the symptoms," he says.

David is a project management professional with bachelor's degrees in industrial engineering and project management. He also holds a master's in information technology management.



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Aaron Sakaria started trading company, Fresh Industries, in 2009 in Shanghai, selling furniture to major retailers like West Elm, Anthropologie, and Urban Outfitters. When he and his wife, Kristina, moved to Minnesota, their plans to start a family inspired Aaron on the business front, too. They saw firsthand how tough it was for new moms to find a comfortable, functional recliner at a fair price, so Nurture& was born in 2020, focusing on the baby and kids' market. Finally, in 2021, Aaron founded his third company, Northern Furniture Manufacturing, in the very town his wife's family hails from in Wisconsin. The factory is in the industrial park that her grandfather helped develop in the 1950's. "We wanted to have more control of our supply chain and were excited about creating jobs in the local community," Aaron explains. Today, Fresh Industries has expanded to work directly with consumers for an easy, affordable experience, with the benefit of manufacturing furniture in the U.S. Nurture& is now run under the management of Aaron's partners, while Fresh still retains a percentage of the company.

While juggling multiple thriving enterprises might seem a daunting task, Aaron does so seamlessly as they continue their upward trajectory. Aaron credits the great team he has built around him for the success. The companies grew 45% last year and this year, they've already seen a 360% increase from that. They stayed afloat through the COVID-19 pandemic, and Aaron is proud to have kept on all of his employees through that time. For Aaron, it's all about the people, his customers, vendors, business partners, and employees. "Our employees are our best investment," Aaron says. Their 99% staff retention rate is proof of that. With everyone taken care of so well, Aaron can focus on what he appreciates most: the creative aspect of developing new business plans to keep up with the evolving market.

When not leading Fresh Industries, Aaron and his family enjoy traveling and sports, and he coaches his son's hockey team. He also donates to Malawi-based Jacaranda Foundation, providing schooling for orphans; and Minneapolis-based Camp Odayn, providing camp programs for children with heart conditions.



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"Doing the right thing, for the right reasons, at the right time" has been the driving force for **Arlyn "Reese" Madsen**, Jr. his entire life. He served 24 years with the U.S. Coast Guard before being appointed DoD intelligence and security chief learning officer within the under secretary of defense for intelligence in 2006. When he retired in 2020, he founded Maryland-based MEMY&I, LLC, an independent consulting firm in the federal government talent development space with the bigger goal of building a national learning ecosystem to help make federal government talent development programs more efficient and effective. "People get overwhelmed by the challenges and myriad programs available, sometimes they feel like it's trying to boil the ocean," he explains.

With over 40 years' experience—and as the creator of the first nationally accredited federal government certification program—Reese helps his clients better understand federal government programs, requirements, and goals, and delivers simple, elegant, innovative solutions. As he serves clients across the private and public sectors, business leaders, industries, and experts are also reaching out to participate in his national learning ecosystem initiative. "If we can all move together in the same direction, then we're all going to win," he says.

Reese received the Presidential Rank Award of Distinguished Senior Professional, the National Intelligence Superior Service Medal, and is the first senior executive certified as an intelligence professional. He served as the inaugural chairman of the Department of Defense Intelligence Training and Education Board for 15 years.



Stephen Mathai-Davis is a full-stack data scientist, an investment research analyst, a seasoned trader, and a recognized expert in the application of artificial intelligence and advanced quantitative strategies to global public markets. He's also an award-winning fintech executive with over 15 years in institutional investment management. In 2019, Stephen founded Q.ai, a Forbes company—the first fintech enterprise to use AI to take on the \$25 trillion fund-management industry with the first AI-powered investment management app.

Since the start of 2022, the Q.ai investment solutions have outperformed the S&P 500 by over five points, on average, before fees, and with an app that has seen 17 months of double-digit growth since its launch, the accolades are pouring in. Stephen was recognized as a fintech rising star by the *U.S. FinTech Awards* in 2021 and *Banking Tech Awards* in 2022, and the Q.ai app was nominated as a semi-finalist for Product Hunt's *Golden Kitty Awards*. At the same time, the performance of the Q.ai investment strategies has been recognized by media, as well as institutional investment management firms wishing to partner with Q.ai to deliver its investment technology to their clients. "We're on a mission to power a personal wealth movement that drives true financial freedom and wealth equality for everyone," Stephen shares.

Stephen has been quoted and interviewed in Cheddar TV, Forbes, CNBC, Fox Business, Business Insider, Nasdaq, Benzinga, Entrepreneur, Fortune, Inc., among others.

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Michael Ansusinha hasn't even been in real estate for a year, but he's already establishing himself and his investment firm, Snowlake Group, across Chicago's south side. Driven by the motto "The best on the block," the firm focuses on the acquisition and revitalization of affordable housing. After seeing communities suffer from unscrupulous owners and real estate professionals, Michael endeavored to help neighborhoods. "Our vision is to do the opposite of what's been done," he says. "And that means being ethical, responsible, and innovative."

It all started when Michael, after graduating with honors from Northwestern and working with Goldman Sachs and AQR Capital, bought his first investment property. To his surprise, it had drug dealers, homelessness, and an arsonist. Many tenants weren't paying. Angry at the building's condition, tenants called the city, and inspectors hit the property with 12 code violations. Then, his manager quit. Not making money, Michael was forced to dig his way out. Only months later, the building is safer and produces 20-30% returns. Since then, Snowlake has been revitalizing housing throughout the area—and Michael has his finger on the pulse of it all, handling operations, acquisitions, and capital raising so that Snowlake can continue making positive changes for southside communities. "Seeing buildings slowly change, that's what keeps me moving," he says.

Michael is active on the Associate Board of After School Matters, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and the Lurie Children's Hospital. He will be a Moelis Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School (2025).



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He's an innovator of over 130 patented inventions, the recipient of the *International Physics Olympiad Bronze Medal* and *EE Times Annual Creativity in Electronics Award*. This is **Ramin Farjadrad**, founding CEO of Eliyan Corp., a technology company that is challenging the status quo to create the most differentiated solutions to real world challenges. Eliyan's mission is to revolutionize chiplet-based system-in-package (SiP) technologies to break the current limitations of the semiconductor industry and unleash the ultimate performance of intelligent systems of the future. Their breakthrough technologies will have a transformational impact on many industries, including artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, networking, autonomous driving, 5G wireless infrastructure and many more. This isn't science fiction, but another in a line of inspiring solutions that Ramin introduced years ahead of its time.

For over two decades, Ramin has pioneered leading-edge technologies that have been adopted not only by high-tech industries but also as international standards, including the PAM4 SerDes technology (IEEE 802.3cd), Multi-Gig Automotive Ethernet (IEEE 802.3ch& IEEE 802.3cy), Enterprise Ethernet (IEEE 802.3bz), and OCP standard for chiplet connectivity (BoW). Prior to launching Eliyan, Ramin was co-founder and CTO of Aquantia Corp., which was awarded the *Most Respected Private Company* by GSA in 2013 & 2017, went public in 2017 and was acquired in 2019 by Marvell Technologies, where he served as CTO and VP of R&D. Today, Ramin and his superstar team continue to push the technology limits with innovations built for the future.

Ramin holds a PhD and master's degree from Stanford University.



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@Just_the_chip

If you've ever purchased a home, automobile, or electronic device, you've probably experienced the high-pressure tactics to sell you an overpriced extended warranty. **Brandon San Antonio** knows how that feels. "Traditionally, these products have been designed with everyone but the customer in mind. Huge mark-ups, poor customer service and non-transparent claims. With so many middlemen in the process, the value is lost," he explains.

That's why Brandon, whose experience includes commercial real estate with Cushman and Wakefield and financial advisory with Stanwich Capital Advisors, created Everything Breaks. The company's tongue-in-cheek name refers to the fact that all products need to be repaired or replaced at some point. Brandon's company is disrupting the \$40 billion warranty industry by cutting out middlemen retailers and dealers. Brandon markets directly to customers, handling the marketing, selling, and claims administration entirely in-house. It allows him to give customers exactly what they want at the lowest price possible, all in a flexible, contract-free monthly subscription package that's changing the way people make major purchases.

The other thing setting Everything Breaks apart is the breadth of their product offerings. Unlike other companies, they cover home, auto, and electronics including bundles for discounts with other products coming in the near future. "We want to embrace the customer and everything they need," he says. And with a \$20 million raise completed at the end of 2021, Brandon is excited about the future. "We control the complete user experience," Brandon continues. "Everything is simple on our website, you can shop and purchase only what you need. We've built our back-end system so claims can be handled quickly and efficiently." Their dedication to a seamless, intuitive customer experience means people are happy to return, and if something does go wrong, issues are handled with a personal touch to make things right. "There's only one phone number to call because they're only dealing with one company." And it's his honesty and willingness to be up front and realistic that customers find so refreshing, and keeps them coming back. It also inspired their motto: "Don't let perfect get in the way of good."



Driven by a desire to push new boundaries and learn continuously, **Bharat Tewarie** has successfully pivoted his career many times. After his education as medical doctor, he moved from a hospital career to medical and then to commercial pharmaceutical and biotech roles. This resulted in his serving as the chief marketing officer and member of the executive committee of the biopharma company UCB for five years, until 2020. With his extensive professional experience across many countries and companies in hand, he launched Boston BioPharma Consultants, providing commercial advisory services to biopharma and medical device companies. Bharat assumes ad interim CEO roles and advises about corporate strategy, orchestrating winning product launches, improving commercial readiness, execution of go-to market strategies, and reinventing the patient experience. Bharat helps executives work on their mindsets to achieve success. "I help them find their inner genius," he says. "Simply put, to be number one, you should think, act, and compete like number one."

To this end, Bharat aligns vision, strategy, and execution to prepare the company, product, and market to win. He serves in boards of biopharma companies and is a keynote speaker on patient value, digital marketing, and harnessing the power of artificial intelligence. As the 2019 recipient of the *Top 100 Healthcare Leaders Award* from IFAH, he knows of what he speaks. Bharat also supplies mentorship to CEOs and founders of life science start-ups as a part of New York University's Endless Frontier Labs Program. Bharat holds an MD and an MBA.


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Ashok Dudhat is the founder and CEO of Tech Jobs Fair (TJF) in Berlin, Germany. It all started during his master's degree, when he pursued an idea for developing a job recruiting platform, where talent can apply for jobs with just one click. This was reflected in *Germany Startup Jobs* and that the time when WP Event Manager, an all-in-one event management solution for website owners, was founded. "WPEM is for listing events for the WordPress industry, which was the main spring for the Tech Jobs Fair," Ashok explains. TJF brings companies and talents together, virtually and in-person, where professionals and businesses can network, recruit, and promote their brands by having pre and post-event services with Hire Tech Talent, a platform based on a reverse recruitment process having screened tech talent. Counting 45,000 attendees and partnered with over 500 companies in 12 countries worldwide, TJF has garnered acclaim as the recipient of the 2020 & 2021 *Tech Event of the Year* by *German Business Awards*. Success is no mystery, considering its founder was named among the 2022 *Top 10 Indian Leaders in Germany* and has a 15-year record of successfully guiding teams through complex processes of technology development, software deployment, and operations. Still, perhaps the best-kept secret comes from Ashok himself, "I really enjoy what I do and seeing my ideas work gives me the motivation to continue."

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Not many people can say they have 38 patents to their name, but **Ed Ratner** can. The applied scientist and entrepreneur filed his first patent in 1999 as the chief scientist at Pulsent, a tech company where Ed worked on video comprehension and gained a deep interest in artificial intelligence. Today, as the founder and CEO of Edammo (www.edammoinc.com), he leads a top-tier AI company named as a *Top 10 Predictive Analytics Company* by *CIO Applications Magazine*, a *Top 10 AI Solution Provider* by *Pharmatech Outlook Magazine*, and a *Top Start Up* on *topstartups.us*.

Ed launched Edammo in 2018, where his patents are focused on core algorithms and algorithmic tech, machine learning, and computer vision, all geared toward their breakthrough technology that flies above the static "deep learning" AI currently available. Aptly named after the firm, Edammo Extreme AutoML technology provides real AI insights from data that is small or dynamic, which can trip up more conventional AI tech. With the chance to harness AI more easily and in any application, Edammo customers from all industries, including biotech and media, are reaching for this revolutionary technology. It's no mystery that Ed's team was awarded the *Best Paper* award at the Extreme Learning Machines Conference in Singapore.

A deeply creative person with a passion for innovation and an uncommon breadth of experience, Ed is able to manifest his ideas from concepts to marketable products—from research to development to execution to delivery. Add to that his effectiveness in raising funds to feed his ideas—over \$10 million to date—and he's an unstoppable force determined to turn dreams into reality. And this is precisely what gives him the greatest thrill. "I love seeing ideas come to life," he says. "It starts as a vision, and then actually gets deployed in the market and brings value to real customers doing real things."



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eunoia naturals

www.eunoianaturals.com

Stacie Ten Eyck is an accomplished event expert with over 14 years in hospitality. This career demanded long hours in a high stress industry. “I was unable to sleep and was restless with anxiety due to working 70 hours a week, she states.” After a decade of executing weddings, corporate events, and opening several restaurants, a drastic change was needed for her overall health and wellness.

Determined to bring an all-natural product to assist with relaxation and sleep to the tired masses, she created eunoia naturals. Eunoia is a Greek term meaning a well mind and beautiful thinking. The collection offers all natural essential oil blends that provide therapeutic benefits. RELAX Lavender + Chamomile Aromatherapy Mist was the first product launched on Amazon, and with huge success. Her most recent creation, NIGHT NIGHT, is a kid-friendly sleep spray accompanied by a bedtime meditation. Be on the lookout this fall for the next product line from eunoia of essential oil perfumes. Ophelia will be launched in October, which is a blend of sandalwood and amber!

Today, eunoia naturals currently offers eight products and is sold in 24 countries around the world. Making local and national news, such as Today Show, she has brought her brand of wellness and conscious living to the community. Collaborating with a major nationwide retailer, Stacie’s motivation remains the same—it’s all about helping people. “I want to give back and help others who struggle with sleep and/or are looking for a holistic way to better their health.”

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MaryBeth Matta is the CEO and founder of the real estate development and consulting company Alodgio. Growing up, she was fascinated to see old buildings rehabilitated and the dramatic impact on city streets and neighborhoods as a result. This childhood interest in urban redevelopment has served as a catalyst for an enduring career in multifamily real estate that's seen her named to Who's Who in Multifamily Housing and honored with other industry awards.

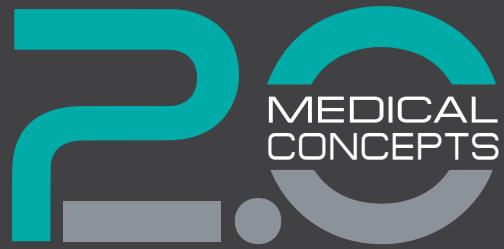
In Italian, “alodgio” means housing and rest and MaryBeth's New York-based Alodgio is built on the belief that you can transform lives by providing people with a place to live. For 27 years Alodgio's mission, inspired by that redevelopment process she watched in her own city, has been to be a positive influence on both communities and their residents. “It's not the buildings themselves, but the people who live in them and the impact a home has on their lives that makes the difference,” she says. She believes that beauty lies not simply in the structures but in the lives she touches through them. “For me, it's important to meet the people we serve and understand what home means to each person.”

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MaryBeth leads a thriving firm that prioritizes deep involvement with the properties the firm develops and with every client for which they provide development services. But it hasn't been easy as a 100% woman-owned business in a classically male field. She says that she's guided by a motto that hangs in a frame on her office wall—one that's helped her succeed and truly defines her: “Either we will find a way, or we will make one.” Literally.



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