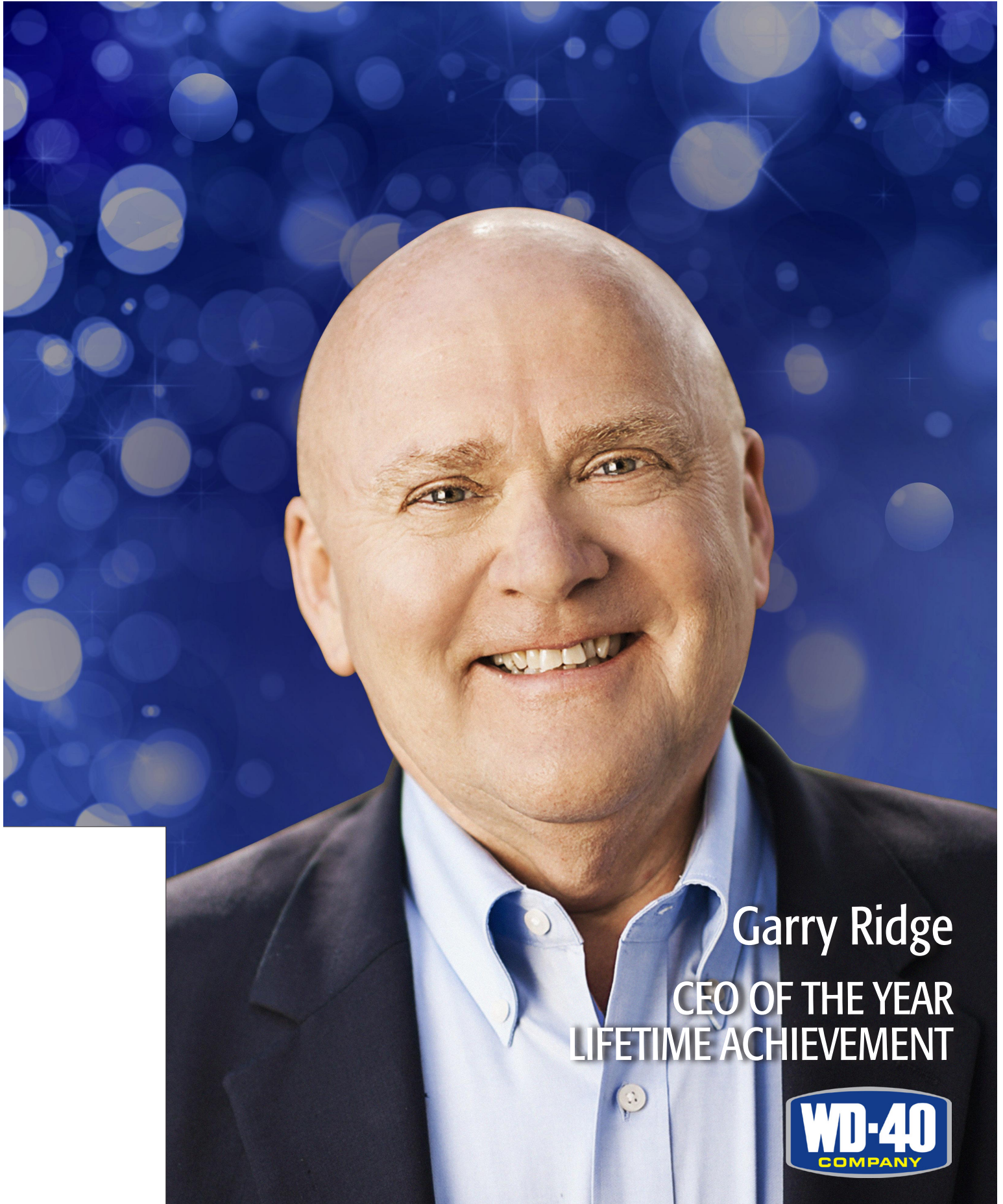


# SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Vol. 43, No. 29

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Garry Ridge  
CEO OF THE YEAR  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT







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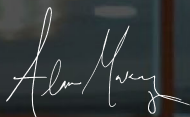
## As Leaders, It's Our Responsibility to Lead by Example

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We would like to thank the San Diego Business Journal, the North San Diego Business Chamber and our team at InnoVision Marketing Group for the recognition.

Sincerely,



**Alanna Markey**

Sr. Vice President/General Manager  
InnoVision Marketing Group



**Ric Militi**

CEO/Executive Creative Director  
InnoVision Marketing Group



WINNER

**ALANNA MARKEY**

*2022 Leadership Award – Emerging Leader  
North San Diego Business Chamber*



WINNER

**RIC MILITI**

*CEO of the Year 2022  
San Diego Business Journal*

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**GARRY RIDGE**  
WD-40 Company  
Lifetime Achievement  
Award Honoree

# SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

# CEO

## OF THE YEAR

## WINNERS

### — 2022 —



**JENNIFER BARNES**  
Optima Office



**BETSY BRENNAN**  
Downtown San Diego Partnership



**JOE BURNETT**  
ClearPoint Neuro



**INNESSA BURROLA**  
Boutique Recruiting



**TAMARA CRAVER**  
Reality Changers



**GEORGE DEVRIES**  
American Specialty Health



**CESAR ENCISO**  
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Rady Children's Hospital and  
Health Center



**MIKE GUERRA**  
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**ARNULFO MANRIQUEZ**  
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**ASHISH MASIH**  
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**RIC MILITI**  
Innovation Marketing Group



**ELLEN NEUFELDT**  
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**JASON PAGUIO**  
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**SIDD VIVEK**  
Junior Achievement of  
San Diego County



**DAN YATES**  
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# SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

## CEO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

### —2022—

## THANK YOU TO OUR JUDGES!



**JASON ANTRIM**

San Diego Commercial & Corporate  
Banking Market Director

**UMPQUA BANK**

Jason Antrim has been the San Diego Commercial and Corporate Banking Market Director for Umpqua Bank since 2019. A native of San Diego, he brings approximately 20 years of banking experience to the company and local business community. Jason leads a strong and experienced team of local bankers focused in meeting the many needs of complex and growing Middle Market companies across a variety of industries. He is responsible for executing the bank's growth strategy while also providing the highest level of customer service possible.



**JUSTIN CHAITIN**

Director,  
Business Development

**RSM US LLP**

Justin Chaitin leads RSM's San Diego business development practice and has over 20 years of consultative sales experience with a documented record of successfully adding value to both public and privately-held companies. Passionate about the tax opportunities available to middle market companies, Justin enjoys educating clients to the credits and incentives available. Justin also serves as Chair for RSM's Business Development Advisory Council. Justin enjoys giving back to the community and spending time with his wife and two young children.



**CHRISTINA DE VACA**

Chief Executive Officer

**CORPORATE DIRECTORS FORUM**

Christina de Vaca currently serves as CEO of the Corporate Directors Forum(CDF), an organization whose mission is "to help directors, and those who support them, build more effective boards through continuous education and peer-networking". Prior to this role, she was a CDF board member serving on the Executive Committee and chairing the organization's Programs Committee. Before joining CDF, she served as the Director of Corporate Relations and Business Development for the Graduate School of Business at the University of San Diego(USD), where she strengthened USD's School of Business relationships with the business community.



**JOE PANETTA**

President & CEO

**BIOCOM CALIFORNIA**

Joe Panetta is President & CEO of Biocom California, the state's largest and most-experienced leader and advocate for the life science industry. Biocom California works on behalf of over 1,600 members to drive public policy, build an enviable network of industry leaders, create access to capital development, introduce cutting-edge STEM education programs, and create robust value-driven purchasing programs. Mr. Panetta works with an experienced professional staff of 75, with offices located in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, Washington, D.C., and Tokyo.



**TAD PARZEN**

President & CEO

**Burnham Center for  
Community Advancement**

Tad Parzen has dedicated thirty years of his career to collaborative innovation in both the public and private sectors. Before becoming Burnham Center's President and CEO, Tad headed Parzen Civic Solutions, providing strategy, management and implementation services to philanthropy, government, and non-profits, specializing in cross-sector collaboration to enhance communities. Formerly a partner at the law firm of Hillyer & Irwin, Tad pivoted to public service and philanthropy in 2000. He has served as General Counsel for the San Diego Unified School District, Executive Vice President of Price Philanthropies, Executive Director of the City Heights Partnership for Children, co-architect of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, reform consultant to Los Angeles Unified School District, and national consultant on large scale civic initiatives.



**LIDIA S. MARTINEZ**

Partner

**¡Adelante! Strategies**

Lidia S. Martinez recently retired after 30 years of service to Southwest Airlines. She served in the Marketing and Communications departments in Dallas, Chicago and San Diego. In recognition of her service to the state of California and the San Diego region, Lidia has received various proclamations from the California Assembly, the City of San Diego, and her member of Congress, Rep. Scott Peters. Lidia's impact in the San Diego region was recently celebrated by being honored with the San Diego Business Journal's 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award; the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce Herb Klein Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021; and the Latino Leaders Network Champion Award in 2021. In May of 2022, San Diego State University awarded Martinez with an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.



**ALAN PROHASKA**

Regional President & Head of Corporate  
Banking Greater San Diego

**PNC BANK**

Alan Prohaska's Regional President's Office is responsible for coordinating PNC's efforts throughout San Diego and implementing all local sponsorships and philanthropic investments that align with PNC's community-based goals and initiatives, like Grow Up Great. He is also responsible for leading the overall growth of PNC in San Diego County, with a specific focus on Corporate Banking. He leads a team of bankers that serve both investment and non-investment grade clients across all industries. In 2010, he joined Wells Fargo after the Wachovia acquisition to help found and grow an Entertainment Industries lending practice. In 2018, he was promoted to be the Business Risk Manager for the Western U.S. Responsibilities included implementing risk programs for credit, BSA/AML, financial crimes, compliance, and reputation. And in 2019, Mr. Prohaska was promoted to run Wells Fargo's San Diego Middle Market Bank.



**TRAVIS VAN TREEESE**

Senior Vice President,  
Commercial Banking Manager

**CITY NATIONAL BANK**

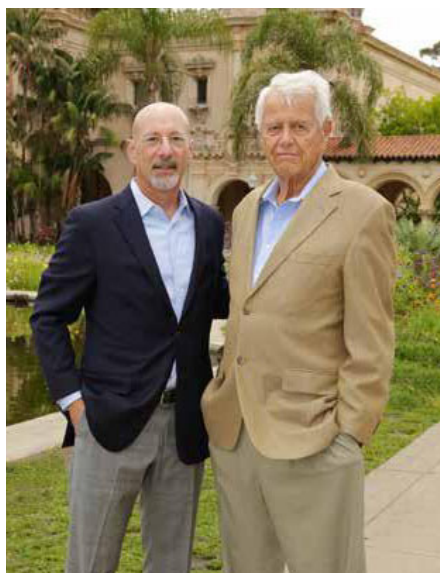
Travis Van Treeese is the market manager for City National Bank's San Diego County Commercial Banking Group. He supervises a team of Relationship Managers and other colleagues that support underwriting, customer service, and treasury management functions. The team services over 80 commercial banking relationships with loan commitments in excess of \$700MM. Mr. Van Treeese has been in the commercial banking industry for more than 18 years. Prior to joining City National, he worked in the Commercial Banking Group for Wells Fargo serving customers in San Diego and Riverside Counties. Mr. Van Treeese holds a Bachelor of Science degree in managerial economics from the University of California, Davis. He has served as an executive board member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Carlsbad for the last ten years, and has volunteered his time with other organizations in the community such as Junior Achievement, Ronald McDonald House, and Habit for Humanity.





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The Burnham Center for Community Advancement (BCCA) is thrilled to support the San Diego Business Journal's recognition of top CEOs in our community. We congratulate all of the 2022 winners and finalists and thank you for your leadership and contributions to the greater San Diego community.

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# Garry Ridge Sees New Horizons for Himself and WD-40 Co.

**MANUFACTURING:** Views CEO Job as a Foundation for Business Consulting Venture; More to Learn Ahead

■ By BRAD GRAVES

The secret sauce of **WD-40 Company** (NASDAQ: WDFC) is a complex mixture.

The first element is the product itself, the lubricant packaged in the trademark blue, yellow and red cans. Actually, there is an entire line of products that clean and lubricate.

A second element is WD-40 Company's corporate culture. For 25 years it has been entwined with a third element: the leadership of Chairman and CEO **Garry Ridge**.

Ridge, who is set to depart later this summer as part of a planned transition, was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award during the **San Diego Business Journal's** CEO of the Year Awards on June 30. The honors, presented in association with the **Burnham Center for Community Advancement**, were held at the center's new East Village location, which it shares with the **UC San Diego Division of Extended Studies**.

Ridge will retire as CEO on Aug. 31, passing executive duties to his president and COO, **Steve Brass**. In December, Ridge will step down as chairman of the board. He will then take the honorary title of chairman emeritus. Ridge will continue as a strategic adviser to the company in a consulting capacity until June 2023.

"It has been an honor and a privilege to lead WD-40 Company for the past 25 years as CEO," Ridge said.

## A Renewed Passion

Ridge may be leaving but he is not going away.

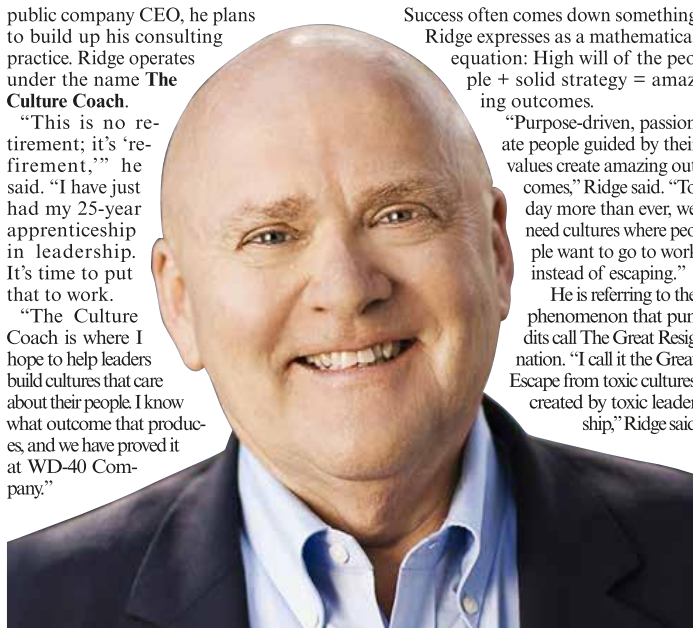
He will be helping to run a couple of businesses. He sits on the board of advisors for Cincinnati-based **Gorilla Glue Company** and recently joined the board of **Eastridge**, an employee-owned company in San Diego.

Once free from the demands of being a

public company CEO, he plans to build up his consulting practice. Ridge operates under the name **The Culture Coach**.

"This is no retirement; it's 're-firement,'" he said. "I have just had my 25-year apprenticeship in leadership. It's time to put that to work."

"The Culture Coach is where I hope to help leaders build cultures that care about their people. I know what outcome that produces, and we have proved it at WD-40 Company."



Success often comes down something Ridge expresses as a mathematical equation: High will of the people + solid strategy = amazing outcomes.

"Purpose-driven, passionate people guided by their values create amazing outcomes," Ridge said. "Today more than ever, we need cultures where people want to go to work instead of escaping."

He is referring to the phenomenon that pundits call **The Great Resignation**. "I call it the Great Escape from toxic cultures created by toxic leadership," Ridge said.

Ridge has also worked as an adjunct professor at the **University of San Diego's Knauss School of Business**, specializing in management, law and ethics.

Ridge joined the San Diego-based WD-40 Company in 1987 as managing director of WD-40 Company (Australia) Pty. Limited, with responsibility for company operations throughout the Pacific and Asia. He held various management positions, including executive vice president and chief operating officer, and vice president of international. He became CEO in 1997 and joined the board of directors in the same year.

In fiscal 2021, the company reported net sales of \$488.1 million, up from \$408.5 million in the previous year.

During Ridge's tenure, WD-40 Company bought other companies selling household cleaners and took new products to market. When the San Diego Business Journal caught up with Ridge in 2011, he was intent on taking products into new markets worldwide. "There are lots of squeaks in China," he said at the time.

International sales grew from roughly 25% in 1987, when Ridge joined the company, to 55% in 2011. Today the figure is about 66%.

In the 2011 interview, Ridge noted the company's approach to the Chinese market was different from its approach to the domestic market. China does not have a do-it-yourself culture; rather, the attitude is "do it for me." Instead of addressing consumers like it does in the United States, the corporation targeted its Chinese marketing campaigns toward skilled tradespeople, as well as the factory.

## 'Mateship' and Leadership

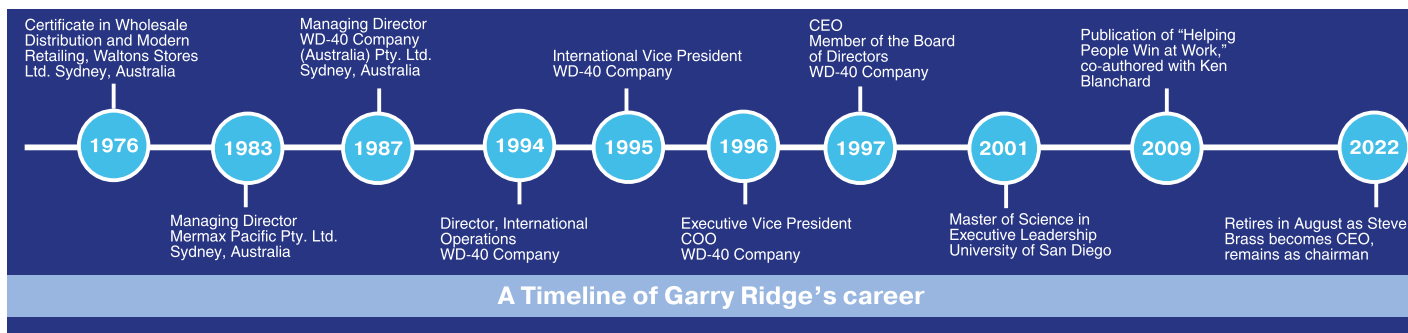
The life of a CEO is lived very much in the public eye. Ridge is able to break the ice with people by mentioning his Australian roots. He will begin emails with "G'day" and his profile page on **LinkedIn** shows the Sydney Opera House next to the landmark Sydney Harbor Bridge.

## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

*"I am honored to have been even considered for the award. It has been a fantastic life experience, with lots of learning to be the CEO of a company with an iconic brand. To have worked with such an amazing group of people for 35 years, 25 of those years as CEO, has been a lifetime that I will treasure."*



Ridge makes a point with CNBC's Jim Cramer.







Ridge and a coworker at WD-40 Company. On the eve of his retirement, Ridge is looking forward to spending more time as a management consultant.



Ridge and employees at WD-40 Company talk shop.



Authors Garry Ridge (left), Ken Blanchard and Simon Sinek.

Being from Australia has shaped Ridge the businessman. "The Australian culture is about adventure, stepping out, and not taking yourself so seriously while wanting to achieve and treat people with a sense of 'mateship' – being dependable," he said.

Asked about the greatest challenge he faced during his time as CEO, Ridge offered some general thoughts.

"You can't please everyone, yet everyone wants to be pleased," he said. "Having a clearly defined set of company values kept us on course. As a CEO, you must ask yourself, did I do what I think was right, did I do my best? And if the answer to both is yes, make peace with yourself and move on."

In a recent interview, Ridge returned to themes of continuous learning, knowledge and wisdom.

He said his management style evolved as he embraced what he calls "the learning moment."

"I continued to be curious," Ridge said.

"There is formal and experiential learning. With both, you gain knowledge, and when you put knowledge to work, that is wisdom at play. So, as I learned more, I gained more knowledge, and I hope I became wiser. I also learned the need to be a servant leader, understanding leadership is not about me; it's about those served.

Another lesson: "I learned the three most important words and getting comfortable with using them. They are 'I don't know.'"

So if Ridge is going to be a full-time management guru, a wise man, who were the wise people who instructed him?

"Without a doubt, the person other than my parents who impacted my leadership thinking most is Dr. Ken Blanchard," he said. "I met Ken in 1999 when I enrolled in the master of science, executive leadership [program] at the University of San

Diego. Ken was one of my professors. After graduating, we wrote a book together, and I served on his company's board for 10 years. We remain close friends. I would not be today's leader if I did not have Ken as a mentor."

Ridge also mentioned Marshall Goldsmith and Simon Sinek. Both, he said, "are friends and mentors that I treasure."

The book that Ridge authored with Blanchard is "Helping People Win at Work: A Business Philosophy Called 'Don't Mark My Paper, Help Me Get an A.'" It encourages leaders to be helpful yet keep expectations high.

If WD-40 Company's so-called "Maniac Pledge" is any indication, the corporation is no place for slackers. "I am responsible for taking action, asking questions, getting answers, and making decisions," the pledge states. "I won't wait for someone to tell me. If I need to know, I'm responsible for asking. I have no right to be offended that I didn't 'get this sooner.' If I'm doing something others should know about, I'm responsible for telling them."

One key element of Ridge's philosophy is that co-workers are not members of a team. For Ridge, the concept of the team is too temporary.

Instead, co-workers at WD-40 Company are regarded as members of a tribe.

Speaking to the San Diego Business

Journal in 2011, Ridge discussed the work of Abraham Maslow. The psychologist, who died in 1970, had a concept of human needs that could be pictured as a pyramid.

Forming the base of the pyramid are very basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, shelter and sleep. A second layer of the pyramid structure represents safety and security.

The third layer is a sense of belonging. That interests Ridge.

"As Maslow described in his work, belonging is one of the essential needs we have as human beings," Ridge said. "As a tribe, we share the common interest of mutual survival – a group of people that come together to protect and help feed each other. The number one responsibility of a tribal leader is to be a learner and a teacher. A teacher that helps those they lead grow."

Tribes also offer identity, work toward a common goal, shared values, traditions and ceremony.

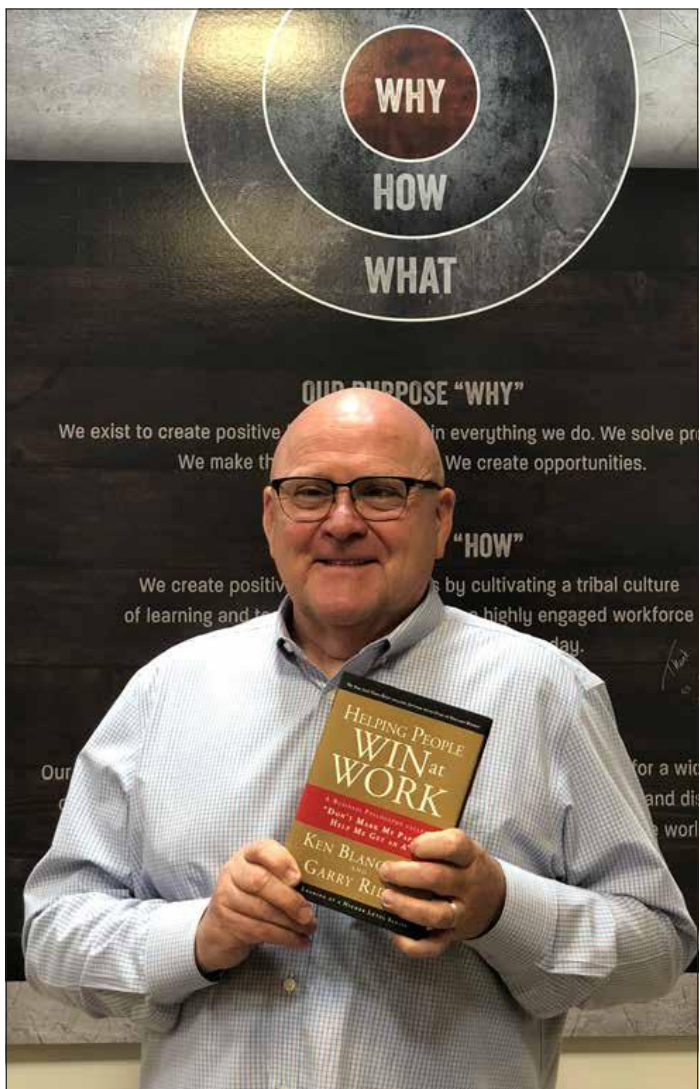
"People love to belong," Ridge said in his 2011 interview.

Today, the CEO said he is confident about WD-40 Company's transition to new leadership.

"The succession was well planned, and Steve Brass is a capable leader who lives our values and knows culture is a competitive advantage," Ridge said.

As for Ridge?

"I am excited about my next chapter," he said. ■



Ridge holds "Helping People Win at Work," the 2009 book that was the product of his relationship with management guru Ken Blanchard.

All photos courtesy of Garry Ridge and WD-40 Company



## CEO Views Caring for Employees as Benefiting Clients

**ACCOUNTING:** Jennifer Barnes Expands Optima Office Into Northern California

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

In the eyes of **Jennifer Barnes**, a happy staff means happy clients.

Barnes, the CEO of Optima Office, is among the 21 people being recognized in this year's **San Diego Business Journal** CEO of the Year Awards.

Those who know her describe Barnes as a "people over profits" leader. Work-life balance is important to her. She is firm — many would say adamant — about her team having a flexible, friendly place to work.

Or, in the words of some employees, an awesome place to work.

### Facing Uncertainty With Flexibility

Though the first four years of operating Optima Office have been far from easy, Barnes said she has seen her company grow twice as fast as her first business.

One hurdle was COVID-19. During the pandemic, Barnes ensured her employees' financial stability by not laying off a single individual and giving the team flexibility in their schedules to best address their evolving needs. Employees with school-aged children appreciated being able to work around their kids' at-home school schedule and have the support of Optima to manage the difficult situation.

Barnes also reached into the wider business community during the pandemic, offering pro-bono services to companies who were struggling.

Barnes sold her first company, **PBO Advisory Group**, and used the funding to invest in growing **Optima Office**. Her

current business already has 90 employees and approximately 300 clients.

Barnes has her sights on making Optima Office the largest managerial accounting firm in the region. She just expanded Optima Office to the Bay Area to grow the business in Northern California.

The entrepreneur also launched a nonprofit specialization

within Optima Office to help more charitable organizations optimally manage their finances and team.

### Getting Past the Glass Ceiling

Barnes has a reputation for holding herself to the highest standards. Being in a male-dominated industry, she pushed herself to be the best at her craft. When faced with a glass ceiling, she forged her own path by starting her own business. She recruits "A" players who know how to meld into clients'

culture and workforce. Within her own organization, Barnes has created a culture that supports diversity, work-life balance, and continual improvement. Optima Office also encourages a culture of mentorship. Barnes offers employees the opportunity to innovate and encourages each individual to pursue their passions, both in and out of the office. She says that providing opportunities to superstar employees and helping small businesses grow is what keeps her motivated. Barnes has been a member of many boards during her career. She currently sits on the **Better Business Bureau** board, the **Business Executives Council**, and **Junior Achievement's** Young Executives Board. She is currently a member of Rotary, **Vistage International**, **Young Entrepreneurs Council** and **Entrepreneurs Organization (EO)**. Barnes dedicates herself to programs that encourage younger generations to develop entrepreneurial skills and prepare for future careers.

She is active in Junior Achievement, helping set up youth for financial success, and serves as a mentor for the **Lavin Entrepreneurship Center** at **San Diego State University's Fowler College of Business**. She will also serve as a judge in various student competitions.

"I will say that Optima, being in its fourth year of business, it hasn't been an easy road," Barnes said while accepting her award. "But I am so blessed to be where we are today. And I couldn't have done it without all the many amazing people in the community who support us, and my amazing team. So I owe much of this success to them." ■



### IN HER OWN WORDS:

"Wow! I remember attending this ceremony for the first time after I started company #1 and being in awe of the CEOs who won. I wanted to be an accomplished and visionary CEO just like them. To be in year 4 of company #2, which I grew in half the time to twice the size, and to have won this award is such an honor. I owe so much gratitude and thanks to my amazing team at Optima and to everyone who has supported me."



On behalf of 2022 AGC President  
Kari Kyne, the Board of Directors,  
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# Trust Your Team and Welcome Diverse Voices, CEO Advises

**CIVIC:** Downtown San Diego Partnership's Betsy Brennan Revels in Urban Renaissance

■ By RAY HUARD

**Betsy Brennan** is the ultimate promoter of downtown San Diego.

As CEO and president of the **Downtown San Diego Partnership**, Brennan oversees an agency that does everything from putting planters and bike racks downtown and cleaning up downtown streets to helping businesses find their way in San Diego and touting the advantages of downtown to anyone who will listen.

"I see us as a very welcoming and smart place to grow," Brennan said. "I do see more housing on the horizon in addition to the really important commercial space and office space that we have."

Brennan was chosen as a CEO of the year by the San Diego Business Journal.

She said that she was "honored and humbled" to receive the award, but was quick to share the accolades on social media.

"My sincere thanks to our stellar team at DSDP (Downtown San Diego Partnership) who does the hard work to keep Downtown clean, safe, and thriving, our dedicated Board of Directors and Chair **Chanelle Hawken**, community, our elected officials, and everyone else involved with this amazing city," Brennan wrote on her **LinkedIn** page. "I also would like to thank my family—they are simply the best."

## Embracing Diversity

Her advice to other CEOs is "it's all about the people."

"Trust your team," she said.

Treat your staff well, support them when they need it, if they hit a bump in the road,

help them get over it, and make a conscious effort to welcome diverse voices, Brennan said.

"We have an internal commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion," Brennan said. "We want to continue to invest in underrepresented minorities that are here in San Diego and are part of our community. We want to embrace them and bring them into even more activity here in downtown."

The concern Brennan shows for those with whom she works is returned by Downtown

San Diego Partnership employees and members.

In nominating Brennan for CEO of the Year, her staff wrote that she "advocates for her staff" and "has been a champion for internal professional development as well as benefits to support wellness like an employee assistance program."

"It is clear to those around her that Betsy's approach to leadership includes support for both professional and personal development goals."



## IN HER OWN WORDS:

"It's an honor to receive this recognition and truly humbling to be named alongside some of San Diego's best business minds. It's a testament to the hard work of our stellar Downtown Partnership team, the commitment from our Board, and the sense of community shared by our urban neighborhoods. I'm grateful for my family and their endless support, it means the world to me. Together we will continue to strive for an economically competitive, diverse, and culturally vibrant Downtown San Diego that is both strong and welcoming to all."

## Pick Up the Phone

Brennan is credited with maintaining the Downtown San Diego Partnership's membership at 95% during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her four years heading the Downtown San Diego Partnership, Brennan said she was proudest of the community's response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer.

Brennan said she was proud of those who went downtown to protest what happened and equally proud of those who came the next day to clean up after the protest.

As the mother of two and stepmother of three, Brennan said, "I think it's important to be a role model for your kids and always let them know that they're first."

When her children call, "I will always pick up the phone."

Brennan was appointed CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership in January 2018 after working as vice president of development and stewardship of the **Coastal Community Foundation** of South Carolina.

She also worked for U.S. Rep. **Scott Peters**, **D-La Jolla**, from 2002 to 2008 when Peters was San Diego City Council president, first in community outreach and then as his chief of staff during the city's transition to a strong mayor form of government.

Brennan did a stint as chief of staff for **Dr. Stephen Weber** when he was president of **San Diego State University**.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish, international studies and diplomacy from the **University of Richmond** and a law degree with a specialization in land use from the **University of San Diego**. ■

## Congratulations from the Boston Consulting Group!

BCG is proud to recognize and celebrate the Finalists and Winners of CEO of the Year 2022!

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**Scott Allen**, *VP, Area Manager, Mortgage Division* | [scott.allen@pnc.com](mailto:scott.allen@pnc.com)

**Stephan Coleman**, *Market Managing Director, Institutional Asset Management* | [stephan.coleman@pnc.com](mailto:stephan.coleman@pnc.com)

**Matt Martin**, *EVP, Retail Banking* | [matthew.martin@pnc.com](mailto:matthew.martin@pnc.com)

**Rick Martinez**, *Commercial Banking Group Manager* | [rick.martinez@pnc.com](mailto:rick.martinez@pnc.com)

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# Burnett Takes Over and Turns Around ClearPoint Neuro

**BIOTECH:** CEO Expanded Business Opportunities and Workforce

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

From the moment **Joe Burnett** joined **ClearPoint Neuro, Inc.** (formerly **MRI Interventions**) as president and CEO in 2017, he began transforming the 50-person, debt-ridden, Irvine-based company on the brink of bankruptcy into a company that in Q1 of this year reported record revenue and 25% year-over-year growth. In just two years' time, he increased the company's valuation from \$15 million to a peak of \$500 million in 2021.

\$15 M to a peak of \$500 M in 2021 in just two years

He also led a significant capital raise of over \$50 million in February 2021 that will sustain the company – now headquartered in Solana Beach – through profitability.

Prior to Burnett's leadership, MRI Interventions focused its strategy on navigating other company's devices to targets within the brain using MRI scanner technology – a market that is quite niche and growing at a very slow pace. Along with rebranding the company as ClearPoint Neuro, Burnett pivoted its business strategy to expand technologies, partnerships, geographies and now surgical arenas, taking technology from the MRI suite to the operating room, where the vast majority of neurosurgeons prefer to operate.

The outcome of Burnett's vision is that ClearPoint Neuro is now involved in many of the impending "firsts" in medicine including gene therapy, stem cell therapy, brain computer interfaces, shape constrained brain models and more.

## Job Saver

Much of ClearPoint's medical device business is driven by elective neurosurgical procedures. When elective procedures were cancelled for several quarters, members of the team were concerned they would be furloughed or laid off. Instead, Burnett



hosted a company-wide "Town Hall" in early April where he assured every single ClearPoint employee that they would keep not only their jobs, but also their entire paychecks. He created special cross-functional "Tiger Teams" to work virtually on development projects that would help ensure the company exited the pandemic stronger than when it entered it.

During the pandemic-induced "Great Resignation," when other companies were losing employees, ClearPoint doubled its workforce over the last two years.

## Career Milestones

Burnett attended school at **Duke University** where he earned a B.S.E. degree in Biomedical Engineering as well as an MBA from Duke's **Fuqua School of Business**.

From 1999 to 2004, Burnett worked as an R&D engineer and product manager at **Guidant Corporation** before leaving to work at **Volcano Corporation** where he held various positions up to executive vice president and general manager of the company's Coronary & Systems Business Unit.

When **Royal Philips**, a publicly traded global health technology company, acquired Volcano in 2015, Burnett stayed on as senior vice president and business leader on Image Guided Therapy Devices at Royal Philips and general manager of Volcano Corporation. Prior to joining ClearPoint Neuro, Burnett served as vice president and general manager of Neuro Diagnostics and Therapy at Royal Philips.

## Beyond the C-Suite

When Burnett is not busy leading ClearPoint, he is kept busy by his three children. He also volunteers his time coaching for the **La Costa Youth Organization Champions Division** for special needs children.

Burnett is also an active member and serves as treasurer of the San Diego chapter of **Young Presidents Organization** – a "global leadership community of chief executives driven by the belief that the world needs better leaders," according to the group's website. ■

## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"It will always be an honor for myself and for the entire ClearPoint team to have been recognized among so many great companies, colleagues and friends. San Diego has some of the most amazing innovators and operators and I would put this group up against any region in the world. San Diego is going to continue to thrive in the years ahead because of our strong leaders that are capable of navigating whatever challenge comes our way. This remains the greatest city in the world because of the people and our priorities."



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As the state's most impactful industry trade association, California Life Sciences empowers the life sciences community to deliver solutions for healthier lives.

On behalf of the California Life Sciences team and our 1,100+ member organizations, we congratulate Mike Guerra on being named CEO of the Year and thank him for championing the sector and its diverse innovation pipeline.

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# Boutique Recruiting CEO Leads Employee-Friendly Workplace

**EMPLOYMENT:** Burrola Doubled Staff, Increased Benefits During Pandemic

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

The success of **Boutique Recruiting** can be traced back to life experiences of CEO **Innesa Burrola** and her co-founder sister **Sema Zavulunova**.

In 1991, Burrola, Zavulunova and eight other family members fled their home country of Tajikistan amid a civil war that had created poverty, persecution and some of the lowest college attendance rates in the world.

The refugee Burrola was determined to take advantage of the opportunities offered her in her new home in the U.S. and eventually earned a full scholarship from **Arizona State University**.

Shortly after graduating, while in her early twenties, Burrola co-founded personnel recruiting and placement company **Boutique Recruiting** in San Diego.

In eight years, **Boutique Recruiting** has served over 5,500 companies in the greater San Diego area and is now providing staffing services nationwide.

Since its founding in 2014, sales at **Boutique Recruiting** have increased eightfold. In the past year, Burrola maintained awareness of the competitive market landscape, expansion opportunities and industry developments to lead a winning strategy that tripled headcount and doubled sales. She also led the development of the company's short- and long-term strategy to expand the brand to a nationwide level.

## Employee-Friendly Workplace

Burrola's leadership in matching the right person to the right job informs her on how to treat her own staff at **Boutique Recruiting**. Despite an economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19

pandemic, **Boutique** managed to double the size of its staff.

Burrola also managed a cost-cutting strategy that allowed for an increase in employee benefits at **Boutique**.

Today, **Boutique** employees enjoy a company culture that includes an extra two weeks off at the end of the year, unlimited PTO, profit sharing, inclusive decision

making, generous pay, a state-of-the-art office with gym, remote working options, monthly house cleaning/car wash allowance, tuition reimbursement and regularly provided healthy lunches and massages.

## Accolades

In addition to the perks, **Boutique Recruiting** staff takes pride in the company's outstanding reputation in the San Diego business community. With numerous outstanding awards, the employees can network with their associates and clients in a more significant way

than their competitors.

Burrola's and **Boutique's** awards and recognitions include:

- 2022 **Inc.** Best Companies to Work For
- 2022 **SIA** Best Staffing Firms to Work For
- 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019 **Inc.** 5000 Fastest Growing Companies
- 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019 Best Places to Work in San Diego!
- Honored As 2018 Woman Of The Year Finalist by **San Diego Magazine** and **San Diego Business Journal**
- Nominated As Top 100 Fastest Growing Companies In San Diego by **San Diego Business Journal**
- Selected As Top 5 Temporary Placement Firms In San Diego
- Featured As Top 10 Permanent Placement Firms In San Diego
- Honored as Top Woman-Owned Business In San Diego by **San Diego Business Journal**
- Magazine features in **Oprah**, **Entrepreneur**, and **Fortune Magazine**

## Generous Giving

In addition to her generosity toward her employees, Burrola is also giving to the community. She recently donated \$10,000 to the **San Diego Food Bank** and assisted the food bank with finding qualified candidates to make sure that their organization runs smoothly.

She also recently donated \$10,000 to the **San Diego Humane Society** to support the organization as a response to the employees' requests to support this organization.

Burrola also donated her time to start a homeschool pod for her children and others in her community. ■



## IN HER OWN WORDS:

"My team always come first to me. That is what leadership is about. Leaders are here for the people. This award is for my people. I'm a cheerleader for my people before anything else. You're only as good as your support system and our leadership team at **Boutique Recruiting** is phenomenal! Family owned and going strong! Major shoutout to my hard working and understanding sister and supportive and intelligent husband who made this possible: Sema Zavulunova and Leonel J. Burrola."

# Congratulations DR. ELLEN NEUFELDT ON BEING NAMED CEO OF THE YEAR

Guided by President Ellen Neufeldt's unwavering commitment to student success and her passion for innovation, Cal State San Marcos is entering its most defining decade.

Together, we are dismantling barriers to educational access, nurturing a culture of service, adapting to meet the needs of the community, building socially minded partnerships and entrepreneurial efforts that advance the San Diego region, and launching

an ambitious philanthropic campaign to fuel this transformation.

On behalf of our exceptional Cougars community of students, alumni, faculty, staff, regional partners and donors, thank you President Neufeldt for your visionary and service-minded leadership.

► Learn more about President Neufeldt's vision for CSUSM at [csusm.edu/powerofcsusm](https://csusm.edu/powerofcsusm).

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## Tamara Craver Advocates for First Generation College Students

**PHILANTHROPY:** Reality Changers CEO Is a Collaborator; Insists on Education Equity

■ BY KAREN PEARLMAN

**Tamara Y. Craver** is president and CEO of **Reality Changers**. She joined the group in 2019 and has more than 20 years of experience in nonprofit management, executive leadership and youth development.

Craver is a passionate advocate for first-generation college students as well as education equity.

As the leader at Reality Changers, Craver has steered the group through the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning it to and from virtual distance learning. She has also overseen the creation of a five-year strategic plan and established an endowment for the organization.

Programs have grown under her leadership, with the implementation of new partnerships to expand reach and a concerted effort to serve more program graduates through the alumni network. Alumni engagement has tripled during her time with the organization.

Reality Changers was named 2021 Outstanding Organization for Diversity and Inclusion by AFP San Diego.

Over the past year, Craver has increased the number of students served by the organization, developed innovative new partnerships, strengthened governance and board development and provided exceptional direction that enabled the organization to further integrate workforce development opportunities into its college readiness programs.

Before Reality Changers, Craver served as director of **The Posse Foundation**, was director of development and communications for the **Torrance South Bay YMCA** and was director of social markets for the **American Heart Association**, Western States affiliates.

Her commitment to education has found her recognized by the **Los Angeles Business Journal**, the **Black Women's Lawyers Association of Los Angeles** and the **San Diego Business Journal**.

Craver is involved in the community, serving on the boards of **LEAD San Diego** and **San Diego Squared** as well as the

advisory council for **San Diego Foundation's Black Community Investment Fund**.

Craver is a member of the **San Diego Rotary Club #33** and is executive committee chairperson for the **Hoover Community Collaborative**.

She developed the **Trauma-Resilient Educational**

Communities organization, advancing individual and organizational health through trauma-informed education.

Craver also has built upon Reality Changers' partnerships with local groups that offer students support and professional opportunities, expanded its board leadership to include a human resources expert, a finance expert and a program graduate. She also established a "give-get" policy for the board and recruited board members, which has indirectly helped the group financially.

The nonprofit's relationships with partners like **Centro Fox**, the **San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce**, **San Diego Unified School District**, **David's Harp Foundation**, **Junior Achievement**, **UC San Diego Extension**, **SD2**, **Robolink** and others have provided resources to meet students' needs now and in the future.

Craver was responsible for holding Reality Changers' first "Over The Edge" event, which raised \$80,000.

In the San Diego region -- and beyond -- Craver is a highly sought influential voice in the college access and education equity fields.

Because of her expertise, she is frequently invited to contribute to and moderate panel discussions, convene diverse stakeholders and serve on advisory boards. Craver is known as a bridge-builder who not only works with local partners in the non-profit space but also understands that larger, systemic issues in education equity can only be solved by bringing together key players from a variety of sectors.

Craver recently facilitated a **LEAD San Diego** panel of four local university presidents, helping industry leaders gain a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions serve our community. ■



### IN HER OWN WORDS

"When I was young, there were adults in my life that didn't believe in me. They didn't think I could make it in college and never would have even conceived of me as CEO of the Year. I'm proud to be a different kind of leader for today's youth. That's what Reality Changers is all about. We KNOW that young people can achieve their dreams and we tell them that every day! This is truly my HEART work"

**The Computers 2 Kids  
community congratulates**

**Chéri Pierre**  
Computers 2 Kids CEO

For being selected as a finalist in the  
SDBJ CEO Of the year 2022 award



[www.c2k.org](http://www.c2k.org)



# American Specialty Health CEO Grew Business Organically

**HEALTHCARE:** George DeVries Used No Outside Investors, Attracted Fortune 500 Clients

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

George DeVries co-founded American Specialty Health (ASH) in 1987 with a few thousand dollars, working from a second bedroom in his townhouse. His goal was to develop specialty health care programs and integrate them into traditional medical plans offered by major corporations, insurance companies and health plans.

An early goal was to persuade California health plans to contract with ASH to administer their chiropractic network programs. ASH asserted that it had a thoughtful approach which focused on improving quality and reducing costs. Within a few years, ASH contracted with several of California's largest health plans. By the end of ASH's first year, the company covered 14,000 members. By ASH's 10th anniversary, it covered 2.3 million members.

Today the number is 57 million members. ASH works with hundreds of health plans and more than 140 companies on the Fortune 500. American Specialty Health programs touch an estimated 1 in 7 Americans.

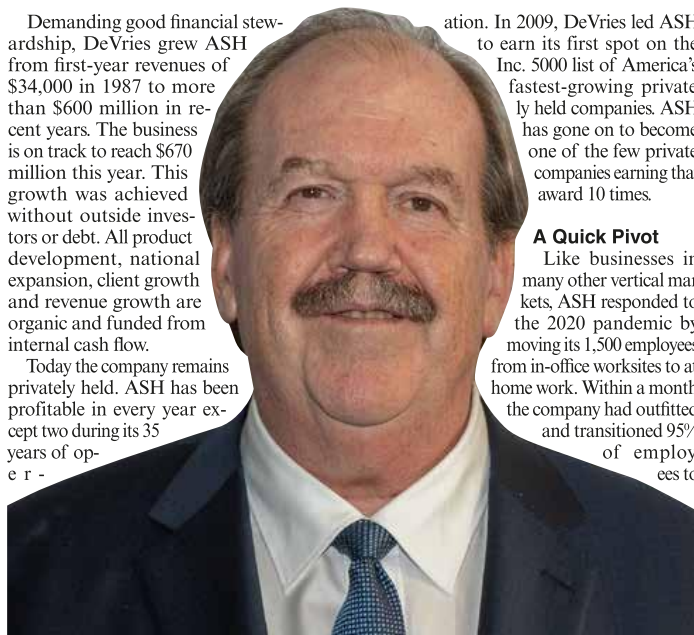
DeVries is one of this year's CEO of the Year honorees.

## Still Privately Held

As chairman and CEO, DeVries has guided ASH's growth to become one of the nation's largest privately held health services organizations, providing a broad range of technology-enabled musculoskeletal provider networks, fitness and exercise products, and health management programs.

Demanding good financial stewardship, DeVries grew ASH from first-year revenues of \$34,000 in 1987 to more than \$600 million in recent years. The business is on track to reach \$670 million this year. This growth was achieved without outside investors or debt. All product development, national expansion, client growth and revenue growth are organic and funded from internal cash flow.

Today the company remains privately held. ASH has been profitable in every year except two during its 35 years of operation.



In 2009, DeVries led ASH to earn its first spot on the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing privately held companies. ASH has gone on to become one of the few private companies earning that award 10 times.

## A Quick Pivot

Like businesses in many other vertical markets, ASH responded to the 2020 pandemic by moving its 1,500 employees from in-office worksites to at-home work. Within a month, the company had outfitted and transitioned 95% of employees to

home status, with no loss of service to members and no loss of clients.

In response to the pandemic's closing of gyms, ASH rapidly launched a digital fitness strategy to offer free fitness workouts to millions of Silver&Fit members and the public. Starting with seven free online workouts (one a day), the classes were so popular that by January 2021, they were increased to 54 a week, ranging from cardio to strength training, yoga, Pilates and more.

DeVries has been honored with awards that include the National Entrepreneur of the Year for Health Sciences (Ernst & Young), Regional Entrepreneur of the Year for Health Sciences (San Diego), and AHIP Innovator's Award. He was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 2000 to serve on the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy.

DeVries was named an Outstanding Alumnus in 2001 by UC San Diego, where he received his bachelor of arts degree. In 2011, he was named one of 50 Distinguished Alumni out of more than 130,000 alumni at UCSD's 50th anniversary.

He currently sits on the board of trustees of the Culver Academies in Culver, Indiana; the college preparatory school is where he received his high school degree.

With offices in Carmel, Indiana, Fort Worth, Texas, and San Diego, ASH employs more than 1,500 people. Through its company culture of health, ASH has been honored as a "Best Places to Work in San Diego" by the San Diego Business Journal as well as "100 Best Places to Work in Healthcare" by Modern Healthcare magazine. ■

## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I want to thank our team. ... People always make the difference. Whether it's a challenge you are trying to face, it's the people that make the difference overcoming it. Whether it's an opportunity, your ability to take advantage of it, it's your people [that matter]. Regardless — in success or in challenges — it's always the people and we have developed just an amazing team of people."



CONGRATULATIONS TO  
**Ashish Masih**

President and CEO of Encore Capital Group

on being named  
**2022 CEO of the Year  
WINNER**





# CEO OF THE YEAR WINNER 2022

## Enciso Leads EVOTEK to Massive Growth

### TECHNOLOGY: Company Expects to Exceed \$500M in Revenue in 2022

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

EVOTEK CEO Cesar Enciso founded the company in 2014 and in just eight years has grown it to become the largest privately-owned integrator.

Last year, ECOTEK exceeded \$424 million in revenue and is expected to best \$500 million this year. The company has seen a 65% year-over-year growth over the last five years under Enciso's leadership.

#### Tech Track Record

Enciso is tech industry veteran with an over 25-year track record of leadership across many different facets of business. After earning a bachelor's degree in Business and Economics from Cal State University – Fullerton, he began his career as an account manager at leading firms such as ADP, Cisco, Veritas and Symantec, where he worked to solve the complex challenges of the Fortune 500 customers he served.

Following his tenure on the software and hardware manufacturing side, Enciso worked as general manager in San Diego for system integrator Trace 3, where he tripled the business in 18 months. Following Trace3, he pioneered a new business for Technoligent and opened businesses in Arizona, Nevada and San Diego, achieving over \$40 million in revenue in just two years.

In addition to EVOTEK, Enciso is also founder of BrickworkX, a sister company to EVOTEK focused on professional services, and ZenVRM, a technology company focused on short term rentals.

#### Company Culture

One of Enciso's main focuses at EVOTEK is company culture. He strives to help provide all his employees with the tools to lead a fulfilling life while also enjoying the work that they do. He believes in the importance of ensuring each employee has access to excellent healthcare options and the opportunity to have flexible time off.

Enciso focuses on the community and honors those around him who have made a difference through enacting scholarships in their name for young women to start their journey in the technology industry.

#### Giving Back

Enciso is also active with philanthropy and established the EVOTEK Giving Foundation. This foundation houses Project Gratitude and Women in Technology, both programs striving to ensure young women and veterans are given every opportunity to succeed in the technology industry and beyond.

He encourages all EVOTEK's employees to get involved in charitable programs they are personally interested in and offers events for them to participate in through the foundation.

These events are hosted by both Project Gratitude and Women in Technology.

Over the holidays, EVOTEK held an event for Rise Against Hunger where employees, their families, company partners and customers joined together to package meals for those in need of nutrition worldwide. The event was held not only in San Diego but in Phoenix, and Denver for employees who are outside of Southern California.

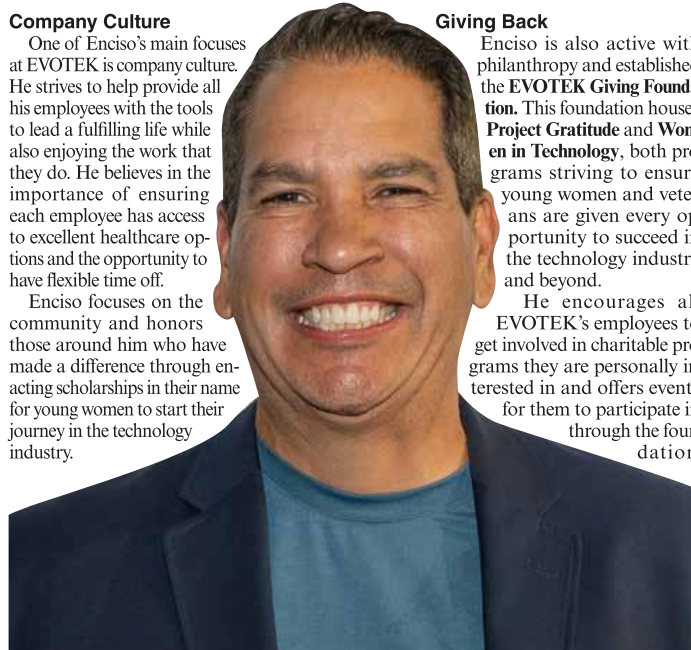
Women in Technology also recently awarded a scholarship to a young woman starting university in San Diego and will be a part of the mentorship and financial program offered by the foundation. Enciso helps select the scholarship recipient and helps dedicate new scholarships in honor of colleagues in the industry who are no longer with us. Enciso has also served on the board of Junior Achievement since 2017.

#### Achievement Awards

In 2021/2022, Enciso received a plethora of achievement awards of his own.

In 2021, he was named Entrepreneur of the Year for the Pacific West by Ernst & Young (EY) and was inducted into the EY Hall of Fame in 2022. EY also tapped him to be an Entrepreneur of the Year judge for 2022.

In addition to accolades from EY, Enciso has been highlighted as one of San Diego's top CEOs by the San Diego Business Journal and in 2021 was named to the publication's SD500 Most Influential People list. The Business Journal has also highlighted EVOTEK as a Best Places to Work every year since 2015. ■



#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"It is such an honor to be named one of SDBJ's CEO of the Year winners. The team we have built at EVOTEK is second to none and it is through all of their achievements that I am here today. This recognition continues to validate what we are trying to accomplish as an organization and our main focus will always be our culture and how we can better improve the lives of each employee."



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# Matthew Fehling Brings Energy and New Purpose to BBB

**SMALL BUSINESS:** Credits Team With Supporting the Work of Main Street Enterprises

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

"We're not your father's or grandfather's BBB anymore."

Those were the words of **Matthew Fehling** as he accepted his award for CEO of the Year on June 30 at the **Burham Center for Community Advancement**.

Fehling is president and CEO of the **Better Business Bureau Serving the Pacific Southwest**. From his Kearny Mesa office, he oversees the work in several markets in Southern California and Greater Arizona.

Fehling, who recently celebrated his 50th birthday, has dedicated more than 25 years to ensuring BBB remains a relevant and trusted source. Leading one of the largest and most innovative BBBs in the country, his leadership is felt not only at a local level, but on the national level as well.

## The Greatest Compliment

"These awards are awesome, and to be up here and be named on the list is incredible. But to me, the best compliment I can get is when somebody says, 'you have a great team.'" Fehling said, telling his audience that he heard that shortly before he went onstage. "You know, if I wouldn't have won this award, that would have been enough for me. ...

"Just to be up here is tremendous, but you can't lead if there is nobody behind you. I'm happy to take this award, put it on the shelf at work and let the employees be proud of it. Because if they didn't do it, I wouldn't be up here."

Fehling has served in several distinctive and vital roles across the country, including the Council of Better Business Bureaus, now known as the **International Association of BBBs**.

He joined his current organization in 2004 as executive vice president, and took the president's job in 2006. Since taking the top job, Fehling has increased the organization's net assets from \$2.6 million to nearly \$7 million

with the support of his dedicated and mission-driven team.

By making team culture a top priority, Fehling has made BBB an exceptional place to work. The organization was recognized as one of the **Best Places to Work in San Diego** in 2021.

## Staying Ahead of Change

To meet the challenges of the current economy, Fehling has had to be quick on his feet. Seeing the rapid increase in inflation and knowing that his staff

needed help in the face of it, he recently provided a salary increase to all employees. The raise funnels down to support the San Diego economy.

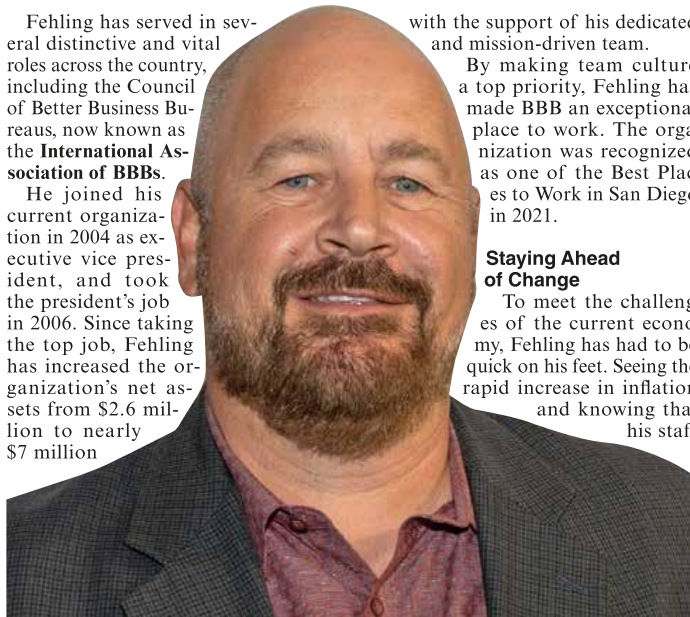
Fehling recently expanded BBB's San Diego campus with a 6,000 square foot co-work and executive meeting space to encourage the successful, ethical growth and development of local businesses and nonprofits.

Those who know him say that what defines Fehling as a successful CEO is the way he rallies the troops creating common purpose and inspire confidence in the team. He proudly shares an ongoing challenge to ignite movement in those who've wrongfully labeled stagnation as tradition.

He currently serves on a number of nonprofit boards including a charter school that operates in an underserved community. He is an active member of Vistage. (Based in San Diego, Vistage offers coaching and mentorship to executives through small groups in communities all over the world.)

The local BBB office still does a good deal of work in Arizona. Fehling has been a board member of the Arizona Coyotes Foundation, which supports nonprofits that offer programs for children and members of the military. He is past president of Valley of the Sun Kiwanis in Phoenix.

Fehling earned his Bachelor of Science from Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Mass Communications in Richmond, Virginia. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"It is an honor to be named one of the San Diego Business Journal's CEOs of the year. To me, it reflects the work that the team has accomplished and is accomplishing. Repositioning a century-old brand requires buy-in from all involved as sometimes our biggest headwinds are from internal stakeholders. I'm proud to lead a team finding new and innovative ways of supporting San Diego's Main Street entrepreneurial communities."



SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL



## Congratulations, Molly He, Chief Executive Officer as a finalist of the 2022 SDBJ CEO of the Year Award!

Molly has been relentless in her efforts to grow Element Biosciences into a next generation sequencing (NGS) company that will transform the industry. Element Biosciences has reimaged every single element that has gone into their first sequencer and has launched its first product into the market in less than 5 years! Molly is an inspiring leader that drove advancement through a pandemic, while enhancing the innovative culture of a fast-paced start-up.

We are delighted that Molly was selected as a finalist and wish her and the rest of our team continued success. Congratulations to all the other 2022 SDBJ CEO of the Year Award finalists!



[elementbiosciences.com](https://elementbiosciences.com)

[info@lembio.com](mailto:info@lembio.com)

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# Rady Children's Hospital CEO Declined to Cut Services

**HEALTHCARE:** Dr. Patrick Frias Shaped His Institution's Response to COVID

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

Every CEO of every healthcare system in the world was tested by the COVID-19 pandemic. Would they slash jobs and cancel services? Would they scale down to the point that patient care was impacted? Or would they find a way to avoid layoffs, maintain critical programs and become an even greater asset to the community?

Dr. Patrick Frias chose option "C."

Dr. Frias is President and CEO of **Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center**. Through intentional and careful financial stewardship, he has made important investments in the health of the San Diego community.

His organization did not put long term expansion plans on hold. It also embraced telework and telehealth. Dr. Frias believed that as long as the hospital focused on caring for the kids and being there for the community, it would all work out. And it did.

During the height of the pandemic, Rady Children's Hospital worked closely with San Diego County and other partners to form collaborations that would benefit the entire region. It transformed its cafeteria into a community vaccination clinic for all ages and led the way in educating the community about COVID through its infectious disease experts.

## Focusing Farther Ahead

Dr. Frias recognized that, no matter what the crisis, the hospital could not

set aside planning to serve even more kids in the future. Before COVID, Rady Children's embarked on a campus master planning process that involved reimagining its flagship campus with modern new buildings and inviting outdoor spaces. Putting the brakes on that project could have potentially impacted the care the hospital would be able to provide kids and families in the future – so Dr. Frias was resolute in keeping the project on track.

The hospital took a similar approach to child and adolescent mental health. Dr. Frias recognized that such a

critical issue could not be put on the back burner until there were fewer pressing concerns.

Much like the campus master plan, he continued to push forward the hospital's transforming mental health initiative and construction of a mental and behavioral health campus.

## San Diego By Way of Nebraska

For Dr. Frias, the road to San Diego traveled through multiple states. He holds a bachelor's degree in theology from **Creighton University** and completed medical school at the **University of Nebraska**.

He completed his pediatric residency at **Duke University Medical Center**, and his pediatric cardiology and electrophysiology fellowships at **Vanderbilt University Medical Center**.

Led by the desire to improve the lives of children, Dr. Frias started his career as a pediatric cardiologist, while serving on the pediatric faculty at the **Emory University School of Medicine**.

To have a greater impact on children's health and to drive broader innovation, Dr. Frias drew upon experience from his past clinical and leadership roles as he stepped into the CEO position at Rady Children's, also serving on the **California Children's Hospital Association Board** as its chairman and the **Children's Hospital Association Quality and Safety Committee**. He is chair-elect of the **Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties**.

He is a Fellow of both the **American College of Cardiology** and the **American Academy of Pediatrics**.

Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center is ranked consistently by **U.S. News & World Report** as one of America's best pediatric hospitals and healthcare systems. It is the largest pediatric hospital on the West Coast of the United States, with 511 inpatient beds and a comprehensive list of services that include six urgent care sites, mental health, home care, convalescent care and satellite care, with more than 30 subspecialty services. ■

## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I am proud and humbled to be among the remarkable group of leaders named by the San Diego Business Journal as 2022 CEOs of the Year. While this is an individual award, our successes as an organization are a team effort. This honor is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our incredible team members and support of the San Diego community."



**Congratulations to all the 2022 CEO of the Year Award Winners and Finalists, including our very own CEO Carol Dedrich! Thank you for all you do to inspire the next generation of leaders.**

Learn more about Girl Scouts San Diego:

[sdgirlscouts.org](https://sdgirlscouts.org)

**girl scouts**  
san diego





## CEO Pushes for a Thriving Life Sciences Ecosystem

### NONPROFITS: Mike Guerra Merged Two Organizations and Made CLS Even Stronger

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

**Mike Guerra** can take credit for improving the fortunes of his life sciences trade organization.

Guerra serves as president and CEO of **California Life Sciences (CLS)**, an influential trade association advocating for California's life sciences industry.

Representing companies up and down the state, Guerra works to advance California's leadership as the world-leading life sciences innovation ecosystem by advocating for effective national, state and local public policies and supporting entrepreneurs and life sciences businesses.

#### Bringing Organizations Together

Guerra successfully led the integration of CLS in June 2021, when the California Life Sciences Association and California Life Sciences Institute came together under the CLS umbrella. The organization now represents more than 1,100 member companies.

Guerra's organization was not always as robust as it is now.

When Guerra first took his CEO job, his organization had just completed a fiscal year where expenditures exceeded income by more than \$300,000. Its balance sheet showed a deficit of more than \$750,000.

By 2021, the organization's revenues were 33% higher and exceeded expenditures by more than \$1.3 million. Its cash balance is 275% better than at the end of 2018, with reserves of more than \$2.8 million.

#### Reconnecting

Guerra also made some important hires. Within his first three months, he secured a new business operations leader and empowered him to hire and lead a team. Outside the office, Guerra built relationships with key executives at partner and member organizations to secure additional funding.

He increased member company representation across research and academic institutions, investors, service partners, and the full spectrum of emerging life sciences

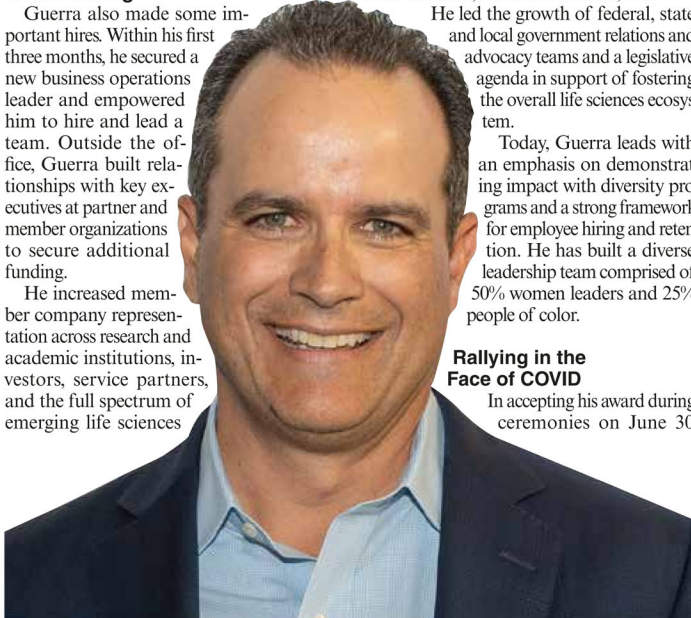
clusters from 1,000 to more than 1,100.

He led the growth of federal, state and local government relations and advocacy teams and a legislative agenda in support of fostering the overall life sciences ecosystem.

Today, Guerra leads with an emphasis on demonstrating impact with diversity programs and a strong framework for employee hiring and retention. He has built a diverse leadership team comprised of 50% women leaders and 25% people of color.

#### Rallying in the Face of COVID

In accepting his award during ceremonies on June 30,



#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"It's an absolute honor to be recognized by the San Diego Business Journal as a CEO of the Year. I'm proud to lead such an incredible organization that truly represents the innovation pipeline throughout the state. CLS will continue to connect San Diego and the rest of California's life sciences companies with strategic partners, events, programs, and collaboration opportunities that support their innovation."

Guerra thanked the people who work for him. "You all talked about teams," he told his audience of CEOs, "and I wouldn't be here without my team."

He continued: "I'm a first time CEO — three and a half years in. Less than a year in, the pandemic hit and we rallied together to make sure we were supporting our members across California and nationally ... and making sure we were taking care of our med device companies, our life science companies, biotech, pharma, et cetera. But it's more about the team."

He said it was inspiring to be among the honorees and finalists.

Prior to joining the association, Guerra held senior leadership positions with **VWR International**, a leading global distributor and manufacturer of products to the life sciences industry for more than a decade. In his last role at VWR, Guerra was vice president of sales for the Western Region of the United States, responsible for companies in the pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical, industrial and production businesses.

Guerra also served as vice president of the Americas for **Avidity Science** — a worldwide leader in water purification systems and laboratory equipment. While there, he helped build and lead its life sciences business and channel strategy.

Guerra holds a bachelor of science degree in business from **San Jose State University**.

California Life Sciences has five offices, including Sacramento and Washington, D.C. Its local office is on Sorrento Mesa, in the heart of one of San Diego's leading tech neighborhoods and a short drive from the innovation and intellectual property centers of UC San Diego, Torrey Pines Mesa and Carmel Valley. ■

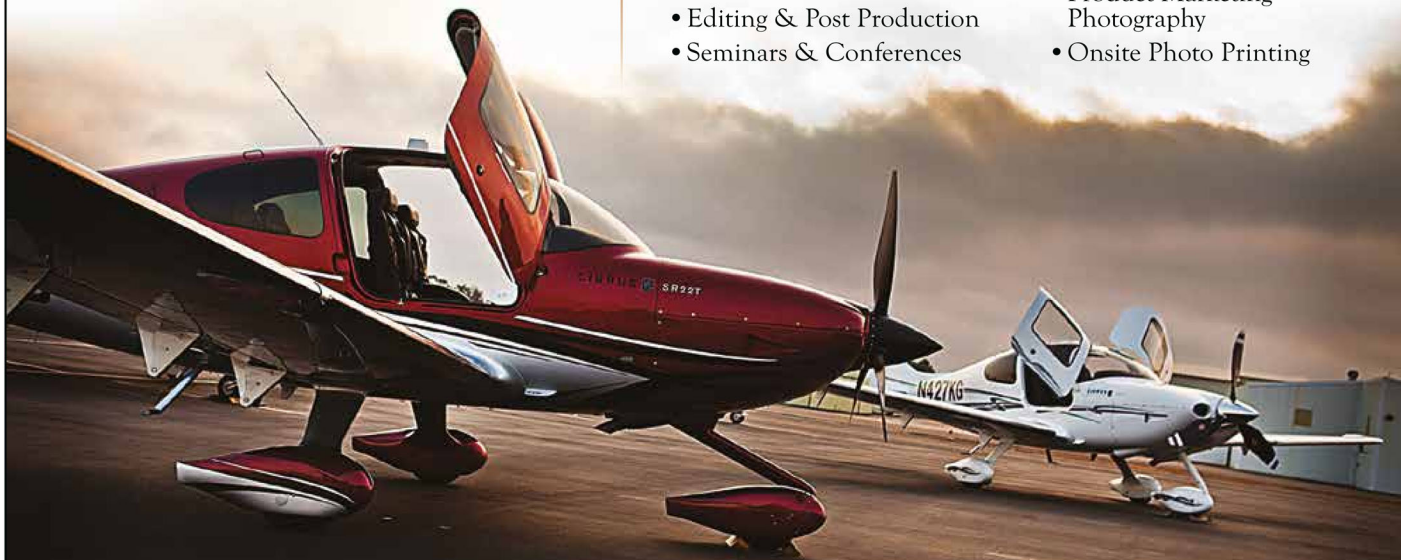
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# CEO OF THE YEAR WINNER 2022

## Underserved Communities Have a Friend in MAAC's CEO

**NONPROFITS:** Even When Funding Looked Scarce, Arnulfo Manriquez Kept Staff Employed

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

**Arnulfo Manriquez** has dedicated his career to working directly with underserved communities across San Diego County.

He is the president and CEO of **MAAC**, a nonprofit organization that provides programs, leadership development and advocacy. (The MAAC initials originally stood for Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee on Anti-Poverty.)

Manriquez has worked in the nonprofit field, including affordable housing development, for three decades. As a first-generation immigrant who grew up in the southern region of San Diego, he understands firsthand the challenges faced by underrepresented communities and is committed to creating opportunities for self-sufficiency and safety for individuals and families who need it most.

People who know him describe Manriquez as a servant leader, a builder of partnerships, and one of the few community voices that truly understands the challenges of working families.

Manriquez's experience spans the areas of program development and operations, new construction, acquisition and rehabilitation, re-syndication, homeownership and property management.

With just over 500 employees and under his leadership, MAAC has expanded its work in the areas of education, health, economic development and housing as well as leadership and advocacy.

### Weathering Uncertain Times

Though the last few years have been challenging, MAAC was one of the few nonprofits that increased its budget and expanded its program to serve 75,000 individuals throughout San Diego County, all because of Manriquez's sound leadership.

He sought alternative funding sources to ensure staffing stability even when certain programs were at a pause. By mobilizing staff to come up with creative solutions, he helped create the conditions for MAAC to keep all staff employed, with no layoffs, furloughs or cuts in any benefits. Manriquez treated his workforce with empathy.

Under Manriquez's leadership, MAAC's work in real estate

development has ramped up, leading to pivotal partnerships that will double MAAC's housing portfolio with five new-construction developments in San Diego County. MAAC also plans to expand into Imperial County with two housing developments slated to provide much-needed affordable homes for farmworker families.

Manriquez asserts that underserved communities should have access to clean transportation. He recently challenged local energy companies to ensure equal access to clean transportation for all communities. As a result, MAAC's affordable housing communities were the first in the region to install electric vehicle charging stations for residents. Soon after, Manriquez successfully negotiated

a partnership with a local funder and financial institution to offer financial education and coaching, as well as low-interest car loans to residents in low-income communities for the purchase of new and pre-owned electric vehicles, paving the way for access to clean transportation where it was previously nonexistent.

In the past year, MAAC has grown its economic development programs, investing \$2 million to grow programs that ensure equitable opportunities for disadvantaged communities to achieve economic mobility.

Manriquez has served on the boards of the **San Diego Housing Federation** and **Housing California** over the past two decades. He presently serves on the board of **Unidos US**, a national Latino advocacy organization, and recently joined the board of the **San Diego Public Library Foundation**.

Manriquez has been a **Southwestern College** Puente Mentor for more than 15 years. He has impacted vulnerable lives and he continues to provide guidance and mentorship to diverse professionals.

He is an alumnus of **UC San Diego**, earning a bachelor of arts in urban studies and planning in 1993. He earned a master of arts in leadership and nonprofit management from **University of San Diego** in 2005.

MAAC continues to evolve and grow. To assure the organization stays in tune with — and can meet — ever-changing community needs, Manriquez prioritizes investment in the organization's strategic plan. ■



### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I truly felt lots of love and support as I received this award at the event. This recognition has validated the work and effort I have put into MAAC and has enforced my commitment to staff, our board of directors and most importantly, to the community we serve. Thank you, SDBJ, for this recognition."



## CONGRATULATIONS TIM MEISSNER CEO of the Year Finalist

Tim has been the visionary in expanding our service lines in asset management, construction, accounting services, property management, and much more. His forward thinking and entrepreneurship inspires the high level of professionalism and excellence that Meissner CRES delivers with each service, to each client.

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## Masih Leads Encore with Purpose and Values

**FINANCE:** 2021 Was a Standout Year for Growth

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

Ashish Masih has led global specialty finance firm **Encore Capital Group** as president and CEO for the last five of the 13 years he's worked at the company and is an inspiring leader with a humble disposition that resonates with the over 6,600 Encore family of employees.

When it comes to his legacy, Masih said he hopes to "leave a lasting impact on Encore in helping build an organization and culture that helps consumers, enables an inclusive and collaborative environment for our colleagues around the world and deliver amazing business results – all leading to enhanced shareholder value."

Despite continued macro volatility during 2021, Encore Capital Group continued a multi-year trend of exceptional performance. Under Masih's leadership the company's revenues grew 8% over 2020's to \$1.61 billion; net income grew 66% to \$351 million; and earnings per share grew 69% to \$11.26. Encore achieved the industry's highest pre-tax ROIC at 15.2% and closed \$390 million in share repurchases – 23% of company's outstanding shares.

In addition to the financial metrics, other notable accomplishments, which Masih attributed to the team's dedication and consistent approach include the launch of new consumer satisfaction voice feedback in U.S. business to further improve how Encore supports consumers and then expansion of digital capabilities such as chat.

Encore increased its commitment to environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives by expanding the cross-functional ESG Steering Committee, formalizing CEO and Board Governance and Nominating Committee oversight structure and increasing communications with easily accessible online at-a-glance resources. Masih also oversaw the launch of Encore Capital Group's first-ever Economic Freedom Study to better understand consumer preferences and perspectives.



### Purpose and Values

Masih attributes the company's success to its disciplined strategy and consistency in its purpose. As part of that strategy, Encore remains focused on its three strategic pillars: focusing on markets where the company can thrive; developing competitive advantages like Encore's consumer-centric approach and investments in digital capabilities; and maintaining a strong balance sheet to ensure the financial health as a company.

Ma-

sih's personal philosophy about the role that Encore plays in the financial ecosystem is his belief that, "credit is the lifeblood of any successful economy and a critical part of that is consumer credit." It is that strong belief that inspires the people of Encore to focus on its mission to create pathways to economic freedom by partnering with consumers to restore their financial health.

As part of the values Masih brings to Encore, the company maintains a commitment to doing the right thing for employees, consumers and the communities in which Encore operates. Throughout the pandemic, Masih invested in the needs of the larger Encore organization by working with its leadership team to protect the health and safety of employees around the globe. As an example, the company launched the COVID-19 Employee Assistance Center to provide employees and their dependents in India with critical medicines, oxygen support and information to find resources such as available intensive care hospital beds. In addition to taking care of its employees, the company extended hardship relief to consumers and supported local community efforts.

"What we were able to achieve and overcome in the last year while responding to COVID-19, keeping our colleagues and communities safe and supporting the consumers we serve through the pandemic, turned into an incredibly uplifting time, despite all the hardship," he shared in a recent interview. ■

### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I'm humbled by this recognition, especially given the great companies in the finalist group this year. As President & CEO, I'm grateful to the 6,600 Encore colleagues around the world that help consumers achieve economic freedom, and I'm inspired every day by the work they do. As a global company headquartered in San Diego, I also feel especially proud that the city's strong sense of innovation and creativity truly inspire what we do."

## Congratulations

# Arnulfo Manriquez

MAAC PRESIDENT & CEO

**WINNER — 2022 CEO OF THE YEAR**

On behalf of the MAAC Board of Directors, staff, and the communities we serve, thank you for your leadership and commitment towards creating access to economic opportunities for all San Diegans.

**You are a true champion for equity and justice in our region.**



Advocacy & Leadership Development | Education | Economic Development | Housing | Health & Wellbeing

[MAACproject.org](https://MAACproject.org)





# Militi Brings Storied Career in Marketing to InnoVision

**ADVERTISING:** Company Doubled in Size Over Last Two Years

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

Known as an innovator in the marketing world, **Ric Militi** has worked with dozens of iconic global brands using a distinctive direct approach over his 38-year career. In 1990, when Militi was in his early thirties, he opened his own ad agency, **The Ad Group**, that specialized in entertainment marketing serving high-profile clients like the **Wherehouse**, **Universal CityWalk**, **Bloomingdale's**, the **Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences** and the **Peninsula Hotel of Beverly Hills**, among many others.

Today Militi leads **InnoVision Marketing Group** as CEO and executive creative director. While many companies faltered during COVID, Militi managed to grow InnoVision, boosting its workforce from 20 employees to almost 40 in the past year and a half. The company's growth is attributed to InnoVision's reputation as all of the company's business comes from client referrals and word of mouth.

Militi has integrated InnoVision into the media community, enabling the firm to secure media with value that clients couldn't otherwise receive. InnoVision is one of the leading media buyers in San Diego because of the extent of clients on its roster in all categories.

This year, InnoVision was accepted into the prestigious 4A's – **American Association of Advertising Agencies** – which has elevated the company to whole new level of agency.

## Pro Bono Work

Militi has served on the board of directors for **Fresh Start Surgical Gifts** since the founding of InnoVision. Fresh Start Surgical Gifts is a non-profit group that funds and facilitates reconstructive surgeries for children and teens who could otherwise not afford to remedy birth defects and other physical abnormalities.

In addition to providing

pro bono marketing services for the organization, Militi personally attends Fresh Start's annual fundraising event to support their lifechanging mission. InnoVision provides creative and website services to support the cause, and Militi personally attends events hosted by the organization on an annual basis.

Militi is also a longtime supporter of the **ASPCA** and InnoVision provides marketing services to **Susan G. Komen San Diego** throughout the year.

Militi has also lectured on branding and marketing to students at **SDSU** and the **Art Institute**. In the community, he has

spoken free of charge to business professionals at the North **San Diego Business Chamber**, **Rosie's Network** and local media stations.

## Entrepreneur and Other Gigs

In addition to leading InnoVision, Militi is also founder and CEO of **Crazy Raccoons, LLC**, a "technology think tank developing simple solutions to complex problems," according to the company's tagline.

Crazy Raccoons has two products in development. One is **Vafied** which is working to be the "solution to deceitful, dishonest and fake online reviews," according to the company's website.

The other is an app named **Zip** that according to the Crazy Raccoons website will "tally votes from other users to quickly and anonymously answer life's opinion-based questions."

Prior Crazy Raccoons and InnoVision, Militi served as vice president of marketing for **Valley View Hotel & Casino** after consulting for them for a couple years as **Ric Militi and Associates**. Before that, he served as president of **RMO**, specializing in leveraged radio promotions, events, branding campaigns and destination marketing for clients like **The Aladdin Resort Casino**, **Harrah's**, **DreamWorks/SKG** and **United Paramount Network**.

He also served as president of **Y2K Communications** and as executive vice president at **Eisman, Johns & Laws Advertising**. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I am both honored and humbled to win this prestigious award, as I am honored that my team would nominate me and humbled such a distinguished panel of judges would select me as one of the winners. I feel this award is really more for my team, and in me winning it speaks to the fact that I am serving them as their CEO in helping make their lives better and more successful."



# Congratulations Steve O'Connell



On behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, we thank you for 20 years of leadership and service as President and CEO of North Island Credit Union.



northisland.ccu.com

# CSUSM President Pushed Through Pandemic Challenges

**EDUCATION:** Neufeldt Found Ways to Overcome Fiscal, Social, Health Emergencies

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

In 2019, just as the COVID-19 pandemic's reality began to set in, **Dr. Ellen Neufeldt** became **California State University San Marcos's** (CSUSM) fourth president.

President Neufeldt met the challenge by transforming the school to students with remote access to classes and services and ensuring the technology needed for remote learning was accessible to students in need, all while raising significant funding for scholarships and other student needs.

In 2020, Neufeldt launched CSUSM's Student Success Coaching program, which allowed the campus to reallocate personnel impacted by the pandemic while providing more touch points and support to students. The program was recognized with the **American Association for State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)** Excellence in Innovation Award for Student Success in November 2021.

Also in 2020, Neufeldt initiated a campus-wide institutional strategic plan process – the first in over 15 years. The new plan, published this spring, places commitment to student success and social mobility at the heart of CSUSM's new mission and vision. New strategic goals in the plan focus on dismantling barriers to educational access; nurturing a culture of service; adapting to meet the needs of the San Diego region; building socially minded partnerships and entrepreneurial efforts; and launching a philanthropic campaign to fuel this transformation.

To close the equity gap, CSUSM currently has groups focused on supporting the recruitment and retention of Black, American Indian

and APIDA students. In February this year, Neufeldt signed an MOU partnering with Black community leaders and groups to cultivate a stronger college-going culture across the region. Then in March CSUSM hosted a summit this March that focused on enhancing its capacity to serve Latinx students.

## Expanding Campus

Under Neufeldt's leadership, CSUSM has experienced

rapid capital growth. In fall 2021, the **California State University Board of Trustees** prioritized the funding for CSUSM's next academic building, an Integrated Science & Engineering Building, which will support the expansion of engineering programs to support regional workforce demands.

This spring, CSUSM's Innovation Hub opened on campus to support entrepreneurial innovation collaborations and initiatives between students, faculty and community. Also this spring, a

new School of Education Active Learning Lab, sponsored by **SchoolsFirst Credit Union**, opened to provide future teachers with the skills they need for teaching in the modern era. Further, a proposal for new affordable student housing was recently submitted that could be soon funded with state dollars allocated by the governor for this purpose.

## Financial Success

When Neufeldt took the job as president, CSUSM faced a fiscal stewardship crisis which she turned into an opportunity to invest in CSUSM's infrastructure related to audit and compliance functions, better aligning practices and controls surrounding travel and hospitality. The university reprioritized the institutional budget and addressed critical unfunded base needs, seeing a significant recovery of reserves and incredible turn-around in the budget, despite COVID-19.

In the 2020/2021 school year, CSUSM raised over \$5 million in philanthropic gifts, exceeding the school's annual fund-raising goal. The same year, CSUSM received almost \$17 million in external research awards, a 14% increase over the year before.

In December 2021, CSUSM raised nearly half a million dollars on Giving Day, breaking all previous campus Giving Day records.

Through the development and funding of the Student Relief Fund, 744 students were supported with financial assistance, and an additional 630 students through the student emergency fund. ■



## IN HER OWN WORDS:

"I'm thrilled, grateful and humbled to receive this award. It is an honor to serve as CSUSM's president and I give so much credit to all our faculty and staff who are so dedicated to the lifelong success of our students. CSUSM proudly partners across San Diego to ensure we continue to be this region's elevator of social mobility and an engine of inclusive growth – a beacon of where the future of higher education is going."

# CONGRATULATIONS

## Andrew N. Kohn, Esq.



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and all of this year's inspiring honorees

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## Asian Business Association's CEO Serves a Wider Community

**SMALL BUSINESS:** Jason Paguio Takes the Lead in San Diego, Sacramento, British Columbia

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

**Jason Paguio** is the president and CEO of the **Asian Business Association San Diego (ABASD)** and the **Asian Business Association Foundation**.

His CEO job, however, doesn't reflect the breadth of his leadership experience.

Look at Paguio's resume and you will find a number of roles in state, county and multiple city governments, as well as in the U.S. military (he is a volunteer member of the **U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary**).

In addition, Paguio leads a band and is part of a business that sells specialty items to bands and militaries. He is drum major for the British Columbia, Canada-based **Simon Fraser University Pipe Band**. Since 2006, he has served as the North American director for the Birmingham, England-based **Dalman & Narborough - Regimental Mace Company**, which makes ceremonial items for military formations — notably the ornate staffs that drum majors carry.

### Growing the ABASD

As a leader, Paguio brings vision and expertise across many sectors, including development of minority-owned business; establishment and coordination of high-impact multi-agency collaborative efforts; advocacy for San Diego's many diverse communities — including underserved communities — and his own experience as a first-generation Filipino-American.

His three years at the Asian Business Association San Diego have seen the organization grow to its largest size in 30 years.

Paguio nearly quadrupled revenue, eliminated all debt and established reserves.

ABASD expanded its impact through community-based outreach and partnerships while more than tripling its office size to provide a free cultural co-working hub for local Asian and Pacific Islander nonprofits.

Beyond San Diego, Paguio provides statewide leadership as the political director for the **CalAsian Chamber of Commerce**. Gov. **Gavin Newsom** recently appointed him to serve on the **California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs**.

His local political activity is extensive. Paguio is one of 15 San Diegans selected by Mayor

**Todd Gloria** to serve on the city's **San Diego Asian Pacific Islander Advisory Group**, and he was also appointed to the **City of San Diego Small Business Advisory Board**. Additional civic commitments include the board of directors, **NTC Foundation** (Arts District Liberty Station), **LEAD San Diego**, **San Diego Community Housing Corporation** and **City of Coronado Mobility Commission**.

### Forging a Strategic Alliance

In a groundbreaking effort, Paguio partnered to establish the **Strategic Alliance**, comprised of

the region's three largest ethnic chambers of commerce: the **San Diego County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**, the **County of San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce** and ABASD. As the Strategic Alliance, this trio of agencies operates as the **Alliance Small Business Development Center (SBDC)**, focusing on delivering a comprehensive array of services to minority-owned small businesses. Focusing on economic equity for the region's underserved communities, Paguio led his organization through the coronavirus pandemic by assisting thousands of minority-owned small businesses, helping them receive no-cost technical assistance and tens of millions of dollars in COVID-19 disaster relief capital.

In 2021, Paguio helped to formally designate the **Convoy District** in Kearny Mesa as the **Pan Asian Cultural and Business Innovation District** in the city of San Diego. Bordered by Interstate 805, state Route 163 and state Route 52, the stretch of **Convoy Street** has long attracted people looking for specialty food. Now recognized as one of the largest pan-Asian business districts in the United States, the **Convoy District** is poised to become an even bigger destination for all people drawn to Asian culture.

Paguio studied at the **University of San Diego's Knauss School of Business**, **National University** and **San Diego City College**. He was the youngest person to be recognized as one of San Diego's 500 Most Influential People while in his early 30s. ■



### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I'm so grateful to be part of this prestigious group of winners. This award is truly a representation of our incredibly supportive board of directors and mission-driven team who all work together to advance economic equity for our region's underserved and under-capitalized small businesses. I hope to inspire a generation of diverse leaders to be thoughtful in achieving a stronger, more inclusive economy for everyone."



**Congratulations**  
TO OUR PRESIDENT & CEO,  
**PATRICK FRIAS**  
FOR WINNING THE SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL'S  
**CEO OF THE YEAR AWARD!**

As CEO, **Patrick Frias, MD**, has helped lead Rady Children's through the highs and lows of the past several years. Team Rady is grateful for Patrick's unwavering support of our mission and staff. That is why we are thrilled to celebrate his acknowledgement as the **San Diego Business Journal CEO of the Year!** We are proud to see his leadership efforts recognized on a wider scale. This honor is a win for all Team Rady and the community and patients we serve. On behalf of our entire Rady Children's family congratulations once again, Patrick and this well-deserved honor.

**Rady Children's**  
rchsd.org

# Neighborhood Healthcare CEO Pursues Nonprofit's Mission

**HEALTHCARE:** Adapted to COVID and Different Care Models, Expanded Geographic Boundaries

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

CEO and practicing family physician **Rakesh Patel, M.D.**, has been with **Neighborhood Healthcare** for more than 19 years. He ensures his nonprofit community health organization has the resources and culture it needs to provide quality, compassionate, whole-person care to patients throughout San Diego and Riverside Counties — regardless of those patients' circumstances.

Dr. Patel, who also has an MBA, oversees a staff of more than 900.

He has acted as the face for Neighborhood Healthcare's fundraising efforts. The organization has raised more than \$1 million over the past five years to support unfunded patient care.

The CEO was behind Neighborhood Healthcare's push to broaden its patient care impact, reaching a record 78,000 patients, via 391,000 medical, dental and behavioral health visits. He has expanded services to the outlying communities of Riverside, Temecula and Valley Center.

## A New Approach for New Times

Dr. Patel and Neighborhood Healthcare's focus on providing access to care remained paramount before and during the pandemic. Soon after the COVID-19 outbreak, the organization launched video telehealth and phone services. Neighborhood Healthcare transitioned thousands of patients to virtual visits while providing critical medical, dental and mental health care. The organization's

innovative providers and staff overcame digital challenges to offer quality care to patients by video, phone and in-person. Neighborhood Healthcare provided services to communities and families that would otherwise not receive necessary care.

Not stopping there, Dr. Patel's leadership and Neighborhood Healthcare's innovative healthcare professionals brought critical care to high-risk patients confined to their homes

through Mobile Care Teams in San Diego and Riverside counties. These skilled practitioners went to 2,083 patients' homes over five months to administer lab and COVID tests. The organization also expanded a myriad of other services, from pediatrics to senior care.

Many of these changes will likely continue when the pandemic subsides, as patient demand for these new offerings grows.

He also:

- Orchestrated the organization's strategy to launch

Neighborhood Healthcare's first Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) center to offer tailored medical care to seniors from a medical team specializing in aging and chronic conditions.

- Authorized the reapportionment of key operational budgets that enabled Neighborhood Healthcare to connect with patients and care outside of its 16 San Diego County facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Crafted and shared industry best practices with 800 other community health centers throughout San Diego and California through his volunteer work with the **Integrated Health Partners** and **Health Center Partners**.

A board-certified family physician and Certified Physician Executive, Dr. Patel received his M.D. from the **Medical College of Wisconsin** and completed his residency at **Scripps Family Practice** in Chula Vista. He received his MBA from the **Isenberg School of Management** at **UMass Amherst**.

Dr. Patel became chair of the board of directors for **Integrated Health Partners**, San Diego County's leading clinically integrated primary care network, earlier this year. He also serves on the board for **Health Center Partners**, the primary voice and health care policy advocate for community health centers in Southern California, and the **San Diego County Medical Society** board. Dr. Patel also sits on the Quality Safety Committee at **Sharp Grossmont** and Peer Review Committee at **Sharp Health Plan**. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I accept this award on behalf of the more than 900 dedicated team members of Neighborhood Healthcare who provide quality, compassionate, whole-person care to 78,000 patients through 391,214 medical, dental, and behavioral health in-person, telehealth, and mobile clinic visits annually, regardless of their circumstance. This past year tested them all, and they rose to the challenges in countless situations. Our Neighborhood Healthcare team makes me so proud to work alongside them every day!"



Congratulations  
**Michael Chagala**

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# Salas Leads WithHealth's Precision Care Program Launch

**TELEMEDICINE:** Attracts Fortune 500s, Major Associations, Large Cities as Clients

■ By JEFF CLEMETSON

**Cindy Salas** is the Hispanic, female founder and CEO of **WithHealth** – a precision care telehealth benefit that offers employers a way to provide a personalized and affordable healthcare experience for their employees.

WithHealth's Precision Care Program brings primary, specialty, mental health, and urgent care together in a digital first model that is powered by genomics. WithHealth staff focuses not only on treating a person's immediate illnesses, but also on creating a plan of care for them that is preventive and proactive. WithHealth's clinicians use a patient's clinical information, including pharmacogenomics and genomics, to help them take the right medication, prevent new illnesses and better manage continued health issues.

## Meeting Pandemic Challenges

In March of 2020, WithHealth launched this transformational, digital-first precision care delivery model, which could have been derailed by the uncertainty of the pandemic. However, WithHealth had an established network of physicians, nurses, genetic pathologists, and a platform, so Salas and team rolled up their sleeves and became the first Precision Care provider for the **County of San Diego**, launching their services for citizens affected by COVID-19. As the clinical providers for the county's alternative discharge centers, Salas and her team gained great expertise in the management of COVID patients.

## A Year of Accomplishments

With the learned expertise servicing San Diego County, WithHealth extended their offering to employers and expanded their laboratory license and service area to all 50 states and major locations in San Diego, Los Angeles, New York City and Atlanta.

To date, WithHealth has serviced more than 150 clients across industries, including high profile clients like the

**National Basketball Association, Discover, Inc., Netflix and Humana**, as well as extending its laboratory services to major events like the **U.S. Conference of Mayors and the Critics Choice Awards**.

WithHealth also launched Precision Care among American Indian/Alaska Native Nations which increased access to primary care services, yielding an improved HbA1c from 12.1 to below 9.0 – a measure of

blood sugar control in monitoring diabetes. WithHealth also increased access to psychiatry and clinical counseling, yielding care plans for mental illness and chemical dependency which included 80% of the population.

In March of this year, Salas testified before the **U.S. Congressional Hispanic Caucus** on the availability of opportunities for Latinx/Hispanic-owned businesses. WithHealth is also a model for female leadership, with 60% of leadership roles at the company held by women.

## Giving Back

Beyond leading WithHealth, Salas volunteers her time to causes in healthcare – especially mental health. She is on the Board of Advisors for **The National Network of Depression Centers (NNDC)**, which is comprised of the top academic that develop and foster connections among members to use the power of the network to advance scientific discovery and to provide stigma-free, evidence-based care to patients with depressive and bipolar illnesses.

Additionally, Salas and the WithHealth team have volunteered and made donations to organizations such as the **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** and youth academic and educational programs focused on environmental awareness and education.

Salas also served on the Board of Management for the **Dan McKinney Family YMCA** for 10 years; and has served as a board member of the **National Association of Latino Health-care Executives** – a national organization led by Latino/Latina executive leaders of U.S. hospitals and healthcare organizations and experts in the fields of health care policy and practice. ■



## IN HER OWN WORDS:

"I feel a duty to create a culture where our team can make a difference every day. At WithHealth, that is exactly what the team does, for our clients and our patients. We are delivering on the promise of transforming healthcare. Our Precision Care benefit provides employees with affordable, accessible, and tailored care to their individual needs and circumstances. I'm thankful for this honor and know it is only because of the team. I am so appreciative for my parents - whose stories and lives inspired the WithHealth mission, and for my daughters, Audrey and Raegan, who inspire me daily."

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# Former Professional Fighter Went from Being Janitor to CEO

**SMALL BUSINESS:** Artem Sharoshkin Rose to the Very Top of The BXNG Club

■ By RAY HUARD

Pretty wild, was how **Artem Sharoshkin** described his ride from being an 18-year-old immigrant with no money from a small farming town about 700 kilometers east of Moscow to being named a CEO of the year by the San Diego Business Journal.

"I probably would be in a very different place if I stayed there," Sharoshkin said. "My story is just another example of what this country is built on."

Sharoshkin is the CEO and owner of **The BXNG Club**, a fitness center with clubs in East Village, Kearny Mesa, and Solana Beach.

The club is expanding to Rancho Bernardo later this year and Sharoshkin plans to open clubs in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

"My advice to anyone who wants to start something is just do it. You'll figure it out along the way. Otherwise, there will always be something that will hold you back," Sharoshkin said. "The biggest thing that was holding me back was just thinking that I'm not well equipped to grow a company, I don't have the education, I don't have the background."

He doesn't think that way anymore. For himself and his company, Sharoshkin sees no limits.

"It's only fair to see how far we can take this," Sharoshkin said. "The more time goes on and the more we understand how we are as a branded company, we realize there really is no competition

out there when it comes to combat sports fitness."

## Realizing a Dream

A former professional fighter in Muay Thai, a form of martial arts that relies on kicking and boxing, Sharoshkin learned of what was then The Boxing Club soon after arriving in the U.S. 2004 when his sister, **Irena Boostani**, gave him a membership as a birthday present.

He got a job in the

club as a janitor, became a trainer, then a training director, then co-owner in 2014, buying out his partner's interest in the business in 2021 to become its owner and CEO.

He changed the name of the business from The Boxing Club to The BXNG Club to differentiate it from other boxing clubs.

When he started out, Sharoshkin never envisioned how successful he would become.

"I was hoping to have my one little small academy or little studio to continue coaching Muay Thai," Sharoshkin said. "After that,

I said, 'hey, wouldn't it be incredible if instead of one location, we had two. Now we're having conversations of being outside of San Diego and being in L.A. and being in Las Vegas. I guess that's how it goes.'"

## Acclimating

Taking risks has been a big part of Sharoshkin's career.

His most recent was deciding to open a club in a closed fitness center in Solana Beach, a city more associated with surfing.

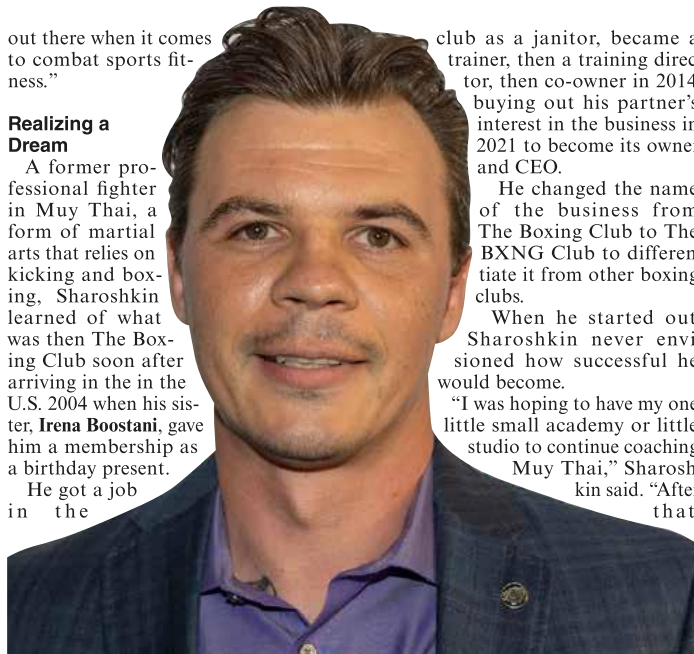
"We were a little concerned because that's not the location you would think of for a boxing club," Sharoshkin said. "A lot of people just don't equate combat sports for fitness. They think, 'I'm going to walk through the door and I'm going to get punched in the face.' Since we opened, some of the customers who were the most vocal and the most concerned are absolutely in love with it. They have their favorite classes, they have their favorite trainers. It's stuff like that that really makes me excited."

Since he first arrived in the U.S., Sharoshkin has been driven to succeed.

To learn English, Sharoshkin took classes at **Mesa College** and watched English-language movies and television shows.

His sister, who was fluent, spoke only English when she was with him.

"I didn't have any friends who were Russian speaking, so I naturally had to be forced to learn the language," Sharoshkin said. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"Being coined CEO of the Year by the San Diego Business Journal is nothing short of a career milestone. This moment is a meaningful representation of what it means to continuously cultivate a vision and a team with a relentless pursuit to see it through. I am incredibly honored, grateful and humbled to receive this award and be recognized along with other talented and inspiring leaders."

## CONGRATS, TONY!



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# Sidd Vivek's Job Mixes Youth Development, Public Policy

**NONPROFITS:** CEO of Junior Achievement Helps Make Young People 'Real-World Ready'

■ BY KAREN PEARLMAN

**Siddhartha Vivek** is known across San Diego County as an inspirational leader with a vision for creating a more equitable, inclusive San Diego.

The CEO and president of **Junior Achievement of San Diego County**, Vivek is innovative, forward-thinking and collaborative in his approach to serving families across the county.

Vivek oversees a team of about two dozen people who empower more than 15,000 San Diego County youths and young adults to be real-world ready.

Through 5,000 industry volunteers that work in their unique facility (Biz Town) and in classrooms and throughout communities, Junior Achievement in San Diego continues to work toward an equitable, inclusive economic future for local students, and local businesses.

Under Vivek's leadership, Junior Achievement of San Diego County has projected to finish Fiscal Year 2021-22 up 60% in revenue, year-over-year. Both contributed and earned income are on the increase for Junior Achievement.

Even taking into account pandemic-depressed numbers from the COVID-19 era of FY 2020-21, Junior Achievement of San Diego County is projecting to finish 34% over its budgeted revenue. From FY 2018-19 until FY 2021-22, Junior Achievement of San Diego County increased revenue 22% while reducing expenses by 4%.

Its programming adapted in-demand needs such as BizTown and its stock

market curriculum to engage direct-to-families through schools.

Junior Achievement of San Diego County also adopted new programs, including JA Fellows at **Lincoln High School**, which provided real-world lessons, mentors and paid work-based learning opportunities to a cohort at the Southeast San Diego school over two semesters.

Vivek helped start a new partnership for JA with the **Chula Vista Elementary School District** to provide critical financial literacy curriculum to 800 low-to moderate-income students.

Vivek has fostered positive relationships with several area foundations, including the **Prebys Foundation**,

**YMCA, San Diego Foundation** and the **Zable Foundation**, resulting in multi-year funding from many of them.

Vivek's professional career started – and remains – at the intersection of youth development and public policy.

From cross-country advocacy that influenced the **Unites States Congress'** approval of \$1 billion for after-school programming to the development of strategic partnerships and funding that directly served 10,000 people annually in San Diego, Vivek continues to think globally and act locally.

Vivek is also a board member for the **NTC Foundation** at Liberty

Station, sits on the board of the **San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation** and supports connecting community members with one another as a board member of **The Public Good Projects**.

## Biz Town and JA Fellows

Vivek steers Junior Achievement of San Diego County's business learning model for elementary school age kids called Biz Town and was also the mastermind behind a new offering for local high school students called JA Fellows.

BizTown is a 10,000-square-foot mini "city" with nearly two dozen real San Diego businesses and is an educational center where supervised local elementary school students – 18,000 every year – spend nearly five hours on a reserved day with JA personnel, teachers and volunteers exploring exhibits and learning about business.

The JA Fellows program launched in January and offered 38 Lincoln High students the opportunity to connect with local businesses in the real world.

The program connected students with social capital through industry mentors, financial capital through scholarship and paid work-based learning opportunities – and real-world experiences directly connected to San Diego's industries.

Students in the first cohort this year were able to find mentorship in business leaders across the county.

Vivek was able to land businesses including **Cox Communications, Deloitte, EY, HawthorneCAT, Maya's Cookies, LPL Financial, Mission Fed, Pepsi, Qualcomm, Vertex** and **Wells Fargo** to give students real-world insight. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"This is really humbling. It is a recognition of the impact of our work and the effectiveness of our team to empower youth with 'real world' skills to be economically independent."



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Winner: San Diego Business Journal, CEO of the Year

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# With His New Bank, Dan Yates Helped Businesses Facing COVID

**BANKING:** Opened in 2018, Endeavor Bank Originated \$300M in PPP Loans

■ BY JEFF CLEMETSON

When **Endeavor Bank** CEO **Dan Yates** co-founded the first new bank in San Diego County in over a decade, he brought with him more than 40 years of banking experience.

Since its opening in 2018, Endeavor Bank has provided consultative help to hundreds of local businesses. During COVID, Endeavor originated over \$300 million in PPP loans to serve hundreds of businesses in San Diego. This was a significant amount, particularly in relationship to the limited staffing resources the bank had.

Endeavor generated record earnings and growth in 2021 and was named a premier performing bank by the **Findley** reports and a five-star bank by **Bauer's**, the highest ratings available from these independent bank rating agencies.

## Decades of Leadership

Yates' 40 years of experience in the banking industry includes leadership roles as president or chief executive officer of four community banks, including Endeavor Bank.

Yates obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in Finance from **San Diego State University** in 1982 while working as a supervising manager in the central cash vault at **Bank of America**. After graduation, Yates worked as a banker at **Manufacturers Bank** for six years where he completed the commercial loan training program

and served as a commercial loan officer serving companies in the apparel industry.

Yates then worked at **Union Bank** where in just two years he became a top producer of new business relationships for the region, focusing on developing lower middle market companies with sales between \$5 million and \$100 million. His efforts earned him Union's Area III Marketing Award and he was promoted from assistant vice president to vice president.

In 1988, Yates began a 12-year stint as regional vice president of **Mellon 1st Business Bank** where he was responsible for managing and developing key client relationships,

managing a team of commercial bankers and served on the bank's Senior Loan Committee.

In 2001, Yates was the founding president and CEO of **Regents Bank** and served in that capacity until shortly after the bank was acquired by **Grandpoint Capital**. During his time as CEO, Regents retained consistent profitability and was rated a "Super Premier Performing Bank" by Findley in 2007 and 2008. Regents was merged into **Grandpoint Bank** in a series of acquisitions in 2010. Yates was retained by Grandpoint as president and served in that role for a

year, eventually leaving in 2013.

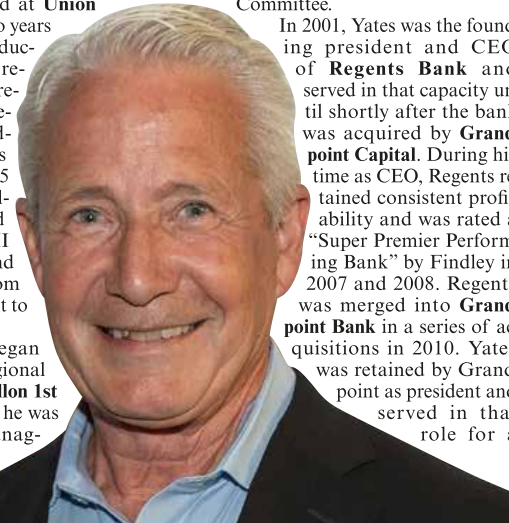
Following his brief role at Grandpoint, Yates was recruited by the board of directors **Neighborhood Bancorp** initially as a consultant and then named CEO to lead the effort to restore asset quality and recapitalize the bank. Yates accomplished both goals and parted ways with Neighborhood in 2017 – the year he founded Endeavor.

## Beyond Banking

Outside of his work in the financial sector, Yates is dedicated to serving his community. He currently serves as vice chair of the **Conrad Prebys Foundation**, where he has played a central role in awarding millions in grants to the arts, youth development, medical research and other important causes that the foundation supports.

In addition to providing needed financial support to causes through the Conrad Prebys Foundation, Yates has also supported many nonprofits by providing banking services, PPP loans, direct donations and by offering consultative services through his role as CEO of Endeavor.

Yates is also a board member of the **Entrepreneurs Organization - San Diego Chapter** and a board member of **California Community Banking Network**. He has previously served on numerous other nonprofit boards, including **Boys & Girls Club of San Diego**, **San Diego Opera**, **New Village Arts**, **San Diego Police Officers Foundation**, **Western Bankers Association** and many others. ■



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"Hundreds of local CEOs contributed capital in 2018 to create a bank to serve our business community. It is an honor to receive the CEO award. The recognition signifies the positive impact Endeavor Bank is making to help business clients achieve their goals. A very notable highlight includes the \$300 million in PPP loans we originated during the pandemic to save local companies and jobs. Our Endeavor team is dedicated to helping business clients thrive and it is a privilege to lead this great tribe of experienced talented bankers."

## Congratulations Jason!

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Asian Business Association of San Diego, congratulations to our President and CEO, Jason Paguio, for being named one of San Diego Business Journal's CEO of the Year!



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Gregg Ward & all of the Finalists**

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MARTY GORSICH  
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**Congratulations, Ron!**

Everyone at Exagen is thrilled to share the nomination and selection of our President and CEO, Ron Rocca, as a finalist for CEO of the Year! Ron's continued leadership has been instrumental in the organization, company culture, and success of Exagen.

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