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JUNE 15, 2026



LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL
WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP AWARDS 2026

HONOREES & FINALISTS

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The 2026 Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards: Recapping the Event

Women leaders bring a range of strengths that can create measurable benefits for businesses, from stronger financial performance to improved workplace culture. As organizations continue to compete for talent, innovation, and market share, many are recognizing the value of having women in executive positions.

In addition, women leaders play an important role in mentoring and developing future talent. Their visibility in senior positions can inspire employees throughout the organization and demonstrate that advancement opportunities are available to individuals from all backgrounds. This can strengthen recruitment efforts and enhance a company's reputation among prospective employees.

This year's 2026 Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards, which took place Tuesday, June 9th at the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown was a half day event of inspiration, education and recognition of such leaders.

The top businesswomen in Los Angeles shared their wisdom through a series of dynamic discussions during the breakfast symposium covering topics such as:

- Culture, Collaboration & Connection in Modern Leadership;
- Burnout, Boundaries & Balance: Sustainable Success at Every Age;
- Beyond Mentorship: Advocacy, Allyship & Collective Power



...and much more!

The afternoon portion was a spirited luncheon awards program where we honored outstanding achievements by women who make a difference throughout Los Angeles.

With hundreds of incredible nominees, there are clearly many accomplished and impactful leaders to draw inspiration from. This year, we named honorees in the following categories: CEO of the Year; Executive of the Year; Innovator of the Year; Emerging Woman-Owned Business Leader Award; Champion of Women Award; Mentor of the Year; Community Impact Advocate Award; The Accelerator Award; and NextGen Woman of the Year.

We honored achievements by a number of powerful women who have made a difference throughout Los Angeles. Each of these remarkable honorees and finalists are described in these pages.

Many thanks to our sponsor organizations, including Platinum Sponsors **All For Kids**, **Montage Insurance Solutions**, and **UCLA Health**, who help to make this event possible, and once again, congratulations to the honorees – Los Angeles area women who “lead by example,” successfully blending effective business vision with a passionate commitment to positively making a difference, both in the world of business and in the communities they serve.



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Congratulations to

TAMMY WALLACE, CPA

Chief Financial Officer, UCLA Health

For being recognized as

Executive of the Year in the Los Angeles Business Journal

Women's Leadership Awards

Your vision and compassionate leadership inspires the entire UCLA Health family and the communities it serves throughout Southern California and around the world.

UCLA Health

Keep on rising



HONOREES & FINALISTS

CEO OF THE YEAR HONOREE

KRISTEN CERF

President; Chief Executive Officer
Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan

Kristen Cerf is president and CEO of Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan, the Medi-Cal managed care plan of Blue Shield of California, serving more than 542,000 members across Los Angeles and San Diego counties – about 350,000 of those members are Los Angeles County residents. Her leadership journey is both unconventional and extraordinary. After 14 years as an attorney including serving as the chief legal officer for Blue Shield Promise, Cerf transitioned into the CEO role in mid-February 2020 – just weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic upended health care as we knew it.

Stepping into her first chief executive role during one of the most volatile periods in modern history required Cerf to lead differently from day one. Almost immediately, Blue Shield Promise pivoted to a fully remote workforce while simultaneously navigating financial uncertainty, rapid operational change, and unprecedented community need. Cerf's response set the tone for her leadership: mission first, people centered, and deeply empathetic.

Known for an inclusive leadership style that encourages openness, honesty and transparency, Cerf leads by actively listening and meeting people where they are. She is not a CEO who sits back and delegates from afar – she is deeply engaged, willing to challenge assumptions, open to feedback, and focused on building alignment and consensus across the organization.

Under Cerf's leadership, Blue Shield Promise achieved a more than \$200 million financial turnaround while growing membership by over 130,000 members – all while expanding benefits, strengthening community partnerships, and improving care quality.



ANITA BHATIA

FINALIST

CEO; Executive Director
Anita Bhatia Foundation for Tomorrow

Anita Bhatia is the CEO/executive director of the Anita Bhatia Foundation for Tomorrow, a forward-looking philanthropic organization that builds on the legacy of the Ramesh and Kalpana Bhatia Family Foundation. With a career spanning business, media and philanthropy, Anita has established herself as a purpose-driven leader who leverages strategy, storytelling, and partnerships to advance equity and inclusion.

Bhatia has also led the evolution of a multi-generational family foundation into a modern, impact-driven organization, balancing legacy with innovation during a pivotal transition. Her work also reflects a strong commitment to uplifting the South Asian community, particularly in addressing issues often left in the shadows. She has been an early and influential supporter of efforts to combat gender-based violence and expand access to culturally competent mental health resources – helping bring visibility and investment to critical, underserved areas.



LOREN CASTLE

FINALIST

Founder; CEO
Sweet Loren's

Loren Castle wasn't about to let life dictate her choices. Diagnosed with cancer at 22, she fought back with everything she had, including changing her diet. But when she couldn't find any treats that met her new standards, she took matters into her own hands. With the heart of a rebel and the skill of an artisan, she whisked and whipped, blended and baked, using pure and purposeful ingredients. She wasn't just baking; she was breaking the mold, challenging the norms of the food industry, and proving that better is possible.

Castle's quest led to the creation of Sweet Loren's – a brand that's all about mouthwatering, guilt-free cookies that break all the rules. Sweet Loren's is more than a cookie – it's a rebellion against the ordinary, a bold statement that you can have it all: taste, health, and whatever makes you happy.



RENEE FRASER

FINALIST

President
Fraser Communications

Dr. Renee Fraser is the founder and CEO of Fraser Communications, one of the largest woman-owned marketing and advertising agencies in the United States. For more than 25 years, she has led the agency with a unique approach that blends behavioral science with marketing strategy, helping organizations inspire meaningful change through powerful communications.

Holding a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from USC, Dr. Fraser has built her career on understanding what motivates people and translating those insights into impactful campaigns for major brands, nonprofits, and public service initiatives. Throughout her career, Dr. Fraser has navigated and overcome the challenges of building and sustaining a woman-owned business in a highly competitive industry. She founded Fraser Communications during a period when women were significantly underrepresented in agency leadership, and through resilience, innovation, and strategic vision, she grew the company into a nationally recognized firm.



DONNA WILSON

FINALIST

CEO; Managing Partner
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP

The legal industry is not known for rapid reinvention, yet during a period defined by technological disruption, regulatory volatility and shifting client expectations, Donna Wilson has led one of the most ambitious transformations in the profession. As CEO and managing partner of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, Wilson reimagined what a modern professional services firm can be – one capable of solving the complex challenges facing organizations operating at the intersection of law, public policy, technology and business strategy.

Under Wilson's leadership, Manatt developed a multidisciplinary platform where lawyers work alongside business consultants, policy advisors and data analysts to help clients navigate the increasingly complex environments in which they operate. That model not only transformed how the firm serves its clients – it helped redefine what sophisticated professional services can look like in the 21st century.

Let's Grow, Together

Founded in 1904, All For Kids has spent more than a century working to ensure children and families have the support they need to thrive. What began as a mission to protect vulnerable children has evolved into a comprehensive organization serving communities across Los Angeles County through prevention, behavioral health, foster care and adoption, early childhood education, and family support services.

While the needs of children and families have changed over the decades, our commitment to their safety, well-being, and future has remained constant.

With compassion and teamwork, we're committed to preventing child maltreatment and promoting lasting well-being. Guided by compassion, collaboration, and innovation, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to grow up safe, supported, and connected. Our story is one of resilience, hope, and the collective impact made possible by dedicated staff, partners, supporters, and families working together to create brighter futures for generations to come. **We're creating a world where every child is #safetogrow, and we invite you to join us in our mission.**

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HONOREES & FINALISTS



EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR HONOREE

TAMMY WALLACE

Chief Financial Officer
UCLA Health

Tammy Wallace, CPA, serves as CFO of the UCLA Health System, one of the nation's premier comprehensive academic health systems and a cornerstone of healthcare delivery and innovation in Greater Los Angeles and nationally. In this role, she provides enterprise-wide strategic and financial leadership for a \$8.5 billion health system encompassing hospitals, clinics, physician enterprises, managed care, and joint ventures. Her scope of responsibility includes oversight of the revenue cycle, accounting and audit, financial planning and decision support, supply chain, mergers and acquisitions, and contracting. She plays a central role in evaluating internal and external market opportunities, driving enterprise cost-savings initiatives, supporting strategic growth, and advancing the adoption of innovative financial and operational technologies.

Under Wallace's leadership, UCLA Health has strengthened its financial performance while continuing to invest aggressively in growth, access, and clinical excellence. She has led long range financial planning that aligns capital deployment and margin targets with enterprise growth and market positioning – which will enable more than \$10 billion in capital investment over the next 10 years while maintaining historic industry leading liquidity and strong operating margins.

Her work supports a health system that remains a leading recipient of NIH research funding.

Wallace has been instrumental in strengthening the organization's fiscal stability and operational performance. She established the Sustaining Excellence Transformation (SET) model, a comprehensive approach that improved margins across labor and operations, pharmacy growth, implant and supply standardization, length of stay, and other revenue enhancement initiatives. Collectively, these efforts have generated annual margin improvements ranging from \$40 million to over \$100 million, or incremental margins ranging from 1-2%.

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TRACY ARCECI

FINALIST

Managing Director; Market Executive,
Global Commercial Banking
Bank of America

Tracy Arceci is a distinguished executive leader with more than 25 years of experience in commercial finance and consulting. As market executive for Bank of America's Global Commercial Banking organization, she oversees one of the most diverse and dynamic markets in the country – spanning West Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, and the coastal counties through Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo. Her team's breadth mirrors the economic diversity of the region.

In 2025, under Arceci's leadership, the market delivered double digit loan and deposit growth, propelling Global Commercial Banking to exceed 50% market penetration across Greater Los Angeles. Her ability to navigate market complexity, expand regional presence, and develop high performing teams has made her an influential force.



MARI-ANNE KEHLER

FINALIST

Partner; Chief Strategy Officer
GHJ

Mari-Anne Kehler is a dynamic and influential leader at GHJ, as both its chief strategy officer and the first non-accounting partner at the firm. She currently serves on the firm's Executive Committee, shaping the decision making and key initiatives at GHJ, and as the strategist of GHJ Foundation, overseeing the private foundation's contributions to mission-oriented organizations. In these roles, she plays a central part in guiding the firm's long-term direction, as well as architecting and driving forward innovative firmwide strategies across AI, outsourcing, workforce planning and pricing.

Kehler's professional impact is deeply rooted in her commitment to developing others. She designed and spearheads firmwide growth and business development trainings that actively engage employees in building essential skills, while also providing personalized, one-on-one coaching to those on the path to partnership.



EUNICE LEE

FINALIST

Chief Operating Officer
Scopely

Since May 2025, Eunice Lee has played a pivotal role in one of the most consequential growth periods in Scopely's history. As COO, she helped steer the company through the \$3.5 billion acquisition of Niantic's games business, operationalizing the integration of Pokemon GO while aligning global teams, live-operations systems, and technology infrastructure across continents. Her leadership preserved creative direction, maintained player trust, and strengthened Scopely's position as the leader in large-scale, community-driven games. During this period, MONOPOLY GO! became the fastest mobile game ever to surpass \$6 billion in lifetime revenue.

Through Lee's "One Scopely" approach, she has connected game teams with central functions, strengthened coordination across a global workforce of more than 3,000 employees, and maintained strong engagement and workplace culture.



SHAWN SHEFFIELD

FINALIST

Chief Strategy Officer
Keck Medicine of USC

Shawn Sheffield, MBA, MHSA, is a highly regarded and energetic health care executive with deep experience in academic medicine. Sheffield has led Keck Medicine of USC's clinical growth and expansion efforts for over a decade. Under her leadership, the health system's annual revenue has more than tripled.

During her tenure, Sheffield developed a regional network that spans from Bakersfield to Irvine. Sheffield oversees network development, including mergers and acquisitions, strategic partnerships, capital and venture planning and physician alignment strategies. She is leading the development and opening of the state-of-the-art 100,000 square-foot medical office in Pasadena that opened in the fall of 2025, containing more than 15 service lines, including comprehensive oncology care, orthopedic and cardiac care, as well as an outpatient surgery center and imaging center.



JENNIFER WEERHEIM

FINALIST

Chief Marketing Officer
Stonefire Grill

Jennifer Weerheim is a highly accomplished marketing executive and chief marketing officer of Stonefire Grill, with more than two decades of leadership experience driving brand growth, customer engagement and enterprise-wide strategy for multi-unit restaurant organizations. Since joining Stonefire Grill in 2020, Weerheim has led the company's integrated marketing strategy across brand positioning, digital and performance marketing, guest experience, menu innovation and public relations, aligning marketing initiatives directly with business objectives and long-term growth. Her leadership has helped strengthen brand relevance, improve customer acquisition and position Stonefire Grill for sustained success in an increasingly competitive dining landscape.

Weerheim is known for building and mentoring high-performing teams and fostering collaborative leadership across organizations.



NINA ZOKHRABYAN

FINALIST

Chief Operating Officer
Christie's International Real Estate
Southern California

Nina Zokhrabyan is the operational and creative backbone behind one of luxury real estate's most significant growth stories. As the driving force alongside Aaron Kirman, who consistently ranks within the top five real estate brokers in the US, she has spent over a decade building, scaling, and ultimately launching an independent brokerage that now stands as one of the most prolific firms in Southern California.

Under Zokhrabyan's leadership, the brokerage has grown into one of the highest-producing independent luxury firms in the country, and the leading firm in Southern California. In 2025 alone, the firm achieved more than \$4.2 billion in total sales volume which reflects the caliber of talent she has recruited, the infrastructure she has built, and the standards she has set across every level of the organization.



HONOREES & FINALISTS

INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR HONOREE

DELILAH LANOIX

Founder and CEO
Butterfli Technologies

Delilah Lanoix is a visionary entrepreneur and founder and CEO of Butterfli Technologies, a pioneering mobility technology company transforming access to transportation for seniors, people with disabilities, healthcare networks, and community organizations. Recognizing that traditional ride-sharing platforms largely overlooked these populations, Lanoix built Butterfli from the ground up to bridge that gap – creating one of the first integrated B2B/B2C transportation platforms designed specifically to serve individuals who require specialized mobility support.

Under Lanoix's leadership, Butterfli has grown into a rapidly expanding technology company working in partnership with the City of Los Angeles, regional transit agencies, healthcare providers, and nonprofit organizations to deliver reliable, on-demand mobility solutions. As a female founder in the highly competitive technology and transportation sectors, Lanoix has overcome significant structural barriers while scaling a mission-driven company that is redefining how cities approach inclusive transportation. Her leadership combines innovation, resilience, and a deep commitment to equity – ensuring that mobility technology serves communities that have historically been left behind.

As a technology entrepreneur, community advocate, and innovator transforming mobility access for underserved populations, Lanoix has pioneered a technology platform designed to address one of society's most overlooked challenges – reliable transportation for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and others who face barriers to mobility. Under her leadership, Butterfli has built an innovative software platform that delivers both on-demand and scheduled transportation services, guided by its mission of "Freedom Leading to Independence."



SAHAR ANDRADE

FINALIST

Neuroscience Based Leadership Consultant
Sahar Consulting, LLC

Sahar Andrade, MB.BCh is the founder and CEO of Sahar Consulting LLC, a Los Angeles-based neuroscience-centered leadership and AI integration consultancy. A trained physician turned organizational neuroscientist, Andrade has spent decades translating brain science into practical leadership transformation.

What makes Sahar genuinely rare is her intersection: no one else in the leadership development space holds medical credentials in neuroscience as well as deep AI implementation expertise and the cultural fluency to work across Fortune 500 corporations, public sector agencies, and higher education simultaneously. She developed the proprietary B.R.A.I.N. methodology and multiple AI ethics frameworks including P.I.L.O.T., WISER, FAIR, and CARES. These have been deployed inside real organizations navigating real pressure. Her tagline, "Leadership doesn't fail. Nervous systems do," reflects a thesis that challenges the entire field of leadership development.



JENNET CHOW

FINALIST

Founder; Owner; Co-CEO
Evolution Design Lab and Jellypop Shoes

In 2009, Jennet Chow started Evolution Design Lab (EDL), a Pasadena-based company. Today EDL is a multimillion-dollar tech-focused company that manages the entire supply chain of shoe manufacturing, from design all the way to production, using its software StyleManager and Segovia which are built in house.

Chow also launched her own vegan shoe brand, Jellypop. EDL only works with safe and ethical factories and is known as a design house that manufactures and distributes women, kids and toddler shoes throughout the US and Canada. Chow and her team create footwear for big box retailers (JCPenney, Famous Footwear, Shoe Carnival, Nordstrom Rack), focusing on creating comfortable, stylish and affordable shoes for women and girls of all ages. Chow is passionate about education and empowering women and youth. She acts on her passion through mentoring others, working to increase diversity in different industries, and giving back to the community.



WENDY LEVY KAAYA

FINALIST

Founder
Mixed Chicks, LLC

Wendi Levy Kaaya, co-founder of Mixed Chicks, is a visionary entrepreneur who transformed a deeply personal challenge into a globally recognized beauty brand. As a multicultural woman navigating a market that historically segmented hair care by race rather than texture, she identified a critical gap in the industry and took action. In 2004, alongside her co-founder, she built Mixed Chicks from the ground up – starting in a garage and growing into an international company serving up inclusive, texture-focused hair solutions.

Throughout her journey, Kaaya has faced systemic challenges, including retail segregation, limited shelf space, and industry biases that overlooked multicultural consumers. She challenged the status quo by advocating for a more inclusive approach to beauty – one that celebrates identity, diversity, and authenticity. Her leadership has helped shift industry conversations from race-based categorization to texture-based solutions, empowering individuals to embrace their natural hair and identity.



LA KEISHA LANDRUM PIERRE

FINALIST

Founder; General Partner
Emmeline Ventures

La Keisha Landrum Pierre embodies the spirit of transformative leadership. She is not merely an investor but a "trailblazer for women and minorities in venture capital" who combines operational excellence with a "heart-centered" approach. By focusing on "women's health, wealth, and well-being," she is actively rewriting the paradigms of how financial and social capital are deployed. Her proven track record of scaling businesses while maintaining a steadfast commitment to civic duty and gender equity makes her an exemplary role model for future leaders.

Pierre is a dedicated advocate for civic transparency and gender equity. Her primary community involvement centers on the Civic Media Lab in Lagos, a nonprofit she co-founded to merge technology with journalism to promote public accountability. She serves as its Executive Chairwoman, partnering with organizations like the MacArthur Foundation and Omidyar Network to foster democratic reform.



Well begins with **we**

Blue Shield Promise Health Plan is proud to sponsor the Los Angeles Business 2026 Journal Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards.



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HONOREES & FINALISTS

EMERGING WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS LEADER HONOREE

KATHERINE RODRIGUEZ ORBACH

Co-CEO; CFO
The Cozy Cookie Company, LLC

After nearly a decade building a successful career in public accounting and finance, Katherine Rodriguez Orbach made a bold pivot that reflects both entrepreneurial spirit and business leadership when she co-founded a company rooted in joy, craftsmanship and community: The Cozy Cookie Company, LLC, a minority owned and woman owned specialty baking company based in La Cañada Flintridge.

From day one, Orbach has led with the resourcefulness and grit that define emerging women business leaders. In its first year, Cozy Cookie relied entirely on social media, grassroots outreach, and personal contact to build brand awareness and gather real time customer feedback. Under Orbach's business leadership, that early focus on proof of concept paid off. Momentum built quickly and continues to grow. As the customer base expanded, so did the menu, nearly doubling its offerings to now include specialty cookies, gluten free options, edible cookie dough, and fudge.

Beyond direct-to-consumer sales, the business now serves special events, wedding venues and corporate clients.

Orbach's entrepreneurial drive is deeply rooted in her family's story. A first generation American with family origins in Mexico, she grew up watching her parents build and scale a family owned trucking business into one of the largest of its kind in Southern California. From a young age, she learned the realities of entrepreneurship and day-to-day operations; lessons that have been invaluable and that she has applied to growing her new business. Becoming a new mom further ignited an entrepreneurial passion to build a business of her own, with the hope that it will become a legacy for her children.



MARIBETH ANNAGHEY

FINALIST

Managing Partner
Annaghey McCann LLP

From decades of experience at major California firms to becoming named partner and eventually founding her own firm, Maribeth Annaghey has led an impressive legal career practicing in complex business, real estate and entertainment litigation.

After 20 years of working at mid-size bi-coastal firms, Annaghey decided to start the women and minority owned litigation boutique Annaghey McCann LLP with her friend and law partner, Kathryn McCann. Along with a third partner, they started the firm with the goal of engaging in a smaller, more client-focused practice. In just three years, the firm has grown to eight attorneys and 3 full-time staff, all colleagues from previous firms. Annaghey has fought for and protected clients as wide-ranging as media companies, real estate companies, artists and creatives, owners in business divorces and various media and entertainment industry professionals.



NANCY COBLENZ

FINALIST

President
Stellenium Corp.

As president of Stellenium Corporation, a Los Angeles-based company she founded, Coblenz is redefining what it means to build sovereign digital infrastructure at a global scale, forging government-level partnerships with emerging economies across Africa, MENA, and Latin America to ensure that the next chapter of the digital revolution is written by the nations it is meant to serve. She has more than two decades of battle-tested expertise across private equity, enterprise marketing, and artificial intelligence.

Under Coblenz's leadership as president, Stellenium has positioned itself as a total solutions provider for sovereign AI infrastructure, encompassing design, build, finance, operation, and management across both data centers and power generation. The company's approach is anchored in what Coblenz calls "Infrastructure as Security" – the idea that digital infrastructure is not merely economic development, but a matter of national sovereignty and self-determination.



KHRYZZA KELLEY

FINALIST

CEO; Founder
CoWorq

In 2021, Khryzza Kelley launched CoWorq, an ethical and equitable outsourcing and scaling company on a bold mission to help one million small businesses scale while creating living-wage opportunities for one million Filipino remote professionals. She also founded Isla and Co., an ethical fashion brand that partners with Filipino artisans to secure fair wages and global recognition for their craft. Both companies are built on the same foundation: purpose before profit, people before margins, and impact before optics.

The results have spoken for themselves. In under two years, CoWorq 10x'd its profit, 42x'd its client base, and 57x'd the number of jobs created, all without venture capital, investor backing, or paid advertising. The company grew from three professionals to over 170 and earned recognition from the US House of Representatives and the California State Assembly for contributions to small business growth and workforce development.



JESSICA ORMANDY

FINALIST

Founder; President
Ormandy Marketing

Jessica Ormandy is the founder and president of Ormandy Marketing, a strategic advisory firm serving top performing leaders in wealth management and financial services. She launched the business in January 2025 with a clear point of view to provide – beyond marketing – clarity, direction and accountability at the leadership level.

In just over one year, Ormandy has built a high value practice by stepping in as a true strategic partner to her clients. She works directly with leadership teams to define priorities, align marketing with business goals, and ensure execution actually drives growth. Her model replaces fragmented vendor relationships with one clear source of strategy and direction. Ormandy has positioned her work at the executive level and built trust by delivering measurable results and consistent leadership. Her impact is clear in the caliber of clients she serves and the role she plays in their success.

Celebrating Excellence in Leadership



Congratulations to Dr. Kristen Walker on being named a Mentor of the Year finalist at the 2026 Women's Leadership Awards.

We are also proud to recognize fellow Nazarian College alumnae who were nominated:

- Yuliya Kaminskaya, U.S. Bank
- Hiko Akopyan, Zero Parallel
- Judy Friedman Rudzki, Bank of America
- Lizbeth Nevarez, GHJ
- Tanya Martin, Martin Business Management
- Danielle Andersen, Withum

Nazarian College joins in honoring all of the remarkable women recognized at this year's awards.

We are a proud sponsor of the Los Angeles Business Journal's Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards.

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HONOREES & FINALISTS



CHAMPION OF WOMEN AWARD HONOREE

HEATHER SPILSBURY

CEO
50/50 Women on Boards

As CEO of 50/50 Women on Boards, a global 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on strengthening corporate governance and expanding access to board service, Heather Spilsbury is a true champion for women.

Founded in 2010, when women held just 10% of public company board seats, 50/50 Women on Boards' research now shows women hold 30% of Russell 3000 board seats. With a commitment to reaching gender-balanced boards of 45 to 55% women, and at least 20% women of color, Heather is advancing a clear path for women to access board opportunities. Through research, education, and direct engagement with public company directors, she is also working with nominating and governance leaders to rethink how director talent is identified and selected.

Under Spilsbury's leadership, the organization has expanded to 15 US cities and six international capitals, with more than 3,000 participants each year. These programs are designed to connect public company directors with board-ready executives to encourage and educate women on how to secure corporate board seats, whether now or in the future. Her work brings together preparation and access, ensuring that qualified women are not only ready to serve, but are also seen and considered for board roles. Under her leadership, 50/50 Women on Boards has also tripled its audience reach, increased corporate sponsorships by 40%, and directed 84% of revenue to mission-driven programs. The organization generates more than \$2 million annually through corporate and philanthropic support and maintains \$1.5 million in reserves.



SAHARA PYNES
FINALIST
Partner
Fox Rothschild

Sahara Pynes is a respected partner at Fox Rothschild, a national law firm with more than 1,000 attorneys across the country. Based in the firm's Los Angeles office, she draws on more than 25 years of legal experience to advise a broad range of businesses on how to best comply with state and federal employment laws relating to workplace discrimination, wage-and-hour laws, disability accommodations, family and medical leave, and workforce reductions. She serves as the key contact for the firm's national Employment Counseling, Policy Development & Audits practice.

Pynes' dedication to empowering women carries over to her work at Fox. Licensed to practice in both California and New York, she often partners with women entrepreneurs to build strong human resources infrastructure and employee culture, helping them effectively grow their companies. Her client roster encompasses many women-led businesses in media, beauty, fashion, staffing and the nonprofit world.



KRISTINA SAWYER
FINALIST
Vice President, Lending
Arixa Capital

As vice president of lending at Arixa Capital, Kristina Sawyer has originated more than \$800 million in loans, directly supporting residential construction and investment projects across Los Angeles.

Sawyer is also deeply committed to advancing women in financial services and expanding access to mentorship, education, and professional opportunity. As the co-founder of Women in Private Lending, she has helped build a national platform that supports career advancement for women in the private credit industry. The organization has grown its reach in major financial markets, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Austin, bringing together hundreds of professionals for mentorship, networking, and industry education. Sawyer served on the Board of Directors for Womxn of Wealth, an organization dedicated to strengthening financial literacy and wealth building opportunities for women. She has helped develop educational programming that empowers women to take control of their financial futures.



SHERRY SEDIGHI
FINALIST
Principal
Baker Tilly US

Sherry Sedighi is an inspiring and accomplished leader whose career is a perfect illustration of outstanding professional capability, coupled with exceptional commitment to the advancement of women in the workplace.

Sedighi is deeply committed to empowering women both inside and outside the workplace, and her community involvement reflects that passion. She regularly initiates and leads activities designed to connect, uplift and strengthen women, including organizing group hikes that create safe spaces for authentic connection and mutual support. She also coordinates self-defense classes to help women build confidence and personal safety skills, demonstrating her dedication to equipping women with tools that extend far beyond professional development. Her philanthropic and community efforts are consistently hands-on and impact-driven, reflecting her belief that empowerment happens when women are brought together, supported and encouraged to invest in themselves and one another.



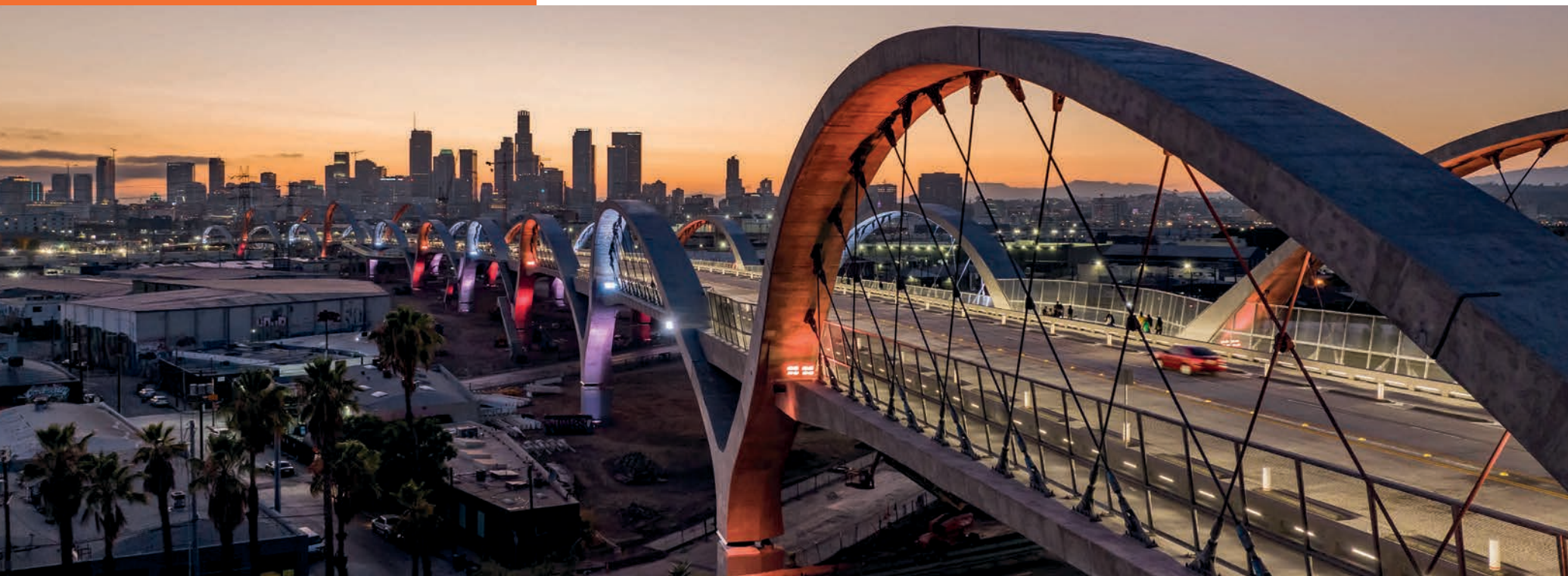
LAUREN SHERIDAN
FINALIST
Senior Strategic Project Manager
Children's Hospital Los Angeles

L Lauren Sheridan currently serves as a senior strategic project manager within the Information Services Office of the CIO at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, where her work sits at the intersection of technology, governance, operations, and patient-focused outcomes.

Sheridan's philanthropic and community involvement reflects a sustained commitment to expanding access, opportunity and support for women, youth and families across Los Angeles County. She is a founding member of the SCV Waves Water Polo program, where she helped establish and grow a youth sports organization dedicated to enhancing opportunities for girls in athletics. This work has focused on building an inclusive, competitive environment that empowers young women through teamwork, discipline, confidence and leadership. She is also actively involved with Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) through its mentorship program, supporting youth as they navigate academic, personal, and leadership development.



Every Journey Begins with a **Spark**



HNTB

Together, we're building the foundation of opportunity. For our clients, our communities and ourselves.



HONOREES & FINALISTS

MENTOR OF THE YEAR HONOREE

ELISABETH SUH

Vice President, Environmental Planning; Office Sales Manager
HNTB Corporation

Elisabeth “Liz” Suh is an accomplished leader whose professional experience and personal commitment to mentorship have been a big part of making her such a respected leader at HNTB Corporation. Suh has built a reputation for delivering high-quality, complex infrastructure projects while fostering a collaborative and high-performing environment for both colleagues and clients. She is widely recognized as a trusted advisor who leads by example and consistently elevates the standard of excellence across every initiative.

Throughout her career, Suh has successfully navigated the challenges of a demanding, fast-paced industry, including those faced by women in traditionally male-dominated fields. Rather than allowing those challenges to define her, she has used them as a catalyst to strengthen her leadership approach, grounded in resilience, authenticity, and a deep commitment to empowering others.

What truly distinguishes Suh is her unwavering dedication to mentorship. She consistently invests time in sharing her knowledge and experience to support staff in their professional growth through one on one mentoring or panel participation. Her compassion and ability to give her full attention make her a trusted advisor not only within the Los Angeles office and other Southern California offices, but across the firm. She is, by nature, a mentor and leader — someone who invests deeply in the growth and success of others without expectation of recognition or personal gain. Her impact is evident in the many professionals she has guided and developed at HNTB and throughout her career, all of whom have benefited from her guidance and advocacy.



JULIE GERCHIK

FINALIST

Partner; Co-Chair, Litigation Department
Glaser Weil

Julie R. F. Gerchik is an accomplished litigation partner whose distinguished legal career is matched by an extraordinary commitment to mentoring and developing all lawyers, including particularly women lawyers. At Glaser Weil, she has grown her practice into a thriving one comprised of complex commercial litigation and entertainment matters, and representing an enviable roster of domestic and international clients.

Gerchik has navigated the demanding realities of a high stakes litigation practice while taking on significant leadership and mentoring responsibilities. She has done so with intentionality and generosity, believing that excellence in lawyering must be paired with genuine support for her entire team. She took the initiative to establish and continues to maintain the firm's mentorship program and consistently goes beyond any formal role, mentoring associates, junior partners and colleagues with clarity, empathy and the highest standards.



SARAH GRAVES

FINALIST

VP, Demand Partnerships
MediaAlpha

In 2019, Sarah Graves lost her manager and mentor unexpectedly. She was still relatively early in her leadership career, working in insurance ad tech, an industry that skews heavily male, and she had leaned on her mentor more than she had ever fully acknowledged. Losing her was not just a personal loss. It was a clarifying one.

Today, Graves is the vice president of Demand Partnerships at MediaAlpha, the insurance industry's leading programmatic customer acquisition platform. Her team is majority women, and every one of them considers Graves a mentor. Not because mentorship is on her calendar, but because it is in her character. Her's is the kind of mentorship that does not require a title or a curriculum. It requires showing up, and in an industry where women are still underrepresented at senior levels, that consistency carries particular weight.



DEEDEE HOWARD

FINALIST

Partner; Estates Agent
The Agency

For over 25 years, Deedee Howard has built one of the most respected careers in Southern California real. As a top-producing estates director at The Agency Beverly Hills and a founding partner since 2011, Howard has taken particularly impressive action with that experience: she has shared it, generously, with every woman who has come into the industry and sought out leadership, inspiration and guidance.

Howard is known for being refreshingly honest and direct – never afraid to tell a client what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. That same honesty is what makes her such a sought-after mentor. Women across The Agency – experienced agents and newcomers alike – turn to Howard not for blind reassurance, but for the real answer. She tells the truth, she shares what she knows, and she helps people find their footing in an industry that doesn't always make that easy.



KRISTEN WALKER

FINALIST

Paul Jennings Endowed Professor in Business;
Professor, Marketing; Director, MBA Program
David Nazarian College of Business and
Economics at CSUN

Kristen Walker is the Paul Jennings Endowed Professor in Business, professor of marketing, and director of the MBA program at the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics at California State University, Northridge. A CSUN alumna, she has built a distinguished career centered on student success, mentorship and innovative program leadership.

Dr. Walker's leadership is defined by her deep commitment to mentoring the next generation of business professionals, particularly women and underrepresented students. Through her efforts with Fox Deportes as well as direction of the MBA program, she has embedded mentorship into the undergraduate and graduate student experience, fostering opportunities for hands-on consulting projects, leadership development and direct engagement with industry partners. Her approach emphasizes academic excellence as well as confidence-building and real-world readiness.

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HONOREES & FINALISTS



COMMUNITY IMPACT ADVOCATE AWARD HONOREE

MYRALYN NARTEY

President
Playing for Keeps Foundation

Dr. Mimi Nartey is an educator, interdisciplinary scholar, former professional athlete, and nationally recognized community advocate whose work bridges public health, education, and youth development. She holds degrees in Environmental Biology and Climate and Society from Columbia University and completed her doctoral studies in Public Health with a Comparative Education minor. Her career reflects a commitment to advancing equity, opportunity and wellness for young people and families.

A former professional soccer player who represented Ghana in the 2003 FIFA Women's World Cup and earned a silver medal in the 2002 African Women's Cup of Nations, Dr. Nartey understands firsthand the power of sport to transform lives. Transitioning from elite athletics to scholarship and community leadership required navigating new professional spaces and redefining her platform – challenges she embraced with resilience and purpose. She has since dedicated her career to using sport and education as vehicles for empowerment and public health advancement.

Today, Dr. Nartey also serves as Head Coach of the Wiseburn Da Vinci High School Girls Soccer Program, where she has led a measurable cultural transformation centered on excellence, accountability, and character development. Her leadership has inspired student-athletes to perform at high levels academically and athletically while fostering confidence and leadership skills that extend beyond the field. Dr. Nartey embodies leadership that is both visionary and actionable. She does not simply advocate for change – she builds systems, programs and opportunities that create lasting impact. Her work reflects the highest standards of leadership, service, and community responsibility.



CASSANDRA CHASE

FINALIST

Mayor; Youth Empowerment Advocate
City of Lakewood

Cassandra Chase's professional journey is defined by resilience, purpose, and a lifelong commitment to service. Raised in Lakewood, she built her career from the grounds as an educator, social impact leader, and entrepreneur long before entering public office. Inspired by parents of Caribbean heritage who instilled values of culture, service and integrity, Chase has dedicated her career to advancing education, equity and empowerment, co-founding initiatives that provided learning opportunities to close literacy gaps and expand pathways for young people in underserved communities.

As the first Black woman to serve as Mayor of Lakewood, Chase has carried the weight of representation while working to build trust and lead with dignity in spaces where leaders who look like her have historically been underrepresented. She constantly fights and navigates the complexities of governance, while chairing key City Council committees and advancing policies focused on accountability, inclusion, and community wellbeing.



CHRISTINE DESCHAIINE

FINALIST

Senior Vice President
KWP Real Estate

Christine Deschaine is a commercial real estate veteran, retail expert, and non-profit dynamo who puts the best of herself into every endeavor she undertakes. When speaking with Deschaine, you will often hear her talk about "walking alongside" people, joining them on their journeys as an engaged and compassionate partner. Her ability to listen, work hard, and act with integrity has served her well in business and, more importantly, has served the organizations and causes she champions, making an impact on thousands of lives over the years.

With a successful career spanning over 35 years, Christine has distinguished herself as a business leader who is passionate about enhancing communities through her professional and volunteer work, creating value in central business districts across greater Los Angeles while improving the lives of those who live there. She is also a champion of women in the CRE field.



ANNEKE GRECO

FINALIST

Executive Vice President
Colliers

Anneke Greco is an executive vice president based in Colliers' Glendale office. With over 25 years of experience in agency leasing, tenant representation, and investment sales, Greco is highly respected and an expert in every facet of the commercial real estate lifecycle.

Beyond her professional achievements, Greco is deeply committed to giving back to her community through leadership, service and philanthropy. She is an active member of the National Charity League, contributing her time and energy to support local causes and fostering civic responsibility. Her dedication to education and strategic planning is reflected in her role as a Board of Trustees member at Mayfield Senior School in Pasadena, where she serves as Chair of the Master Plan Committee. She is leading the school's most ambitious initiative: the largest Capital Campaign and renovation project in its history.



NANCY MOLENDI

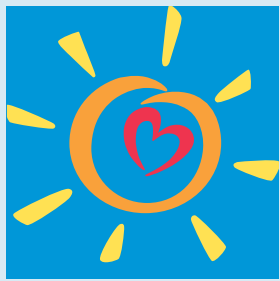
FINALIST

Vice President, Global Corporate Events
& Philanthropy
Mattel, Inc.

Nancy Molenda is Mattel's vice president of global Corporate Events and Philanthropy, where she brings a wealth of experience and expertise, and leverages her passion for fostering community engagement and social responsibility.

Since joining the Mattel Children's Foundation and Philanthropy team in 2015, she's maximized her strengths in relationship building, community outreach, event planning and management, and creativity to develop new philanthropic initiatives and further develop legacy programs at Mattel.

She played a key leadership role in convening a United Nations cohort to establish the International Day of Play, a global movement aligned with UNICEF goals that recognizes play as essential to child development. Building on this momentum, she helped spearhead advocacy efforts that led to the State of California officially proclaiming June 11 as International Day of Play, championing play as a fundamental right for children.



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HONOREES & FINALISTS

THE ACCELERATOR AWARD HONOREE

SANA SARFRAZ

Software Group Manager
Miso Robotics

Sana Sarfraz is a software group manager at Miso Robotics, where she leads a team of six engineers across DevOps, Platforms, Perception, and Actuation to bring autonomous cooking technology to life. She serves as the lead engineer for the Vision and Perception system of Flippy, Miso's flagship robotic fry station, designing the intelligence that allows the robot to learn its environment, adjust its motion in real time, and identify food types with precision. Before her current manager joined, Sana also led the broader software organization at Miso Robotics, demonstrating the kind of quiet, steady leadership that keeps teams focused and products shipping.

Sarfraz's impact has been quantifiable and swift. Since joining in September 2024, she led the delivery of the first third-generation Flippy Fry Stations, increased throughput by 30 percent, reduced robotic arm collisions by a factor of six, and streamlined the release process to double release frequency while cutting deployment time in half, all with a leaner team. These are not incremental improvements. They represent a fundamental transformation in how the product operates and how the engineering organization delivers.

What makes Sarfraz's story especially compelling is the path she took to get here. In late 2023 her position was eliminated. In the months that followed, she simultaneously navigated the uncertainty of her immigration status in the United States, grieved the loss of her mother-in-law, and continued interviewing while volunteering her time to IEEE. She returned to the workforce not diminished but stronger, stepping into a senior leadership role and delivering exceptional results from day one.



DANA CATONE

FINALIST

Senior Project Manager
KPRS Construction

Dana Catone's leadership and technical expertise at KPRS have made her a sought-after senior manager by both clients and peers alike. Catone began at KPRS as an intern in 2013. From that time, she grew in her career as a project engineer, project manager and now senior project manager, constructing a substantial volume of work in both the office and industrial markets for KPRS.

Some of her most significant work within the LA region includes the construction of 8888 Washington Blvd in Culver City. The iconic building houses retail on the ground floor with offices now occupied by Pinterest. She was also part of the team who constructed Building Y at the Culver Studios, as well as the landmark Entrada building in Culver City. Catone is now providing oversight on construction of the newest Equinox located within Entrada.



CHRISTINA CHOI

FINALIST

SVP; Banking Manager
Hanmi Bank

Christina Choi is an emerging leader at Hanmi Bank who has distinguished herself through her ability to drive meaningful operational changes while building high-performing, people-centered teams. With over a decade of experience in banking, she brings a combination of technical expertise, cross-functional collaboration, and a leadership style rooted in adaptability and empathy.

Over the past two years, Choi played a key leadership role in the implementation of Hanmi's new loan operations system, a transformative, bank-wide initiative to digitize and streamline the loan lifecycle. Representing the SBA division, she worked across departments to ensure the platform met complex regulatory and operational requirements while also adapting it to support multiple lending frameworks. This required her to step outside of her core area of expertise, develop a deep understanding of commercial lending processes, and work closely with operations and technology teams to resolve system limitations.



FATEMEH KAZEMI

FINALIST

Production Coordinator
AC Martin

Fatemeh Kazemi is a globally experienced designer and emerging leader who values inclusive, human-centered design. Born in London in a dual language household and raised in Tehran, Kazemi developed an early grasp on navigating different perspectives. Now based in Los Angeles, Kazemi specializes in multi-family residential projects, believing the home is where architecture can have a considerably meaningful impact on people's daily lives. She is committed to the importance of creating inclusive spaces. Her mission is exemplified in one of her favorite projects she's worked on – the Saguaro project in Palmdale for Affirmed Housing – where she helped to design affordable housing with a "resort-like" quality without compromising dignity or design integrity.

Kazemi represents a new generation of women in architecture who are reshaping the industry. She believes exceptional leadership does not require conforming to male-dominated norms, but instead elevates qualities historically undervalued in the profession.



DAHLIA MALDONADO

FINALIST

Nursing Practice Outcomes and
Magnet Program Coordinator
UCLA Health

Dahlia Maldonado began her clinical career at UCLA Santa Monica Medical Center, spending five years as a bedside clinician and rising to Administrative Nurse I, where she mentored new nurses, led evidence-based practice initiatives, and improved patient outcomes in measurable ways. In 2022, she stepped into her first formal leadership role as the nursing practice outcomes and Magnet Program coordinator for the hospital, taking on one of the most demanding designations in healthcare: the American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Recognition Program, held by fewer than 10% of hospitals in the nation.

Maldonado's leadership has never been confined to the walls of one institution. Recognizing that the healthcare system is a system shaped by policy, she became a fierce advocate for changing it. She was selected as an ANACalifornia Advocacy Fellow, where she created The Advocacy Institute Guide, a resource to help nurses engage in local and state health policy.

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HONOREES & FINALISTS

NEXTGEN WOMAN OF THE YEAR HONOREE

KYLIE RAWN

Senior Associate
Cushman & Wakefield

Kylie Rawn represents the next generation of leadership within commercial real estate – one defined by grit, presence, resilience, and a deep commitment to earning trust through action. In nearly five years at Cushman & Wakefield, Rawn has advanced from coordinator to a trusted, integral member of Team Condon, led by one of the firm's highest-ranking brokers in the Western region. Her progression was not driven by entitlement or timing, but by outworking expectations, stepping into complexity early, and consistently making herself indispensable in high-pressure, high-stakes environments.

Entering a male-dominated industry without a roadmap, Rawn learned by doing – navigating strong personalities, complex transactions, and real-time challenges with maturity beyond her years. She sought feedback, asked hard questions, embraced discomfort, and allowed results to speak for themselves. Her leadership formation has also been shaped by exposure to authentic sponsorship, notably through working alongside a senior leader who actively champions women in real estate, influencing how Rawn approaches mentorship and pays it forward.

In January 2025, Rawn experienced a profound personal loss when her family lost three homes – including her childhood home – in the Los Angeles wildfires. The following morning, she was back in the office. Not from obligation, but from conviction. Her decision to show up modeled resilience, grace and purpose, setting a quiet but powerful standard for her peers. Rawn's trajectory, mindset, and growing influence exemplify the essence of an Accelerator Award recipient – someone early in tenure, but already shaping culture, outcomes, and the future of the organization.



ALIYA ASTAPHAN

FINALIST

Associate
Snell & Wilmer

Aliya Astaphan is a dynamic litigation attorney whose practice focuses on complex commercial disputes and intellectual property matters. She represents clients in high-stakes cases involving breach of contract, business torts, trademark infringement, and defamation. Her work often sits at the intersection of law, media, and emerging societal issues, requiring both technical precision and strategic insight.

As an early-career attorney, Astaphan has distinguished herself by quickly building credibility in sophisticated litigation environments. She has navigated the challenges of developing a strong professional voice while handling nuanced, high-pressure matters, consistently demonstrating an ability to synthesize complex legal issues and deliver thoughtful, effective advocacy. Her selection as a 2024 Leadership Council on Legal Diversity Pathfinder further underscores her recognition as a rising leader in the legal field.



LISETTE GAVIÑA LOPEZ

FINALIST

Managing Director; Chairman of the Board
Gaviña Coffee Company

Lisette Gaviña Lopez is a fourth-generation coffee roaster and an inspiring business leader who proudly carries forward the 150-year legacy of the Gaviña family. As chairman of the Board and managing director of sales and marketing for Gaviña Coffee Company, Lopez plays a pivotal role in guiding one of America's largest family-owned coffee companies and the nation's largest privately held minority-owned coffee roaster. Founded in Vernon in 1967, the company's roots trace back to the Gaviña family's beginnings as coffee growers and roasters in Cuba. Lopez has embraced the responsibility of preserving this heritage while evolving the company for the future.

In her leadership role, Lopez oversees the strategy and growth of the company's brands, including Don Francisco's Coffee, Cafe La Llave Espresso, Gaviña Gourmet Coffee, and Jose's Gourmet Coffee.



HANNAH MAILE

FINALIST

Senior Associate, Capital Markets
Avison Young

Hannah Maile represents the next generation of capital markets leadership, combining institutional-level execution with forward-looking strategy. As a senior associate on Avison Young's West Los Angeles Capital Markets team, she has become a key driver on complex, high-profile assignments spanning land, multifamily, and mixed-use development across major markets.

In the past year, Maile has played a central role in advancing transformative opportunities, including the 132-acre Plum Creek Innovation Campus in Texas, The Echo Park Collection in Los Angeles, and multiple large-scale development and adaptive reuse projects totaling over \$400 million in value. Her contributions extend beyond execution. She develops data-driven positioning strategies, builds targeted investor outreach campaigns, and identifies unconventional value drivers that expand buyer pools and enhance asset performance. What distinguishes Maile is her ability to think strategically at a level well beyond her years of experience.



DANA RITTER

FINALIST

Integrated Construction Technology Manager
PCL Construction

Dana Ritter represents the next generation of leadership by redefining how construction teams use technology to solve problems earlier and deliver with greater certainty. Joining PCL Construction in 2019, and relatively early in her career, she took on a major responsibility on the \$1.2 billion LAX Consolidated Rent-A-Car Facility (ConRAC), one of the most complex projects in the region and the largest cast-in-place concrete project of its kind at 6.3 million square feet, quite the first experience.

On that project, Ritter was a key player and supported utility modeling, foundation coordination, overhead MEPFP coordination, and composite coordination drawings on a project with enormous scale and complexity. Her contributions to the ConRAC project are ubiquitous and her encyclopedic knowledge of the project is remarkable. Since then, her experience has expanded across health care, higher education, K-12, laboratory, athletics, and mission critical work.

Advocates, Mentors, *and* Industry Changers

The Agency Congratulates Our Colleagues

NOMINATED FOR *THE LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL'S* 2026 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARDS.



Rainy Hake Austin
Executive of the Year



Deedee Howard
Mentor of the Year



Gina Michelle
The Accelerator



Gloria Castellanos
Champion of Women



Monique Navarro
Community Impact Advocate



Jeeb O'Reilly
Mentor of the Year

We are incredibly proud to share that six of our team members have been nominated for *The Los Angeles Business Journal's* 2026 Women in Leadership Awards. Their leadership, mentorship, and advocacy remind us of the meaningful impact one person can make. Congratulations to our amazing nominees!



CONGRATULATIONS 2026 NOMINEES

Gina Abbott	Ashley Beimford	Loren Castle	Maryam Deilami	Carisa Ferrer	Dianne Gubin	P. Joy Huffman	Vivian Kim
Deidra Acquah	Amanda Beltran	Dana Catone	Suzanne DeJong	Shira Fine	Ikram Guerd	Karen Hunt	Debbie Kim
Bridget Ahern	Ashley Benitez	Kristen Cerf	Brenda Demers	Maritza Flores	Maria Guido	Maria Hunter	Celina Kirchner
Sandra Aispuro	Susan Berman	LaReine Chabut	Christine Deschaine	Carrie Fogliani	Susan Gutierrez	Meymuna Hussein-Cattan	Brita Kleingartner
Hiko Akopyan	Barbara Bernstein	Jennifer Chang	Madeline Di Nonno	Renee Fraser	Monica Gutierrez-McCarthy	Fiona Hutton	Taylor Kogler
Susie Albin-Najera	Sunny Beutler	Emily Chang	Kristine Dillon	Christina Fung	Candice Tahour Hakimfar	Cristina Hwang	Sara Kornblatt
Natasha Aminpour	Anita Bhatia	Shawna Charles	Suzie Doran	Barbara Gadbois	Jennifer Halvas	Johanna Hyoty	Sarah Kosasky
Danielle Andersen	Kavitha Bhatia, MD, MMM, FAAP, FACHE	Cassandra Chase	Susy Dowell	Shawna Gale	Ann Hamilton	Shelley Iocona	Julia Kozlov
Sahar Andrade, MB.BCh	Tania Birker	Christina Choi	Melissa Dowler	Claudia Garza	Erica Hansen	Morgan Jackson	Rosanne Kuder
Maribeth Annaguey	Kristen Blunt	Flora Chou	Darlene Duran	Lauren Gautschi	Cooper Harris	Kirsti Jane	Deborah La Franchi
Alison Steinlauf Anziska	Lise Bornstein	Jennet Chow	Erin Earlywine	Julie Gerchik	Genie Harrison	Wandala Johnson	Natalie Lagunas
Rainy Hake Austin	Michelle Brazil	Olga Chrysostomides	Anna Eckelberry	Lori Girgis	Kelly Heinen	Wendy Levy Kaaya	Francine Lai
Tracy Arceci	Dawn L. Brown	Anna Chung	Kathryn Eidmann	Christine Gonzalez	Ellie Heisler	Yuliya Kaminskaya	Molly Larson
Marisela Arechiga	Lila Brown	Diana Ordaz Cherrington	Joyce Eisenberg	Tawny Graham	Beth Hilbing	Fatemeh Kazemi	Lois Lee
Jennifer Armstrong	Connie Brown	Nancy Coblenz	Jill Epstein	Samantha Grant	Katie Hill	Mari-Anne Kehler	Eunice Lee
Aliya Astaphan	Caitlin Bryant	Melissa Cohen	Allison Etkin	Sarah Graves	Shafali Hill	Cynthia Kelley	Tina A. Leggbelossi
Sally Aubury	Kay Buck	Carolyn Rae Cole	Jade Everage	Demetria Graves	Katrina Holliday	Gisselle Kelley	Kawanna Leggett
Jacquelyn Ayala	Amanda Bunn	Sara Collins	Karen Fairey	Debra Gray	Melanie Horowitz	Khryzza Kelley	Delilah Lanoix
Raquel Baldelomar	Corina Casco, LCSW, MSW	Erika Contreras	Anna Joo Fee	Anneke Greco	Deedee Howard	Jazz Keyes	Julia Leonard
Susan Bazarsky	Gloria Castellanos	Simone Date	Jane Feinberg	Cathleen Green	Teresa Huang	Kacy Keys	Savannah Levin
		Martha de la Torre	Adrienne Ferree	Donna Grissom		Channing Kilani	Jennifer Lieser



CONGRATULATIONS Anna Tom!

Valley Bank congratulates **Anna Tom, SVP, Commercial Banking Relationship Manager**, on being named a 2026 nominee for the Los Angeles Business Journal's Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards, honoring outstanding women leaders making a difference throughout Los Angeles.

Valley Bank
LA Commercial Banking Office
555 West Fifth St., Suite 3300
Los Angeles, California 90013





Amy Jane Longo	Dennise Mejia	Kama Nist	La Keisha Landrum	Miray Rossi	Kay Sides	Vanessa Terzian	Jennie VonCannon
Lisette Gavina Lopez	Debra Ellwood	Myra Nourmand	Pierre	Miri Rossitto	Danone Simpson	Ashley Tesoriero	Kristen Walker
Dana Lowy	Meppen	Kelly O'Connell	Sahara Pynes	Lori Roth	Renata Simril	Gillian Tiede	Rue Walker
Kelli MacIver	Maesha Merchant	Kaylee O'Connor	Vera Quinn	Judy Friedman	Wendy Smith	Anna Tom	Christine Walker-
Hannah Maile	Lisa Helfend Meyer	Kelly O'Neil	Heather Quinn	Rudzki	Samantha F. Spector	Tatevik Torossian	Bowman
Rochelle Atlas Maize	Gina Michelle	Jeeb O'Reilly	Bee Rarewala	Natalie Rutledge	Heather Spilsbury	Jesa Townsend	Tammy Wallace
Dahlia Maldonado	Karen Miesner	Doreen Marie Olson	Kylie Rawn	Trish Ryan	Johnese Spisso	Mary Tran	Lily Walzak
Anastasia K Mann	Janice L. Miller	Olivia Olson	Angela Reddock-	Paige Samblanet	Rachel Springate	Stormy Tripp	Jackie Ward
Dr. Drebra Manuel-	Ekaterina Mironova	Dana Ontiveros	Wright	Mia Samson	Mercy Steenwyk	Christine Trunick	Jennifer Weerheim
Smith	Elizabeth Mitchell	Katherine Rodriguez	Sima Reid	Sana Sarfraz	Emily Lou Steenwyk	Olga Tsokova	Panney Wei
Nina Marino	Cynthia Mitchell-	Orbach	Jessica Reilly, MSW	Kristina Sawyer	Viktoriya Stinson	Teresa Turner	Laura Wilhelm
Brenda Martin	Heard	Sara Orellana	Chelsey Reynolds	Bonnie Schlachte	Khristina Stone	Kendal Turner	Rayni Williams
Tanya Martin	Kayoko Mitsumatsu	Jessica Ormandy	Jenny Rieu	Lara Schmoisman	Shanelle Sua	Jaimie Turner	Donna Wilson
Valentina Martinelli	Nancy Molenda	Anoosheh Oskouian	Dana Ritter	Sherry Sedighi	Elisabeth (Liz) Suh	Kimberly Burns	Danielle Yamane
Monica Martinez	Ellen Montz	Kadriye Ozdayi	Amber Rivas	Laura Segura	Kristen Sullivan	Turner	Elizabeth Yano
Jasmyn Masters-	Jimena Moreno	Kim Patten	Teresa Roberson	Suzanne Seini	Randi Sunshine	Linda Valencia	Brenda Zamzow
Culpepper	Sarah Moses	Tia Boatman	Lyssa Roberts	Shannon Sheehan	Sheba	Annette Valle	Sally Zesut
Precious Mayes	Myralyn Nartey	Patterson	Samantha Rogers	Shawn Sheffield	Taherizadegan	Andrea Vargas	Judy Zhu
Torrey McClary	Monique Navarro	Nora Perez	Andrea Roschke	Lauren Sheridan	Rachel Guanwei Tao	Christy Vega	Andrea Zoeckler
Vallerie E. McDaniel	Lizbeth Nevarez	Gina Perez	Genna Rosenberg	Rasha Shields	Julie D. Taylor	Vanessa Vigil	Nina Zokhrabyan
Samantha McNulty	Toni Newman	Jan Perry	Erin Ross	Oshrit Shlomian	Dr. Sara Terheggen	Erin Voisin	



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REDEFINING LEADERSHIP IN CRE

Featuring Cushman & Wakefield's nominees for the **Los Angeles Business Journal's 2026 Women's Leadership Awards**

What does redefining leadership *mean to you?*

Lead with intention, act with integrity and inspire action.”

— **MICHELLE BRAZIL**
Director of Operations

Leadership is constantly improving and elevating the people around you.”

— **MORGAN JACKSON**
Senior Director

Be the example, not the exception.”

— **KYLIE RAWN**
Senior Associate

Creating joy for others and being their biggest champion.”

— **DEIDRA ACQUAH**
Senior Marketing Manager

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Building Cultures Where People Belong and Grow

By MELANIE HOROWITZ

As leaders, we often talk about developing talent, but some of the most impactful moments in a person's career happen because someone believed in them before they had the opportunity to prove themselves. Many of us can point to a leader who advocated for us behind closed doors, recommended us for an opportunity or gave us a seat at the table before we thought we were ready.

Organizations that want to attract, develop and retain great people must intentionally create cultures where advocacy, empowerment and curiosity are part of the everyday experience — not just leadership buzzwords.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

After years of contributing to professional development programs, I have found that advancement rarely begins with capability alone. Instead, it begins with advocacy. Many high-performing employees are doing great work every day, but without visibility, sponsorship and leadership support, their contributions can go unnoticed.

Advocacy can take many forms: it can be a formal mentorship program or career coaching. It can also be much simpler. Sometimes advocacy is a leader speaking positively about an employee in a meeting they are not part of. Sometimes it is recommending someone for a

project that will stretch their skills or introducing them to people who can help them grow.

One of the most meaningful opportunities in my career came because a leader advocated for me before I saw the potential in myself. When responsibility for continuing professional education shifted to the audit practice, my supervisor encouraged me to take ownership of the program. That experience ultimately led to a leadership role and demonstrated firsthand how advocacy can open doors that might otherwise remain closed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPOWERMENT

A survey conducted by Gallup showcases how employees that are engaged in their work and organization actually deliver stronger client outcomes and higher productivity. And employees are more likely to contribute ideas, ask questions, challenge assumptions and think strategically when they feel trusted to do so. Empowerment requires leaders to create an environment where people know their perspectives are valued and where thoughtful risk-taking is encouraged.

One of the most effective ways organizations can empower employees is by giving them exposure to conversations that shape the future of the business. Invite emerging leaders to strategy discussions. Create opportunities for employees across levels to collaborate on solving challenges.

When employees are given a seat at the table before they reach leadership positions, they gain

confidence, develop critical thinking skills and begin to see themselves as future leaders.

At GHJ, empowerment also shows up through the spaces we create for employees to connect across departments and levels. Our Women's Empowerment, Parenting and BIPOC cohorts were created to give employees a place to be seen and heard, share experiences, build community and support one another.

These cohorts create opportunities for employees to learn from different perspectives, form meaningful relationships and feel a stronger sense of belonging within the firm. They also reinforce that empowerment is not only about giving employees opportunities to lead externally with clients, but also creating internal environments where people feel supported, valued and confident using their voice.

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF CURIOSITY

When employees know their leaders are advocating for them and trust them to contribute, they naturally can become more engaged. They will start to ask better questions and challenge outdated processes. And they may seek new ways to solve problems and improve outcomes.

Curiosity fuels innovation and encourages people to look beyond how it has always been done to consider what is possible.

Organizations that foster curiosity create

One of the most meaningful opportunities in my career came because a leader advocated for me before I saw the potential in myself.

environments where learning is continuous and improvement becomes everyone's responsibility — not just that of leadership.

INVEST IN ADVOCACY AND EMPOWERMENT

Among the best leaders are the ones who take the time to advocate for others, challenge them and provide opportunities that help shape people's careers. Those actions reinforce an important lesson: leadership is not about being the smartest person in the room. It is about helping others realize their potential.

The most effective organizations invest in advocacy, empowerment and curiosity to create environments where employees do not just perform — they belong and grow.

Melanie Horowitz is audit principal at GHJ. Learn more at ghjadvisors.com.



Congratulations Ashley Tesoriero

Congratulations to our own Ashley Tesoriero, Director of National Project Management, and all of the Women's Leadership Awards nominees. We thank you for your leadership and continual pursuit of excellence.



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Empowering Women. Protecting Rights. Driving Change.

Shegerian & Associates proudly celebrates the remarkable women honored at the LA Business Journal Women's Leadership Symposium. True leadership means more than recognition — it means ensuring every woman is treated fairly at work. That commitment drove us to secure a \$14 million verdict for Dr. Lauren Pinter-Brown in her gender discrimination case against the Regents of the University of California.



Keeping Los Angeles Covered Means All-In on Our Community and Its Healthcare

By MELANIE FONTES RAINER

Los Angeles County is home to world-class talent, innovation, and opportunity. It is also home to far too many families whose health and stability depend on a safety net that is increasingly stretched beyond capacity. In the year ahead, these families will face immense hurdles to maintain coverage and stay healthy.

Our healthcare system is at an inflection point, requiring providers, health plans, government agencies, community organizations, promotoras, community health workers, and businesses to work together to keep people connected to care.

That's why L.A. Care Health Plan, the nation's largest publicly operated plan, has prioritized investing in our communities and strengthening the safety net across Los Angeles County. Our mission calls on us to support the providers, clinics, hospitals, and community-based organizations that serve as the foundation of care for millions of Angelenos.

These organizations help families access food, behavioral health services, housing resources, enrollment assistance, and other support needed to navigate an increasingly complex healthcare system. Now more than ever, we

must come together to Keep L.A. Covered.

We have seen how these investments make a difference in practical, immediate ways. Food insecurity is not just a social challenge; it is a health challenge. Families cannot effectively manage chronic conditions when they are struggling to put food on the table. That is why we have supported emergency food security efforts by funding food banks and pantries throughout Los Angeles County.

We have also invested in wildfire recovery and relief because disasters disrupt every part of a family's life, including access to healthcare. When homes are lost, medications are displaced, or transportation is interrupted, recovery becomes even more difficult. Supporting communities as they rebuild is an important part of supporting health.

Our investments also extend to the people who make the safety net work. Through scholarships, training programs, and recruitment efforts, we are helping to strengthen the pipeline of clinicians and community health workers who will care for our region for years to come.

Investing in our safety net is a key part of our Keep L.A. Covered work. New changes will require some individuals to renew their coverage every six months instead of annually,

'Investing in our safety net is a key part of our Keep L.A. Covered work.'

which could mean that a person loses their care because of an incorrect zip code or missing piece of information. And, new changes will require certain individuals on Medi-Cal to participate in community engagement, meaning these individuals must demonstrate they are working, volunteering, or going to school at least 80 hours a month to keep their coverage. At a time when many people are worried about their healthcare, it is imperative that we invest in our trusted community voices and partners throughout the county to create and connect people with programs and tools to help them stay covered.

Since action often starts with awareness, one way to help preserve coverage is through our Coverage Champions program. Community organizations – and even local businesses – can receive training to help increase awareness about coverage changes, share information

through events and social media, and support residents in maintaining their health coverage.

Business can also partner with us by creating volunteer opportunities and serving as trusted community hubs that help residents meet requirements and stay engaged with available resources.

We invite organizations across Los Angeles County to join us in this effort and become Coverage Champions. To learn more, visit lacare.org/coverage-champions.

At its core, this is about how we show up for each other. No single organization can solve the challenges facing the safety net alone. But when health plans, providers, public agencies, businesses, and community organizations work together, we can make a meaningful difference. We can help families stay covered.

That is the promise of Keep L.A. Covered: not simply to insure people, but to ensure that coverage is real, durable, and connected to the support families need to thrive.

Melanie Fontes Rainer is the chief strategy and transformation officer of L.A. Care Health Plan, the largest publicly-operated health plan in the nation serving more than two million Angelenos. Learn more at LACare.org.



CONGRATULATIONS NOMINEES!

You're all Playing for Keeps!

We are so proud of our president and 2026 finalist, Dr. Mimi Nartey, whose tireless work from boardrooms to sports fields is creating safe, equitable access to play for kids in underserved communities.



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Congratulations to Nina Zokhrabyan

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER | CHRISTIE'S INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Play Isn't a Luxury — It's a Public Health Imperative

By DR. MIMI NARTEY

Across America, too many children are losing access to one of the most essential ingredients for healthy development: opportunities to play.

Play is not simply recreation. It is how children build physical fitness, confidence, resilience, and social skills. It fosters leadership, belonging, and lifelong habits of health. Yet as youth physical activity rates decline and communities face limited recreational infrastructure, access to safe spaces for play has become increasingly unequal.

As an environmental scientist, public health scholar, former professional athlete, and President of the Playing for Keeps Foundation, I see this issue at the intersection of health, environment, and community design. From that perspective, one truth is clear: access to play is essential public health infrastructure.

The science is clear. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. It also improves mental health, cognitive function, and academic performance. Yet despite this, youth activity levels continue to fall.

This is not accidental. It reflects diminished access to safe, reliable opportunities for physical activity.

In dense and under-resourced communities, children often have far fewer recreational options than their peers in affluent neighborhoods.

When fields are unavailable, parks overcrowded, or infrastructure insufficient, the result is simple: fewer chances to move, participate, and thrive.

This is why play equity matters.

Play equity recognizes that access to safe recreational space is uneven. Children in well-resourced communities have options; those in underserved areas often do not. When field availability shrinks, the impact disproportionately affects those already facing barriers.

The consequences are measurable: higher rates of childhood obesity, poorer mental health outcomes, and disparities in academic success. Access to safe play environments is a critical social determinant of health.

Yet too often, recreational infrastructure is treated as expendable.

This issue is especially relevant as communities across California, including Los Angeles, debate restrictions on artificial turf. These discussions are important—but they frequently overlook a critical question: How do we preserve and expand opportunities for children to be physically active?

Too often, debates center on materials and hypothetical risks while ignoring a more immediate threat: lack of access. In many communities, the question is no longer where children play—but whether they can play at all.

In high-demand areas, natural grass fields alone often cannot meet recreational needs. They require intensive maintenance, wear out



quickly, and are frequently closed due to overuse or weather. The result is reduced access and fewer opportunities for children to participate in sports and outdoor activity.

When access declines, participation follows—and so do health consequences.

We cannot separate environmental priorities from human outcomes. True sustainability requires both.

That means supporting consistent, year-round access to recreation. It means investing in solutions that reduce environmental impact while preserving opportunities for physical activity. And it requires avoiding one-dimensional policies that ignore real-world trade-offs.

We should continue improving materials, advancing safety standards, and minimizing environmental impacts—but not at the expense of access.

Because this isn't just about infrastructure.

It's about whether a child has a place to go after school. Whether communities can support youth sports. Whether we are building environments that promote lifelong health—or quietly eroding them.

At the Playing for Keeps Foundation, we believe every child deserves access to safe, reliable spaces for play, regardless of zip code.

The greatest public health threat facing our children is not what they are playing on—it is that too many no longer have a place to play.

The path forward requires balance. It demands solutions that protect both environmental integrity and human health while expanding access. That includes regulating—not eliminating—recreational infrastructure, adopting safer materials, and ensuring responsible end-of-life practices.

This is how we move forward: by safeguarding children's health in every sense—through access to activity and the use of better, safer systems.

Because play is not optional. It is a fundamental right of childhood.

Dr. Mimi Nartey is an interdisciplinary scholar, former professional soccer player, philanthropist, and the founding president of the Playing for Keeps Foundation. Visit playing4keeps.org to learn more about the Playing for Keeps Foundation and how it is ensuring kids across the country have safe, equitable access to play.



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CONGRATULATIONS DELILAH LANOIX

2026 Innovator of the Year



Butterfli Technologies proudly congratulates our Co-Founder & CEO, Delilah Lanoix, on being recognized as Innovator of the Year at the Los Angeles Business Journal's 2026 Women's Leadership Awards.

Her vision, leadership, and dedication to helping individuals overcome mobility challenges by providing accessible transportation to healthcare appointments, essential services, and everyday destinations continue to make a meaningful impact in communities across California.



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California Invests \$26 Million to Recruit More Women Into Construction Careers

In an effort to address statewide construction needs and build equity in the workforce, the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) and its Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) announced last year that 25 construction apprenticeship programs have been awarded \$26 million in Equal Representation in Construction Apprenticeship (ERiCA) grants. This funding aims to increase access to construction careers for women and disadvantaged communities.

“With this funding, we are addressing barriers that women face when trying to enter into construction careers,” said DAS Chief Adele Burnes. “It has been empowering to see the ERiCA grants at work and watch apprentices successfully land jobs in the skilled trades and earn family-sustaining wages.”

CHILD CARE, RECRUITMENT, AND IMPROVING WORKSITE CULTURE

This new funding will support three core areas identified as needed to hire and retain a diverse workforce in the building trades:

- **\$11.8 million** will go towards offsetting the cost of childcare for pre-apprentices and apprentices. Flexible childcare funding has been identified as one of the primary barriers that women apprentices face in the con-

struction industry. They often need to start working on a jobsite before many daycares open.

- **\$7.2 million** to support targeted recruitment efforts to improve gender representation and advance equity.

- **\$7 million** to improve worksite culture by providing mentoring and mental health support. This funding supports anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training for construction crews to create a more welcoming environment for all.

ERiCA AWARDEES

This is the second round of ERiCA grant funding. During the first round, \$25 million in funds were disbursed to 19 programs.

In this round, 25 building trades organizations that work with programs to recruit, support, and retain workers are receiving funding. Awardee highlights include:

- **Cerritos College** received \$1.25 million in ERiCA funding, which will be used to support its field ironwork apprenticeship program, where women are learning how to reinforce concrete with steel and cables.

- **Los Angeles and Orange Counties Building Trades Council Apprenticeship**

Readiness Fund received \$2.5 million for childcare, recruitment, and worksite culture. This nationally recognized program provides the skills and training needed to launch successful careers in a range of essential trades, including painting, plumbing, sheet metal works and more.

- **San Diego Electrical Training Trust** received \$700,000 in funding. Through this program, apprentices are obtaining hands-on experience in sustainable construction projects and learning about electric vehicle infrastructure, as well as solar system design and installation.

- **Associated Builders and Contractors of Southern California** received \$550,000 in funding. Over the next two years, the organization is striving to double the number of women enrolled in its programs through outreach efforts and strategic partnerships with flagship groups such as the National Association of Women in Construction.

- **The Construction Trades Workforce Initiative (CTWI)** is a program that has demonstrated success and has been awarded \$2.4 million. Apprentices who graduate from CTWI typically earn starting wages of \$75,000 or more per year.

‘With this funding, we are addressing barriers that women face when trying to enter into construction careers.’

ADELE BURNES
DAS

HOW WE GOT HERE

The state plans to invest \$180 billion in infrastructure over the next decade. Workforce development and apprenticeships are central to California’s plan to meet infrastructure needs and large-scale development projects. Governor Gavin Newsom aims to serve 500,000 apprentices by 2029.

Expanding access to equitable building trades apprenticeships is outlined as a key strategy to advance apprenticeships in California, outlined by DAS and the Labor Workforce Development Agency’s Five-Point Action Plan.

Learn more at dir.ca.gov.

HillsidesCares

Healing Together

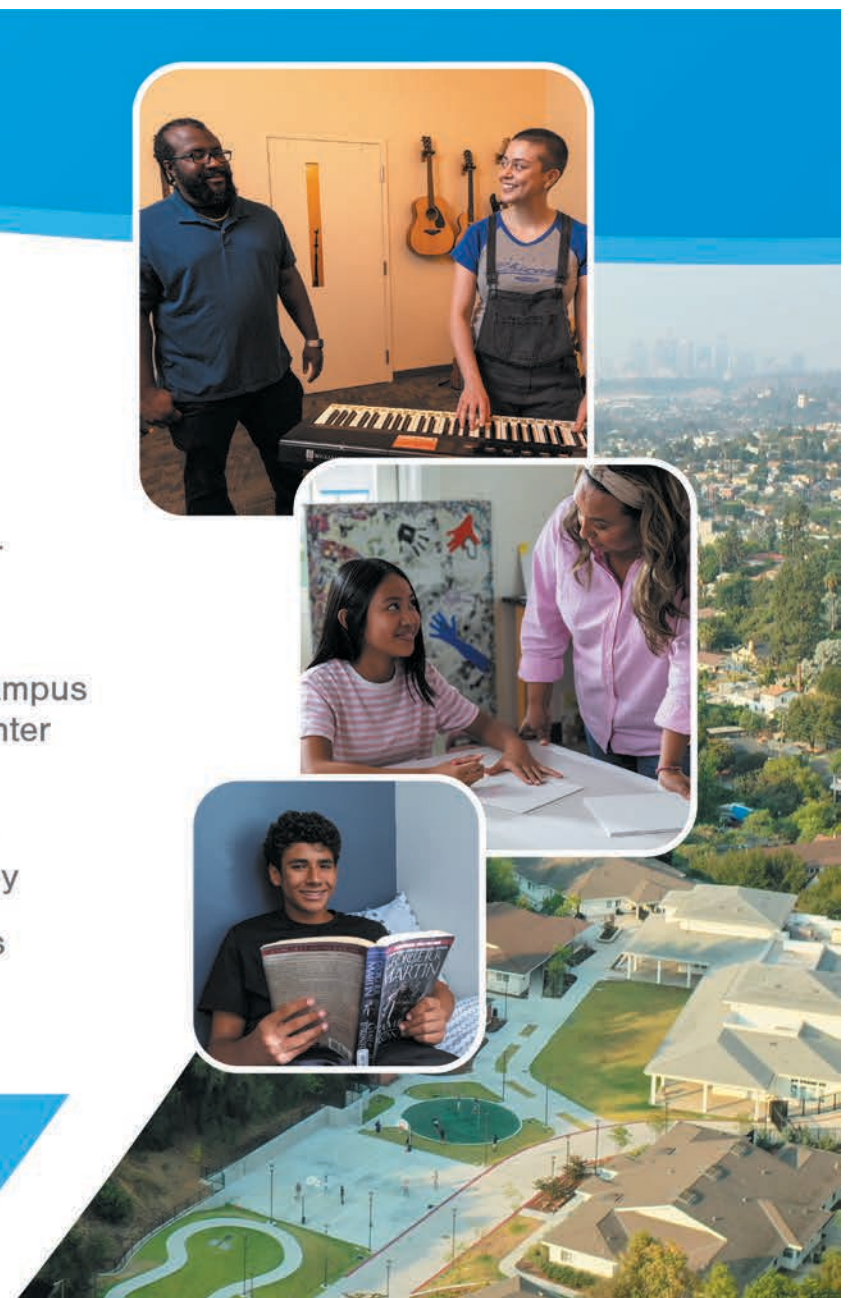
A safe place for children and teens to heal

When your child is struggling, it can feel like everything stops. At HillsidesCares, we help children and teens ages 6–17 find their way forward with comprehensive mental health support.

- ▶ **Spacious healing environment:** A serene 17-acre Pasadena campus with outdoor spaces, home-like cottages, and an enrichment center with a music room, art room, and gym
- ▶ **Three levels of care:** Continuum of care from residential to day treatment programs to support families along their child’s journey
- ▶ **Compassionate expertise:** Our team of dedicated professionals offers evidence-based therapies and trauma-informed care



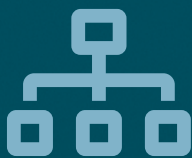
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Paying It Forward: Effectively Mentoring the Next Generation

By ANDREA SANDOR

As women continue to gain ground in executive leadership roles across industries, many are recognizing an important responsibility that comes with their success: helping other women advance. Mentorship has long been one of the most powerful tools for professional development, and for women navigating leadership pathways, guidance from experienced executives can make a significant difference.

Research consistently shows that women benefit from having mentors and sponsors who can offer advice, advocate for opportunities, and help them navigate workplace challenges. Yet effective mentoring involves much more than occasional career conversations. The most impactful executive mentors actively invest in developing future leaders and creating pathways for long-term success.

Here are several key strategies women executives can use to become influential mentors.

SHARE THE REALITY

Emerging leaders often see executives as individuals who have achieved seamless career success. However, one of the most valuable

gifts a mentor can provide is honesty about the obstacles encountered along the way.

Discussing career setbacks, difficult decisions, failed projects, and lessons learned helps mentees understand that leadership journeys are rarely linear. Transparency builds trust and provides practical insights that can help younger professionals overcome their own challenges with greater confidence.

FOCUS ON CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Many talented women struggle with self-doubt, particularly when pursuing promotions, negotiating compensation, or stepping into leadership positions. Mentors can play a critical role in helping mentees recognize their strengths and trust their capabilities.

Effective mentors encourage women to pursue stretch assignments, speak up in meetings, and take calculated risks. Sometimes, a mentor's belief in a mentee's potential can provide the confidence needed to pursue opportunities that may have otherwise seemed out of reach.

MOVE BEYOND ADVICE

Mentorship and sponsorship are related but distinct. While mentors offer guidance, sponsors actively advocate for individuals within their

organizations and professional networks.

Women executives can create meaningful impact by recommending talented women for leadership opportunities, introducing them to influential contacts, and ensuring they are considered for high-visibility projects. Sponsorship often helps emerging leaders gain access to opportunities that might not be available through merit alone.

ENCOURAGE AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Historically, many women felt pressure to adopt leadership styles that mirrored traditional executive models. Today's workplaces increasingly recognize the value of diverse leadership approaches.

Mentors should encourage women to develop leadership styles that align with their personalities, values, and strengths. Authenticity often leads to stronger employee engagement, better communication, and more effective leadership outcomes.

HELP BUILD STRATEGIC NETWORKS

Career advancement is often influenced by relationships as much as performance. Many successful executives attribute part of their career growth to strong professional networks.

Women mentors can help mentees understand the importance of networking and relationship-building. Introducing mentees to colleagues, industry associations, and leadership groups can significantly expand their professional visibility and opportunities.

In addition, mentors can teach women how to cultivate meaningful professional relationships rather than viewing networking as a purely transactional activity.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Perhaps the most powerful mentoring tool is demonstrating leadership through actions. Mentees observe how executives communicate, make decisions, handle challenges, and support others.

Women leaders who model integrity, empathy, accountability, and continuous learning provide a living example of effective leadership. These behaviors often leave lasting impressions that influence future leadership styles.

The most successful mentors recognize that every interaction can serve as a teaching moment.

Andrea Sandor is a freelance writer focused on women's issues.



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