



*The region's top young leaders channel their inner child*

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## FOREWORD

The funny thing about aging is that when you're young, you can't wait to become an adult. And as you get older, you wish you were a kid again. Unfortunately, no one has invented a time machine yet, so traveling back to your childhood isn't possible. However, even with all the responsibilities that come with being a grown-up, it's still possible—and we say essential—to hold on to your childlike enthusiasm, curiosity and energy.

That was the idea behind the 2018 40 Under 40 publication. We wanted to bring out the kid in each of this year's honorees. And what better place to do that than at the Sacramento Children's Museum, a veritable funhouse with all kinds of colorful and interactive



Sam Boykin is managing editor for the Sacramento Business Journal.

exhibits, displays and games. While these accomplished young professionals are all dealing with busy schedules, deadlines and, in some cases, parenthood, they all got into the spirit of this year's theme, which comes through in their photographs.

Of course, what this year's class of 40 Under 40 honorees has accomplished is not child's play. They've all worked hard, competed and achieved an impressive level of suc-

cess. And the good news for Sacramento is that they're just getting started. Representing industries ranging from law and health care to real estate and technology, these young professionals are helping boost the region's vitality and competitiveness. Moreover, they're making the city a better place to live, as they all give back to the community in meaningful ways.

I hope you enjoy this year's 40 Under 40 publication as much as we enjoyed putting it together. The Business Journal is in the unique position to not only help our readers grow their businesses, advance their careers and simplify their professional lives, but we also get to highlight exceptional young talent that deserves special recognition.

## ABOUT THE COVER



This year's cover (and back cover) was created and designed by SBJ lead designer Stephanie Hays and photographed by SBJ photo editor Dennis McCoy. The idea of childhood creativity, imagination, enthusiasm and fun was embodied with Legos, a quintessential children's toy.

The photo is a composite image. The 40/40 model (right) was built by hand, photographed and then disassembled and arranged into a pile of blocks (left), after which another photo was taken. Both images were merged together afterward.

Special thanks to office administrator Rebekkah McCurry for providing the Legos.

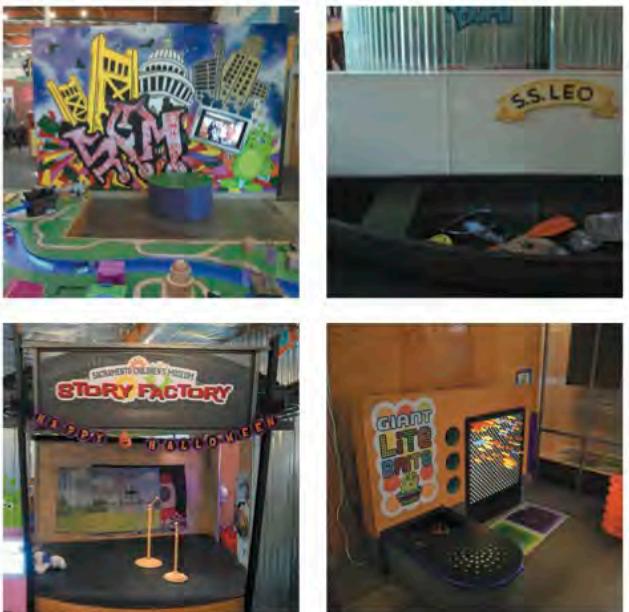
## ABOUT THE LOCATION

Sacramento Children's Museum

After a six-year effort, during which time they raised funds and scouted locations, a couple of elementary school teachers opened the Sacramento Children's Museum in 2011. Located in Rancho Cordova, the museum serves kids up to 8 years old and aims to "spark lifelong learning through play," said Sharon Stone Smith, who has been the museum's executive director since it opened. She oversees five full-time and 10 part-time employees, along with various volunteers. About 100,000 people visit the museum each year, which is the nonprofit's main source

of funding, along with groups sales, outreach programs, fundraisers and grants, said Smith. The city of Rancho

Cordova rents the 7,000-square-foot space to the museum for free, said Smith, who added that they're hoping to expand into a larger space sometime next year. "We knew we were going to need more space the day we opened seven years ago."



(Clockwise from top left) The trains and mural (by local artist Brandon Clingen), the S.S. Leo canoe, the Lite Brite and the Story Factory. These were the four locations used in the photos of the winners.

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## 40 UNDER 40 CREDITS

MANAGING EDITOR	SAM BOYKIN	SAM BOYKIN
LEAD DESIGNER	STEPHANIE HAYS	Stephanie Hays
PHOTO EDITOR	DENNIS MCCOY	DENNIS MCCOY

## JUDGES PROFILES

**AMANDA BLACKWOOD** was appointed as president and CEO of the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce in May 2018. She is responsible for the strategic direction, vision and management for programs and personnel of the Metro Chamber.

Before joining the Metro Chamber, Blackwood served as owner and managing partner of OE Consulting Group, a women-owned firm that works with both for- and nonprofit

**ANNIE V. LAM**, principal of the Lam Consulting Group, is a recognized expert in public and nonprofit service and known for her strategic approach to enhancing and revitalizing organizations. She currently works with legislative and local elected officials to increase their organizational strength and build their pipelines. She leads four organizations with complementary missions: APIs Mobilize, the League of

California Cities Asian Pacific Islander (API) Caucus, the League of California Cities Women's Caucus and the California Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus Institute. She is recipient of the National Association of Asian Pacifics in Politics and Public Affairs' inaugural Forward Award. She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California and a bachelor's degree in art from UC Davis.

**MICHAEL BROUGHTON** started his journey as a marketing expert and community leader in the Sacramento region at the University of California Davis. He worked with prominent northern California companies like AGI Publishing, The Chubb Group and CBS Television. In 2005, Broughton founded Blanket Marketing Group, a digital advertising agency serving clients both in the

Sacramento region and across the state. As president and CEO, Broughton leads a team of branding and digital creatives. He and BMG donate over \$100,000 annually in monetary and in-kind advertising to nonprofits and community service organizations. He also serves on multiple nonprofit boards, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, KVIE PBS's advisory board, Street Soccer USA, the Chevo Foundation and the Sacramento Zoo.

clients. Previously, Blackwood served as the chief development officer for Elevation Entertainment Group, where she provided leadership for a statewide, multi-location, 700-member workforce. She has also served on the board of directors for the Citrus Heights Chamber of Commerce since 2016 and devoted her time to the Governor's Office of Innovation as the committee chair for Valley Vision's Innovation Pipeline and vice chair of Greater Sacramento Economic Council's Young Professional Board.

**EMILY BAIME MICHAELS** has been executive director of the Midtown Association since 2013. Under her leadership, the organization renewed for a 10-year term, generating \$15 million in assessment funds for midtown. The association has also helped develop the Sacramento Midtown Farmers Market into one of the most popular events

**Anthem United** started its journey as a marketing expert and community leader in the Sacramento region at the University of California Davis. He worked with prominent northern California companies like AGI Publishing, The Chubb Group and CBS Television. In 2005, Broughton founded Blanket Marketing Group, a digital advertising agency serving clients both in the

**DR. TONY MIKLA** is the owner of the KIME Human Performance Institute, which focuses on physical therapy and performance training. KIME is one of the fastest-growing health care practices in the region, working with everyone from elite athletes to

high school students. Mikla was also a national finalist for the NCSA Sports

**EMILY BAIME MICHAELS** has been executive director of the Midtown Association since 2013. Under her leadership, the organization renewed for a 10-year term, generating \$15 million in assessment funds for midtown. The association has also helped develop the Sacramento Midtown Farmers Market into one of the most popular events

**in the region. Prior to Midtown Association, Michaels was the CEO of the Downtown Stockton Alliance. She has 15 years' experience with Property and Business Improvement District leadership and helped plan the World Cup in Rio, Brazil. More recently, she served as the International Downtown Association's vice-chair for the Council on Public Private Partnership.**

40 UNDER 40 HONOREE 2016

Medicine Specialist of the Year. He has served as a consultant and rehab specialist for several professional sports teams and college athletic programs and speaks at several physical therapy graduate programs, including Sacramento State University. He also volunteers with medical coverage at triathlons, marathons, cross-fit competitions and coaches youth sports.

40 UNDER 40 HONOREE 2014

**MEGHAN BAKER** is the owner of the KIME Human Performance Institute, which focuses on physical therapy and performance training. KIME is one of the fastest-growing health care practices in the region, working with everyone from elite athletes to

high school students. Mikla was also a national finalist for the NCSA Sports

**Growing Places**

**Anthem United**

Congratulations to this year's  
40 Under 40 honorees  
and to Brendan Leonard,  
Project Manager, Sacramento.

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IT IS AN HONOR  
TO BE RECOGNIZED  
AMONG THE 2018  
40 UNDER 40 HONOREES.

Thanks to each of you  
for making a positive impact  
upon our Region.

**Chrysa Tsakopoulos Demos,**  
President & CEO AKT Investments

**AKT**

**Meghan Baker**

**MEGHAN BAKER**  
Partner, Downey Brand LLP

**B**aker specializes in lawsuits between Sacramento-area businesses. She graduated at the top of her class from

McGeorge School of Law in 2005 and has since held a number of leadership roles at Downey Brand. She has also mentored new lawyers within the firm, served on Downey Brand's hiring committee and contributed to the Downey Brand Associate

Liaison Committee, where she facilitated communication between associates and senior management. In addition, Baker is active in the local community. She coaches a youth softball team and volunteers with the McGeorge School of Law,

where she coaches students who participate in regional and national mock trial competitions.

**AGE 38**  
**Education:** B.A. in political science and communication, UC Davis; J.D., McGeorge School of Law

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Working on an extremely complex legal case that required long days/late nights at the office, which was made even more challenging by being pregnant with my second daughter and having a 2-year-old at home."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Professionally, to become an excellent lawyer and a partner at Downey Brand. Personally, to be a mom—and hopefully a good one, too."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Still a partner at Downey Brand! I am truly blessed to work at a great law firm, with top-notch attorneys, in the best city in the state."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Nagging. And throwing out fruit in an indoor trash



can. It makes the whole room stink."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A quick getaway to Twain Harte – it's a gem! We love swimming at the lake, miniature golfing and spending quality time together. Plus, it gives us the perfect excuse for not doing laundry, grocery shopping and chores back home!"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My parents, Tom and Patty Gavin, who love and support me unconditionally; my husband Josh, who is an awesome father and lawyer; Bill Warne, my mentor and friend; and Nancy Drew, my childhood hero who led to my legal career."

**Katherine Bardis-Miry**

**KATHERINE  
BARDIS-MIRY**  
President, Bardis Homes



**AGE 31**  
**B**ardis-Miry founded Bardis Homes in 2012 with the intention of bringing transparency, innovation and quality to the construction industry. When getting the company off the ground, she was simultaneously finishing her law degree and studying for the bar. Over the years, Bardis Homes has gone from building an average of four homes each year to more than 100. Some of the company's most notable projects include The Mill at Broadway in downtown and The Good Project in West Sacramento. Through the company's housing developments, Bardis-Miry teams up with local organizations like the Front Street Animal Shelter and the Food Literacy Center. These efforts resulted in the

development of a 4-acre community garden and free animal adoptions for Bardis Homes residents.

**Education:** B.A. in communication studies, Loyola Marymount University; J.D., McGeorge School of Law

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Learning how to grow a company"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To get accepted to, and finish law school"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continuing to do what I love"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Tardiness"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Catching up on sleep and Ginger Elizabeth chocolate chip cookies"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My family"

# Leslie Bosserman

## LESLIE BOSSERMAN

Founder and community manager, The Makers Place

**W**hile juggling roles as a self-employed leadership coach and a new parent, Bosserman had difficulty finding a flexible workplace with childcare options. With the help of her husband, Joel, she founded The Makers Place, a professional coworking space with onsite childcare, last January. Since then, The Makers Place has served over 50 local families and their children. Earlier this year, The Makers Place received a RAILS grant of \$99,900 from the mayor's office, which will be used to launch an onsite preschool and a professional coaching program. In addition to The Makers Place, Bosserman runs Lead With Intention, a coaching program for Millennial leaders and

**AGE  
34**

their managers. She volunteers as a pro bono leadership coach for The Coaching Fellowship, where she helps women between 25 and 35 achieve their professional goals. Bosserman has also contributed to TEDxSacramento, W.E.A.V.E., Women's Empowerment and the International Rescue Committee.

**Education:** B.A. in communication studies, M.Ed., UCLA.

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Three years ago, the transition to parenthood as an entrepreneur redefined me in the hardest and the best possible way. Being a 'mompreneur' made me aware of how much I view my work as a calling, not just a job."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To figure out how to work for myself and raise an amazing family, while giving



back to my community. I guess you can say I followed my dream and am living it!"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continuing to invest in local initiatives and growing our businesses to serve even more people by empowering others."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When someone says, 'I don't know how you did that.' I could never do that. And I think, wow, don't limit yourself (or me!), and if you really want something, start where you are and take the next step."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A morning yoga class at Yoga Shala. Family brunch at Orphan Breakfast House. Hot local Pachamama coffee. A trip to the Downtown Farmer's Market. And both kids napping at the same time (one can dream, right?!)"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My faith and belief that I can really go after my goals and make my dreams a reality. I've known my husband for almost 30 years (even though we didn't date until we were 28!) and his support is unwavering."

# Francisco Castillo

## FRANCISCO CASTILLO

Senior director of public affairs, Union Pacific Railroad

**C**astillo has created strategic alliances between companies and media organizations, community partners and government entities.

Prior to working for Union Pacific, Castillo served as the deputy press secretary for former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and co-led the communication strategy for Maria Shriver's WE Connect campaign, an effort to connect low-income families to public resources. Castillo began his career as a job developer for the Mission Language and Vocational School in San Francisco, which offers job placement services to hundreds of low-income, non-English speakers. He has continued to support educational efforts in underserved communities, working on the St.

Hope Public Schools Board, serving as a career counselor at LULAC National Education Services and volunteering with First 5 Yolo Children and Families Commission.

**AGE  
38**

**Education:** B.A. in political science, San Francisco State University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:**

"Being raised by a single mother, my family experienced lower socio-economic status compared to individuals whose families were fully intact. This motivated me to work harder at a young age and prove that no matter your circumstances, one can succeed."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Focused around my career passion and personal satisfaction. I wanted to create a plan that led me to a profession I passionately enjoy, while maintaining excellent balance between home and work."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Living in West Sacramento, having mastered my knowledge in public policy and continue to elevate the voices of the underserved community. Encouraging collaboration among diverse groups that could lead to fresh approaches to many social problems."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People that play loud music while in the gym sauna with no headphones."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A day at the beach with my two kids. Low-key weekends are the best."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The support and encouragement of my mother, who raised me as a single parent."



# Kelly Brink

## KELLY BRENK

Manager, community health, Sutter Health

**A**s a leader of community projects for Sutter Health, Brenk helps lead company efforts to improve health outcomes and strengthen the community. One of Brenk's projects, the Getting to Zero campaign, is an initiative to end homelessness in the Sacramento region. To date, her department has raised over \$2 million for the campaign, which has resulted in new housing opportunities for hundreds of people. Brenk also leads programs related to youth wellness, emergency department navigation and chronic disease management. In 2017, Brenk won the Sutter Health President's Award for her work with the Street Nurse program, which provides on-site medical care to the homeless population. Since Brenk helped design and launch the program in Sacramento in 2016, it has expanded to Modesto and Los Banos. Brenk

**AGE  
38**



**Education:** B.A. in political science, Sonoma State University; B.A. in speech communications, San Francisco State University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Being the kind of parent I want to be, while striving to be the best manager I can be, has proved challenging. With the backing of a wonderful husband, amazing family and supportive bosses, it's a challenge I'm overcoming."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To continue along a career path that enabled me to do meaningful and challenging work, with a team of people I love and respect, all while having the support and flexibility to always put my family first. Mission accomplished!"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continuing to positively impact the communities where I live and work, still working alongside my incredible coworkers to improve community health and in the stands cheering for my kids at all of their sporting and school events."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people at Costco jam up the aisles waiting for free food samples. I am usually trying to hustle through the store with an impatient toddler in my cart, so busting through endless walls of snacking shoppers always frustrates me."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Cramming as many activities as possible into a two-day period – soccer games, fun with family and friends, errands, being outdoors, events, parties, running, cooking, Chardonnay, road trips - then complaining about how tired I am on Sunday night."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Roger Niello, Stephanie Jantzen (Roger's campaign manager) and Todd Moffitt (Roger's chief of staff). They took a chance on me when I was fresh out of college and brand new to Sacramento, and I will forever be grateful to them."

also volunteers at her children's school, organizing fundraisers and working in classrooms. Early in her career, as a field representative for former state assemblyman Roger Niello, she helped create a "back-to-school boutique" with supplies for underserved kids.

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AND ALSO TO OUR OWN KATHERINE BARDIS-MIRY

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# MIKE COX

## MICHAEL COX

Service area vice president, mission integration, Dignity Health

**C**ox joined Dignity Health in 2009 and oversees provider-patient relationships, working to facilitate conversations about courses of treatment and overall health care. While at Dignity Health, Cox has led a number of programs, including Methodist Hospital's new employee orientation, Dignity Health's Greater Sacramento Human Trafficking response program and the Whole Person Care Initiative, a partnership focused on providing resources to Catholic parishes on advance

**AGE  
39**


care planning and end-of-life decision-making. Prior to working at Dignity Health, Cox led an awareness campaign for MiChild, a children's health

insurance program in Michigan. A father of four, Cox also supports local schools and faith-based organizations such as the Mercy Foundation and Loaves & Fishes.

**Education:** B.A. in Spanish from Carroll College of Montana; M.A. in health care mission, Aquinas Institute of Theology

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Our daughter had a multi-year scary health crisis that began when she was 1. My challenge was keeping my family intact, healthy, resilient and connected."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To be an effective leader, working with others to serve the community and create healing environments to provide care in and to receive care in."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "I hope I am a servant first and leader second. I hope I am still serving those who are vulnerable; helping to create healing environments dedicated to helping others become who they are meant to be."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Spelling errors"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Flying members of my family for breakfast at one of the region's numerous general aviation airport restaurants or spending time making family memories while camping and hiking in Yosemite or the Sierra Nevada Mountains."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Of course, my wife Julie, my kids and my extended family, especially my great-aunt, Sr. Ethel Richardson. Also, I am grateful to those women, men, patients and families who teach me daily the importance of humility, dialogue and compassionate strength."

# Chrysa Tsakopoulos Demos

## CHRYSANTHY TSAKOPoulos DEMOS

President and CEO, AKT Investments

**D**emos leads a company that has developed over 60,000 homes and 30 million square feet of office space in Northern and Central California. AKT Investments also maintains a large commercial building portfolio and manages several thousand acres of farmland, all with Demos at the head. She grew up in Sacramento and returned to her home city in 2015 after having moved away for seven years. She says her most significant professional accomplishment was being chosen to succeed her father as the leader of AKT, and she is devoted to guiding the company into the next generation. One of her latest projects is a housing community that will accommodate aging baby boomers and those with developmental disabilities.

**AGE  
32**


**Education:** B.S. in foreign service, Georgetown University; MBA, The Wharton School, The University of Pennsylvania

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Being able to find harmony between the responsibilities of running AKT and the joys of being a mom to two wonderful and active boys."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To get a graduate degree and to have a family"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Know that all of my work has led to the creation of new, safe and enriching communities"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People who cannot see the blessings in their lives"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Spending time with my husband George and our two boys. We love to go bowling and go to the Railroad Museum in Old Sac."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The love and support of my family"



# Anne Descalzo

**AGE  
31**

**With 13 years of experience with SAFE Credit Union, Descalzo has moved up the ladder to lead teams and spearhead numerous innovative projects for the company. She works with families and small businesses and is constantly developing new ways to work with SAFE Credit Union members. Descalzo started as a teller at SAFE Credit Union while still in college and held a few entry-level positions before being promoted to assistant vice president earlier this year.**

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Nearing retirement! With a plan, it's not a wish." **My biggest pet peeve:** "Meetings that could have been a phone call or an email. I love efficiency!" **My ideal weekend includes:** "Hopping in the car with my husband, kids and dogs and heading to our family cabin in Butte County. Nothing beats dirt under the fingernails, no cell reception, hiking, good barbecue, s'mores at the campfire, champagne and quality family time." **I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The love and support of my husband!"

## Humanity in healthcare.

Dignity Health congratulates Michael Cox for being named to Sacramento Business Journal's "40 Under 40" list. Michael is a strong and compassionate leader that fully embodies the ministry and mission of Dignity Health. As Vice President of Mission Integration, he has been instrumental in our work to combat human trafficking, reduce our environmental footprint at our hospitals, and educate the community on palliative care and other health services. He has also elevated our mission with employees, in our hospitals and community. And that really is what humankindness is all about.

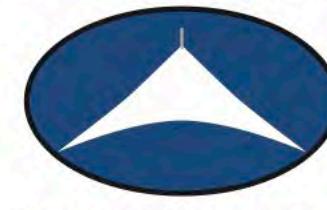


Hello humankindness®



**Congratulations to Jackie Kirkwood, recognized as a current and future leader in the Sacramento area.**

**Goodwin-Cole, since 1888, is proud to have Jackie as a key member of our team serving the greater Sacramento area with their shade, custom fabrication and ornamental iron needs.**



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## Shawn Dhillon

### SHAWN DHILLON

Corporate counsel,  
Ethan Conrad Properties Inc.

**D**hillon leads the legal department of Ethan Conrad Properties, one of Sacramento's largest commercial real estate companies. Dhillon was the company's first in-house counsel and has spearheaded the growth of its legal department. His first career was in commercial real estate. He sold properties as a way to support his college education and closed several million dollars in deals by the time he graduated. During his legal career, Dhillon has litigated and resolved over 75 cases in state and federal courts against large national banks and insurance companies. He has also drafted and negotiated over \$100 million of commercial real estate transactions.

AGE  
**33**

**Education:** B.S. in business finance, California State University Sacramento; J.D., Western State College of Law

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Losing both of my parents in high school. That was and will always be the biggest challenge in my life. Although my teenage years were difficult, luckily I had some caring family members that kept me on a good path."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To go to law school and work in commercial real estate."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "One of the best commercial real estate attorneys in California."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Unorganized paperwork"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Having a nice dinner with my wife and playing soccer around the house with my 3-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son, hopefully without breaking anything in the house!"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My beautiful wife, Kiran Dhillon. She is and has always been my biggest supporter."

## L.I.S.A! FEIGENBAUM

### LISA FEIGENBAUM

Vice president, groups, premium hospitality and event sales, Sacramento Kings

AGE  
**32**

**F**eigenbaum leads the Sacramento Kings and the Golden 1 Center's strategic sales team. In her role, Feigenbaum uses the latest technology to advance her department and increase ticket and event sales. Most recently, her team started using artificial intelligence to target future clients and showcase changes in revenue stream. Last year, Feigenbaum started a career-advancement program within the Golden 1 Center to mentor and develop talent within her department. Since the program's inaugural year, three of Feigenbaum's employees were promoted to management positions within the company. Feigenbaum also contributed to record sales during the Golden 1 Center's California Classic

**Summer League**, a basketball competition that attracted 50,000 fans over three days last July. Additionally, Feigenbaum is dedicated to community-enriching initiatives and is in the process of creating summits for underserved youth to learn about career options in the NBA and other professional sports.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in recreation management, Springfield College

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Being a woman in a male-dominated industry. But don't make excuses ladies, you can do it!"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To run my own sales and hospitality department within professional sports - I did it!"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "At an



elevated role within sports and entertainment and a strong leader in the community"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people are late both personally and professionally—my time is just as valuable as yours. Figure it out people."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "If I'm not golfing, I'm trying to coordinate a beach or boat day, but either way

I'm surrounding myself with great people. That's the key to success and happiness: great people."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Mentors who supported and challenged me. My mom intentionally surrounded me with strong women growing up. My current male boss (Phil Horn); also, my twin sister Amy and closest peer, Courtney, who have made me believe I can do anything."

## Shawna Fitzgerald

### SHAWNA FITZGERALD

CEO, Creating Answers

**A**s founder of Creating Answers, an accounting firm that offers outsourced CFO services, Fitzgerald takes a creative approach to provide financial support to her clients. In 2017, Fitzgerald transitioned Creating Answers to a completely virtual operation after 19 years as a brick-and-mortar business, helping it to grow beyond California. Fitzgerald encourages an innovative and fun work environment at Creating Answers and has developed programs like "Fun Thursdays," where employees take a break from deadlines to socialize. Fitzgerald is also on the board of the National Association of Women Business Owners and was a finalist for the organization's Outstanding Woman Leader Award in 2017. Beyond her involvement in local business, Fitzgerald has supported Sacramento State students in accounting internships, volunteered with the SPCA and served as a mentor for Youth Helping Youth.

**Education:** Associate degree in business, Sacramento City College; B.S. in business administration, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Stepping out from the shadows of the prior owner of my current business without losing the core principals she established. It was a very strategic and methodical process."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Ten years ago I had just dismounted from my first business and had a boss for the first time in five years. My main goal was not get fired and to help business owners through the struggles of entrepreneurship."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Able to look back and know I left a legacy within the Sacramento business community; to know the work I did encouraged small businesses to thrive within our community and beyond."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people show up in life, work, etc., not bringing their A game."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Flip-flops, no cell service and no schedule. It's these times that allow my creativity to flourish."

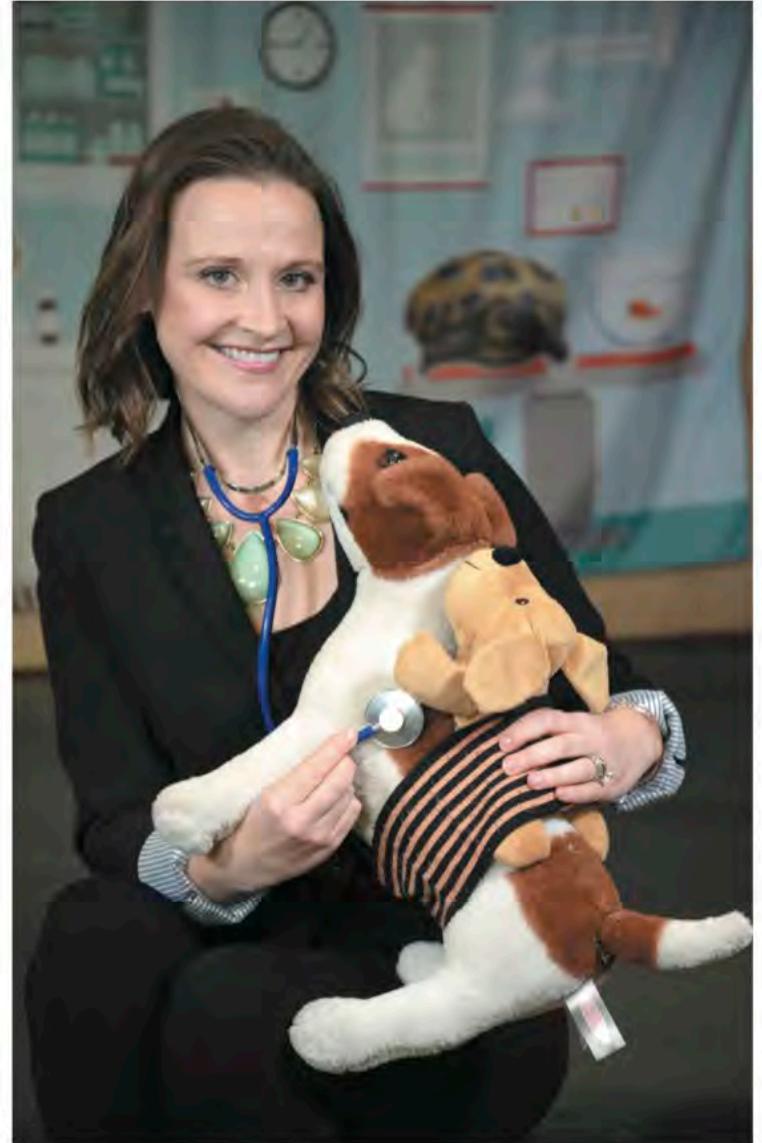
**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Having to overcome the struggles of a difficult childhood. It instilled a drive within me that can't be taught and forced me to overcome adversity."



## It all begins with a simple partnership.

At Sutter Health, we understand that our care extends outside the walls of our hospitals. We are committed to the communities we serve and each year, invest millions of dollars in our community partners and the collaborative projects that improve and enhance lives.

**Sutter Health**

**BRENDA FORMAN**

Vice president, managing director, Merlot Marketing

**W**ith 15 years of experience at Merlot Marketing, Forman has helped develop the company into a nationally recognized marketing agency. Forman guides marketing strategies for the company's national and regional clients and ensures efficiency and cost-effective business practices. Forman has also developed video and social media news releases for clients rather than relying on the standard press release format. She has contributed to over 65 company awards for national branding, public relations and social media campaigns. Additionally, she was named Marketing Person of the Year

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by the Sacramento Advertising Club and created an entrepreneurship program at Sheldon High School in Elk Grove to educate students about marketing practices at local businesses.

**Education:** B.S. in business administration, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:**

"An immediate family member was recently diagnosed with a long-term illness. Learning to compartmentalize in an effort to stay focused and productive at work, while providing an extra level of love and care to my family has been the biggest challenge."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "In 2008, the recession hit and our team was reduced by 75 percent. My goal was to stay focused and build our team back up to the size it was or larger within five years."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Healthy and still able to do the work that I enjoy so much and with people I admire and continue to learn from every day."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people talk over each other. It's disrespectful and means you're not listening to what the other person is saying."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A quick trip to Tahoe with my husband and two girls (ages 7 and 5). Fresh mountain air and a Mai Tai lunch at Sunnyside."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Merlot founder and CEO Debi Hammond. She took a leap of faith by hiring me 15 years ago and has given me the opportunity to make decisions, freedom to make mistakes and a chance to create my own path as a marketer."

**LUCAS FRERICHS****LUCAS FRERICHS**

City councilman, city of Davis; Director of state policy, The Nature Conservancy

**F**erichs serves as a Davis city councilman and as director of state policy for The Nature Conservancy. As a councilmember in Davis, Frerichs led a successful partnership between the cities of Woodland and Davis to build a \$300 million surface water project, which now supplies the region with a sustainable and clean water supply from the Sacramento River. He also supports the development of affordable housing and mixed-use development projects in Davis and throughout Yolo County. At The Nature Conservancy, Frerichs helped negotiate state legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and campaigned to add Proposition 68 to the 2018 ballot, which sought to improve parks and water systems. More recently, Frerichs contributed to

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**Education:** B.A. in government, California State University Sacramento; land use and environmental planning certificate, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Moving numerous times as a kid. It was really challenging. Although, it taught me how to be flexible and how to adapt—skills which have suited me well as an adult."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To become a well-respected and go-to legislative staffer in the Capitol. I wanted to be the person that others turned to in order help solve their most pressing challenges. Ultimately, I was successful in making that happen."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Folks assume

that because I'm in a local elected office, I must want to move up. I really enjoy what I'm doing today: advocating for California's biggest environmental issues and making my community and region better."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "It's actually burnt-out streetlights (and potholes). I'm all about fixing things, and when local governments have a hard time fixing seemingly little things, how can we possibly successfully solve people's larger problems?"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "If in

Davis, definitely a trip to our amazing farmers market, coupled with a long bike ride or walk through the UC Davis Arboretum. If out of town, you'll find me in nature—it's how I keep myself balanced."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My wife, Stacie—we just celebrated our 15th anniversary! Watching her in action in our lives and in our communities. I'm constantly inspired by her leadership, drive and compassion. She inspires me to strive to be a better person."

**NICHOLAS HAYSTINGS**

President and executive director, Square Root Academy

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**A**s a Sacramento native, Haystings is dedicated to community building and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education for Sacramento youth. He uses his technical background in mechanical and environmental engineering to create science-focused programs throughout Sacramento. In his role at Square Root Academy, Haystings has created after-school programs and community events in STEM for over 3,000 underrepresented students. Additionally, Haystings is the executive director of Square Root Labs, a STEM-focused coworking space that is projected to open in 2019. The goal of both Square Root Academy and Square Root Labs is to eliminate the financial barriers to STEM education and encourage science as a vessel for future success.

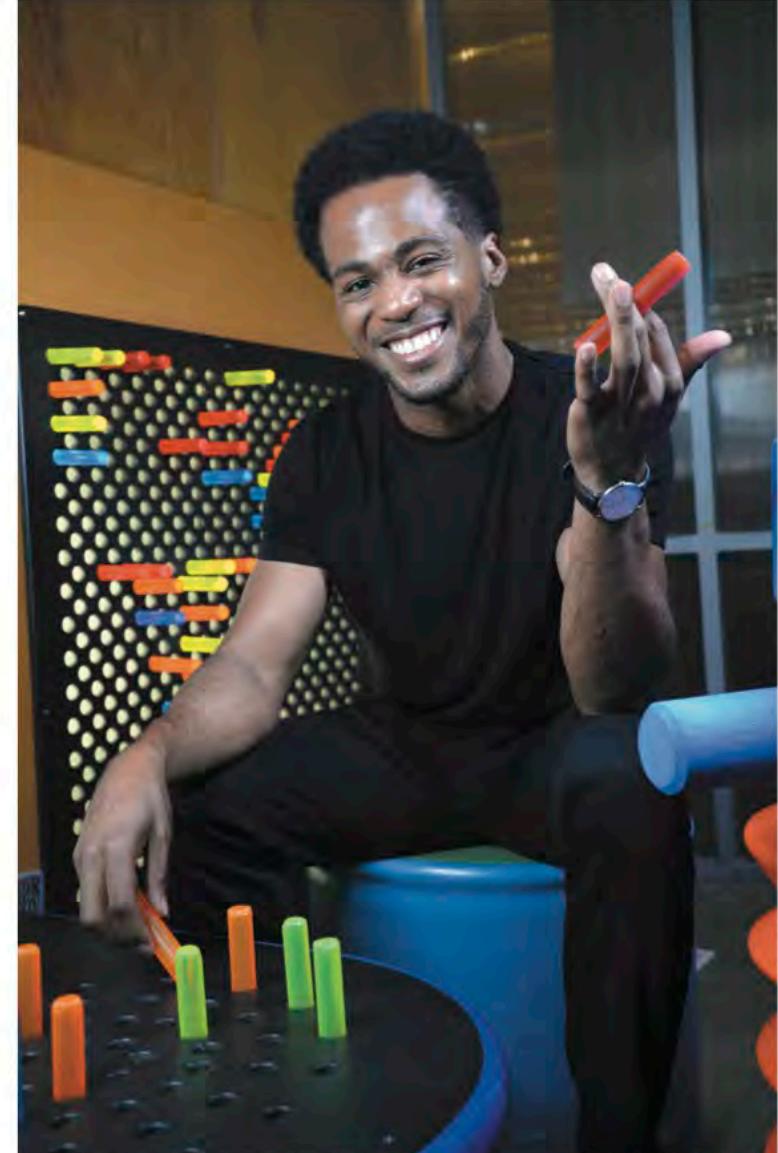
**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To make Forbes 30 Under 30, have my own engineering-focused consulting firm, open a school in my home neighborhood of Meadowview and make sure I was giving back to the community."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "A part of a movement rooted in making our communities more equitable for all people, from education to quality of life. My role in the endeavor matters less to me than my ability to support."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Would have to be seeing systems meant for social change done ineffectively."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Getting outside either hiking or somewhere being active with good company (my dog included). Either that or being somewhere remote with a good book, and still my dog."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My family and community, past and present. They have served as both the anchor to keep me grounded and the inspiration to propel me forward in moments of doubt."

**CONGRATULATIONS LISA FEIGENBAUM!**

2018 40 UNDER 40 HONOREE

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# Samuel Hon

## SAMUEL HON

President, First Corporate Solutions Inc.

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In his role at First Corporate Solutions, Hon works to spearhead culture change with more than 70 staff in multiple offices across the U.S. In his two years as president, Hon has led the company's highest revenue growth in its history, which resulted in over 15 new jobs. Hon also founded his own marketing firm, HON Marketing, which provides creative and marketing services to clients in the U.S. and Asia. Throughout his career, Hon has received more than 10 marketing and design awards and was named Ad Person of the Year by the American Advertising Federation – Sacramento. He has also served as president of the Sacramento chapter of the American Advertising Federation, volunteered on the Communications Committee for Metro Edge and worked on the Professional Advisory Committee at the Art Institute of Sacramento.

**Education:** B.S. in journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Berkeley executive coaching program, Berkley executive leadership program, financial acumen for leaders, UC Berkeley; strategic marketing management, executive education, Harvard Business School; advanced project management program, Stanford University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Moved to America on my own"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To pay off my younger brother's college tuition and support my family"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Living a global life with contentment"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People who lack empathy"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Traveling to New York City"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Hard work and perseverance"

# Tyson Hubbard

## TYSON HUBBARD

Partner, Downey Brand LLP

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**H**ubbard specializes in estates and trusts litigation.

After three years at Downey Brand, Hubbard was named partner at the firm. He has since taken on estate cases involving hundreds of millions of dollars of property. Some examples include disputes between the heirs of a fuel distribution company and the property left by naturalist John Muir. Hubbard is also the vice chair of the probate and estate planning section of the Sacramento Bar Association and volunteers with Social Venture Partners, which advances education programs in the Sacramento region. As a Davis resident, Hubbard serves as the chair of the city of Davis' Recreation and Park Commission, which assesses the viability of

projects in the city, such as a new aquatics facility.



**Education:** B.A. in history, Harvard University; J.D., Syracuse University College of Law; graduate certificate, sports business, New York University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "I come from a farming town in New York. Most people do not go to college. I was raised by my grandparents, and they emphasized pursuing higher education. I was the first person from my school to matriculate at Harvard."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Exactly 10 years ago I was in my first week of my first job as an attorney, and my main goal was to keep that job in the middle of an otherwise dreadful recession."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "I want to have the perspective necessary to be seen as a thought leader in the trust and estate litigation field, and I want to grow my skills by taking on

challenging cases."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Inefficiency. I like to get right to the point (and for others to join me there)."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "I have a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old and so an ideal weekend definitely involves playing with them. Both of them have active imaginations and like playing

firefighters in particular. An ideal weekend is home with them and my wife."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Opportunity and luck; success is about maximizing the opportunities that are presented. I have been extremely fortunate (i.e., lucky) to have those opportunities."

# Kachet Jackson-Henderson

## KACHET JACKSON-HENDERSON

Founder and CEO, The Kachet Life, Kachet Media Group, The Blog Bloc

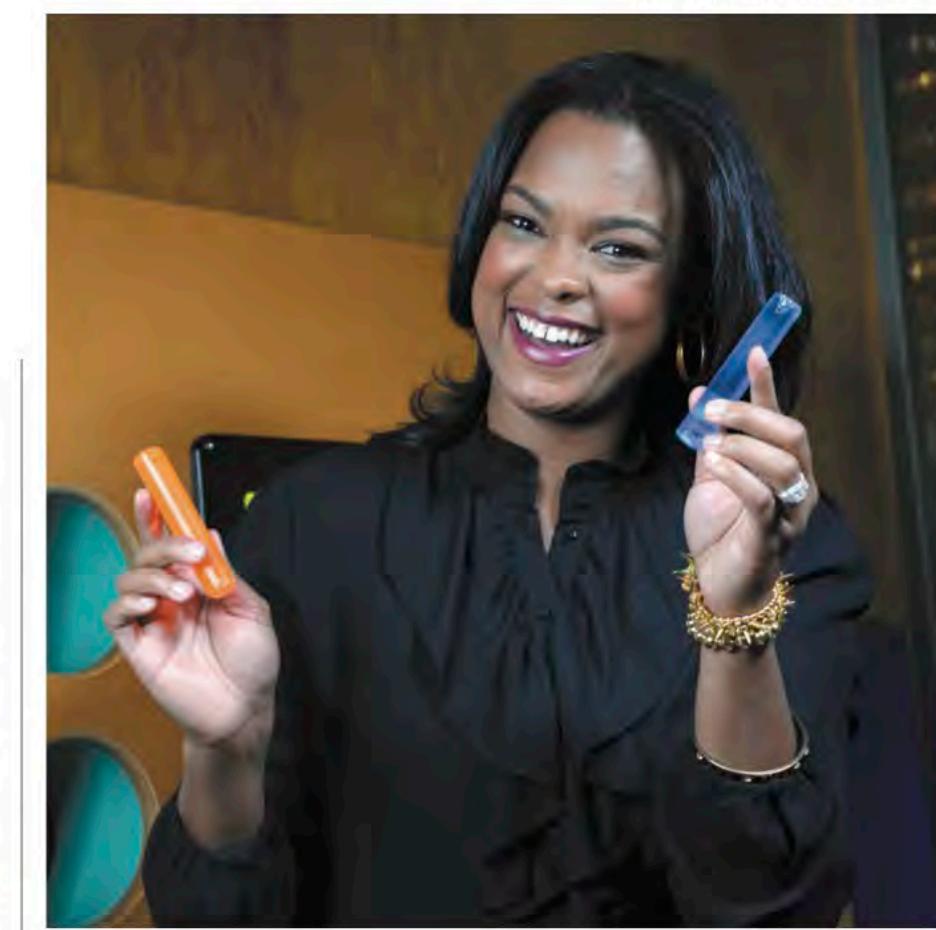
**Education:** B.S. in journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Berkeley executive coaching program, Berkley executive leadership program, financial acumen for leaders, UC Berkeley; strategic marketing management, executive education, Harvard Business School; advanced project management program, Stanford University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Staying motivated in the face of adversity. My mother died of leukemia when I was a teenager and I became my grandmother's caregiver. I did not let my circumstances take me away from my educational and professional goals."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "I was 21, so it was definitely to graduate on time! Classes were impacted and my grandma's health began to rapidly decline. I graduated on her last birthday, Dec. 17, 2009."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Happy, healthy and on my book tour, kicking off in Sacramento, of course."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People who don't say what they mean."



**Communication is one of the keys to success that I think some don't prioritize."**

**My ideal weekend includes:** "The coast. Any will do, from Sonoma to the South of France. It does not include a laptop or my phone."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My friends, family and the people of Sacramento who have supported me since I started blogging in 2012. I would've never guessed that I'd come so far and help so many others in the process."



# Bindu Jaduram

## BINDU JADURAM

Regional manager, Tri Counties Bank

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**Education:** A.S. in business administration, Yuba Community College; B.S. in strategic management, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "To balance two jobs and go to school full time to graduate with my bachelor's degree at the age of 20. I have worked diligently to prove that ultimate success comes from hard work and commitment to excel."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To be successful and to start a family. I am happy to say I have a beautiful family with two wonderful girls that are the pride and joy of my life and I'm a regional manager."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "A senior leader that continues to have an unwavering commitment to meet the needs of the people in our communities and continue to support the mission of Tri Counties Bank."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Complacency. I have a hard time with people not willing to adapt to the wonderful changes around us."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Making a delicious breakfast with my family and then heading out to all of my girls' activities. There is an Indian dance class and swim lessons, while the other is in karate and Girl Scouts."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The encouragement and guidance of my parents. They have shown me that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. They have taught me to work hard and follow your dreams."

# Melissa Jost

**MELISSA JOST**  
Clinical informatics  
program manager,  
UC Davis Health

**J**ost develops new methods to increase efficiency in health record documentation. She created the Physician Efficiency Program to allow for customized training and optimization of software used by doctors to enable them to more efficiently input electronic health records. The program launched in February and has gained national attention. In August, Jost spoke about the program at a conference with over 18,000 attendees, encouraging other health systems to adopt the UC Davis methods in order to improve the lives of their physicians. Jost is also a triathlete and has spearheaded a program to expand opportunities for women to participate in local races.

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**Education:** B.A. in history, B.A. in political science and M.S. in health informatics, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "As a manager in a field where young women are the minority, I've had to work to change perceptions about what women leaders in technology and health care look like. It takes time to build trust, but it benefits everyone."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To study law with the aim of drafting and analyzing congressional legislation."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Improving legislation for regulation in health care and health care technology. I believe that government can be a critical driver for progressive health technology adoption and standardization, through which we can build a healthier world."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When I run out of coffee. No perfect morning starts on tea."



**My ideal weekend includes:** "A trip to Temple Coffee and time to disconnect from my phone and technology. I crave unscheduled time with my family and friends after maintaining such a demanding daily work and triathlon training schedule."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Jennifer Burger, my mentor and former manager at UC Davis Health. When I joined UC Davis Health she promised to always challenge me. She kept her word and inspires me to become a better person and a stronger leader."

# Dave Kempa

**DAVE KEMPA**

Founder/editor  
VOICES: River City

**K**empa is the founder of VOICES: River City, an online news publication that serves the greater Sacramento area. The goal of VOICES: River City is to fill gaps in Sacramento news coverage and to provide a platform for community members to write about local issues. Now in its second year, the online publication generates about 5,000 unique visits to its website each month. Kempa has established VOICES: River City by hosting meet-and-greets during which community members can engage with writers and editors and by focusing on local buy-in. Kempa won a first place

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award from the California News Publishers Association in 2017 and a Robert F. Kennedy Award in journalism in 2010. He is also an adjunct professor of journalism at American River College.

**Education:** B.S. in English/creative writing, University of Wisconsin-Madison; master's in mass

communication/journalism, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "My friend Tex's death in 2017"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Seeing how long I could spend living out of a backpack in South America. (Answer: Just under a year.)"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Living out of a backpack in South America"



**My biggest pet peeve:** "Coffee shops with spotty internet"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Soccer, a day trip, day drinks, night owls and hiding out with a great book from the Sacramento Public Library."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Personally? My parents, sisters and friends. Professionally? The Nehemiah Emerging Leaders Program (Class 007), and VOICES: River City's volunteer editors Anthony Siino, Kris Hooks and Blake Gillespie."



# MATT KEASLING

**MATT KEASLING**  
Attorney, Taylor & Wiley

**K**easling specializes in land use and development law. Some of his most significant cases include getting approval for a 15-story tower in midtown Sacramento, working on Sutter Park, the largest infill redevelopment project in East Sacramento, and approving the remodel of a family shelter that keeps nearly 100 homeless families together. Keasling is also the president of Sacramento Steps Forward, a nonprofit that manages all federal funds for local homelessness service providers, working closely with the city and county of Sacramento.

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**Education:** B.A. in history, UC Santa Barbara; J.D., McGeorge School of Law

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Learning to operate without sleep after I became a dad."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Simply to make it through the Great Recession and figure out how to help my clients develop land during an incredibly difficult time."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "At a point in my career where I am known by my clients and my peers for providing legally supportable innovative solutions. I'd also like to attend every meeting in shorts."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "As I look out the office window at a flag at half-mast for Senator McCain, my biggest pet peeve is the increasing incivility in politics. We need to get back to a time when we treated others with respect."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A trip to the Central Coast with my son and beautiful wife, a little wine tasting and a sunny beach."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "A lot of hard work, hours reviewing case law, brutal exams and lots of gray hairs."

# Jackie Kirkwood

**JACKIE KIRKWOOD**

Vice president of operations, Goodwin-Cole Company Inc.

**A**s a Marine Corps veteran, Kirkwood has translated her leadership skills from public service into the private sector.

Kirkwood retired from the Marine Corps in 2015 with the rank of gunnery sergeant and moved on to work as the executive administrative manager at the Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento, a local foster care facility. Now, Kirkwood serves as vice president of operations at Goodwin-Cole Company Inc., a manufacturer of awnings, textiles and ornamental iron,

where she oversees the company's manufacturing teams. Kirkwood continues to support the military community as president of Woman Veterans Giving, an organization that seeks to narrow the gap between civilian and military relations. Additionally, she volunteers with the Sacramento chapter of The Mission Continues, which helps veterans find purpose through community impact.

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**Education:** B.A. in business administration, Lindenwood University; M.A. in management and leadership, Webster University; graduate certificate in business principles, The Fullbridge Program at Concordia University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Moving up in the ranks as a female in a male-dominated organization called the Marine Corps."



**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Retire from the Marine Corps and start my second career."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "The CEO of The Goodwin-Cole Company and still promoting the largest and most successful women veteran's nonprofit: Women Veterans Giving."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "The smell of

cigarette smoke"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A weekend getaway near the beach where we can relax with food, wine and time together."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The knowledge and support of family, friends and all of the Marines I served with"



## GIULIANO KORNBERG

**K**ornberg joined the Sacramento Philharmonic & Opera in 2016 and has since helped increase yearly fundraising to over \$1 million, up from \$650,000 when he started. As development manager, Kornberg works with the Philharmonic's board of directors and executive director to implement all aspects of fundraising, from building relationships with donors to planning special events like Big Day of Giving. Kornberg also serves on the boards of directors of The First Tee of Greater Sacramento and the Stanford Sacramento Alumni Association, giving back to the community through youth mentorship and alumni engagement in the Sacramento region.

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### GUILIANO KORNBERG

Development manager,  
Sacramento Philharmonic  
& Opera

**Education:** B.A. in music, M.A. in music, science and technology, Stanford University  
**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Moving to Sacramento for work without knowing anyone or anything about the city was a big challenge, but I have enjoyed my time and will continue to build my life here."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Ten years ago, I wanted to become better at playing the drums, and to play some type of drum in the marching band (bass drum, quads, snare drum). I ended up playing the bass drum."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continuing to do good work and making an impact in my community — hopefully for an orchestra, and hopefully in Sacramento!"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "I am not impressed by people who don't respond to emails and texts at all (late, or after a while, is totally fine!)."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "I love playing tennis, listening to a live concert and spending the day on the beach — in no particular order."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "I have had lots of support from family, friends, colleagues, mentors, significant others, etc., who have always had my back whenever I needed it, either personally or professionally."

Devin Lavelle

## DEVIN LAVELLE

Senior researcher,  
California Research Bureau

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Lavelle uncovers insights about policy initiatives through economic analysis, data visualization and consumer outreach. Some of his projects include an analysis of the impacts of national security spending in California, an examination of the environmental hazards resulting from sea level rise and a report to track changes in legislative demographics from election to election. Lavelle also serves as the District 7 parks commissioner, providing input on the policies and operations of local parks. He has contributed to the Mayor's Project Prosper Working Group to help guide economic development in the Sacramento region. Additionally, he co-founded the Pocket Greenhaven Community

**Association**, a nonprofit that encourages engagement with community issues.



riverfront and completed parkway, an expanded Sacramento State Downtown Campus, a community center in the Pocket-Greenhaven neighborhood and a series of WOW murals at parks in neighborhoods around the city."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A volunteer day at a local park, hike in the foothills or bike ride on the parkway, take the kids to a local park, the library or Fairytale Town and finish at a great local craft brewery or two."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My wife, who believes I can do anything."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Not taking pride in your work"

**Education:** B.A. in politics, Pomona College; master's in public policy and administration, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "The recession left me unemployed and feeling unemployable for over two years. I struggled on, piecing together short-term work, pinching pennies, becoming harder working and more focused as a result."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "I was a 20-something single male. I wish my main goals were more laudable, but they did allow me to develop countless relationships that have been invaluable in the years my goals have become more meaningful."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Helping cut the ribbons on an activated

# Congratulations TO OUR ALUMNI

The Sacramento Business Journal's 40 Under 40 highlights the region's rising stars. These honorees are entrepreneurs, innovators, public servants, and government leaders who are making a difference in the capital region and beyond — and they were *Made at Sac State*.

## MADE AT SAC STATE™

Anne Descalzo  
Assistant Vice President  
SAFE Credit Union  
Journalism '11

Shawna Fitzgerald  
CEO  
Creating Answers  
Finance '09

Brenda Forman  
VP & Managing Director  
Merlot Marketing  
Marketing '02

Lucas Frerichs  
City Councilman,  
Director of State Policy  
City of Davis  
Government '06

Nicholas Hastings  
President & Exec. Director  
Square Root Academy  
Mechanical Engineering '16

Bindu Jaduram  
Regional Manager  
Tri Counties Bank  
Strategic Management '00

Devin Lavelle  
Senior Researcher  
California Research  
Bureau  
Public Policy and Admin. '11

Michael Lynch  
Co-Founder & CEO  
Improve Your Tomorrow  
Public Policy and Admin. '14

Christine Mahon  
AVP, Marketing & Comm.  
Association of General  
Contractors of California  
Public Relations '10

Ashley Mellott  
COO & Chief of Staff  
Webconnex  
Marketing '09

Sarah Pollo  
President & CEO  
Pollo Communications, Inc.  
Journalism '06  
Government '15

SACRAMENTO STATE  
Redefine the Possible

[csus.edu/made/blog](http://csus.edu/made/blog)

# Brendan Leonard

## BRENDAN LEONARD

Land acquisition and entitlements, Anthem United

In his role at Anthem United, an international real estate development company, Leonard has helped the Sacramento region capitalize on new home development opportunities. Prior to working at Anthem United, Leonard founded his own consulting firm, served in the U.S. military, earned a seat on the board of directors of the Building Industry Association and founded a competitive men's lacrosse team in San Francisco. Currently, he serves as vice chair for the City of West Sacramento Environment & Utilities Commission and participates in

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local volunteer programs through the Sutter Club and Saint John's Program For Real Change.

**Education:** B.A. in communication, Saint Mary's College; civil engineering and government, United States Air Force Academy; Ross Program in real estate development, USC

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Overcoming age bias in a field where

youth is (understandably) perceived as a lack of experience or maturity to do the big jobs with enormous budgets."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Contributing meaningfully to the positive direction of this world while in ferocious pursuit of my best self."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Upspeak. It is one of the most damaging characteristics of the speaker's credibility and the English language overall."

**My ideal weekend includes:**

"Unstructured time with people I love, rigorous exercise, learning, meditating, recovering, binge watching Planet Earth, making food, being in nature, napping, writing and last but certainly not least, plotting the next move."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Crushing hardship. It forged a wisdom that forever altered the fabric of my being. But on the daily, it is the intelligent, successful, loyal, loving goofballs that comprise my core friend group."

# Genevieve Levy

## GENEVIEVE LEVY

Director of family services, Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services

**Education:** B.A. in international relations; international relations and Spanish executive leadership program, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Helped refugee family through the tragic loss of their father, brain injury in the son and subsequent services needed, including asylum petition for brother, family self-sufficiency and name change applications. The illiterate mom got her driver's license and the family moved into a new apartment."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Continue working for a cause I believed in, to support my community including immigrants and refugees, get married to my best friend and start a family."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "The president/CEO of a nonprofit social service organization that I am proud to lead. I would also like to be involved in activities at my children's schools, coach local youth sports and find new ways to support the community."

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"Complacency, laziness and acceptance. Just because things are normally done one way, doesn't mean they can't be different, better and more efficient."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Spending time with my husband, daughter and friends. Being outdoors."

Riding our bikes to go to the park, farmer's market and restaurant."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The support of my best friend and husband, Rob. We have been together since we were 19 and we have supported each other through all academic, professional and personal accomplishments."

# Michael Lynch

## MICHAEL LYNCH

Co-founder and CEO, Improve Your Tomorrow

Lynch co-founded Improve Your Tomorrow in 2013 with the goal of increasing the number of young men of color who attend and graduate from colleges and universities. Improve Your Tomorrow started with 17 students and \$2,000. The organization now has 35 staff members and a budget of \$1.5 million. Improve Your Tomorrow has changed the trajectory of hundreds of young men of

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color by providing them with support services from seventh grade until college graduation. Students from the original cohort of Improve Your Tomorrow will graduate from college this year, with many more graduation ceremonies on the horizon.

**Education:** B.S. in business management, Humboldt State University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Starting Improve Your Tomorrow"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To become an attorney"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "CEO of IYT"

and a university professor"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people are late!"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Eating great food, spending time with my wife and daughter, playing basketball, going to church and reading."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My wife and dad"

# Christine Mahon

Associate vice president, marketing and communications, Associated General Contractors of California

Mahon works to give a voice to the construction industry and call attention to policy or workforce issues. During the statewide drought in 2014, Mahon represented clients that relied on water supplies from a critically low Folsom Lake and helped craft a strategic plan to make the issue stand out to lawmakers. Prior to her role at Associated General Contractors, Mahon managed communications and public affairs strategy for VSP Global's mobile clinic outreach in California. In that role, she worked to identify communities with significant gaps in eye care and find sustainable solutions to ensure the health of their residents. Mahon is also chair of Metro EDGE, where she supports the professional

development, civic engagement and philanthropic involvement of about 700 young professionals in the Sacramento area.

**Education:** B.A. in communications, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "I think that one is yet to come! I'm expecting my first child in late November, which is guaranteed to present some exciting and exhausting challenges."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Simply to make it through college. In 2008 I was in my second year of college, transitioning to a new school and learning how to balance a full-time job."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continuing to find ways to make an impact in Sacramento. I almost left to move to Portland a few years back and stayed after realizing this community



would always be home. I want to keep helping to make it better."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "The person who always sends high-importance/read receipt emails that aren't urgent. It's usually the same person who calls to see if you got their email they just sent."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Pre-pregnancy: walking my dog, brunch

with friends and wine tasting in Clarksburg or Amador. Now that I'm pregnant? I really just want a weekend filled with naps!"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My tribe, network, whatever you call it—I wouldn't be where I am without the support of my friends, family and mentors who believe in me and constantly push me to be better."



# Kate Meis

## KATE MEIS

Executive director, Local Government Commission

**M**eis supports local officials through policy guidance and community events. Some of her projects include creating regional adaptation strategies for climate change, addressing the growing racial equity gap and working with local leaders to prepare for the opportunities and concerns related to autonomous vehicles. Additionally, Meis worked with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research to start the California Adaptation Forum, which brings people together in Sacramento to advance community resilience to climate risks. In 2016, she was recognized by the Chronicle of Philanthropy as one of the nation's "40 Under 40 Young Leaders Who Are Solving the Problems of Today – and Tomorrow." Meis also serves on the boards of a number of community organizations, including the Powerhouse Science Center.

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**Education:** B.A. in sociology, Sonoma State University; M.S. in community and regional development, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "As a young female leader, I'm often the outlier. However, thanks to my amazing mentors in the region, I've learned to take full advantage of the great privilege and responsibility that comes with having a seat at the table."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Improving communities. Traveling around the world seeing amazing parks, diverse mobility options and walkable downtowns, I wanted more people in the Valley to experience those kinds of cities. My position helps me leverage my experiences into building more."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "With the speed of today's innovations, 10 years is a lifetime. I ask myself every year if I'm still contributing to this work. As long as I can say 'yes,' I will be here helping communities embrace the future."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Complacency. There is so much in life to be passionate and compassionate about – whether it's a social injustice or a remarkable experience to enjoy and share, I find it really tragic when people live their lives on cruise control."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "I am usually happiest when I'm outdoors with friends and loved ones. I love backpacking in the Sierras, playing soccer, biking along the American River, trail running and traveling just about anywhere I haven't been."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My tribe. My family has always encouraged me to seek leadership roles. My husband and close friends have given me the strength and energy to take on difficult challenges, and my mentors have guided me through the process."

# Kari Miskit

## KARI MISKIT

Vice president of communications, Visit Sacramento

**M**iskit is at the forefront of bringing the ever-changing face of Sacramento to life. When she started working at Visit Sacramento, Miskit developed a public relations program around Visit Sacramento's Farm-to-Fork initiative and has since created an all-digital press room to create blog posts and videos to market Sacramento as a destination. Miskit uses her professional skills to mentor local students in public relations and communications and serves as a guest lecturer at her alma mater, California State University Chico. Miskit is also the co-chair of the Read Across America project, which encourages recognizable community members to share their love of reading with students.

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**Education:** B.A. in journalism, California State University Chico

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "I've had to learn to trust my instincts. It's easy when you're surrounded by lots of opinions to defer to others. But to really lead, I have to believe in myself first and foremost."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To get to a place where my work and my personal life had a better flow and balance. When you're really cutting your teeth in your career, the balance can shift, so it's about figuring out what works."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Surrounded by family and friends, in a job that challenges me and drives me to be better, and all with a good cup of coffee in my hand."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Nothing bothers me more than people who don't own their mistakes. We're all human, we all mess up. But the way someone responds to a mistake says more about them than the mistake itself."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "No alarm clock, the farmers market with my kids, some exercise, lots of good coffee, verde enchiladas from Tres Hermanas, time to enjoy a cocktail and down time with my husband."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My family and friends, great professional mentors and plain old life experience. My loved ones and professional supporters challenged me and lifted me up. Those people, coupled with trying new things and overcoming challenges, brought me here."



# Ashley Mellott

## ASHLEY MELLOTT

Chief operating officer and chief of staff, Webconnex

**Education:** B.S. in business marketing, California State University Sacramento

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "I am a recovering people pleaser. Most of my leadership fails and challenges can almost all be pinpointed back to that trait. Once this was overcome, my impact and leadership skills were able to flourish."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "My main goal was to find or create a career that didn't suck, where I could leverage my skills to impact people. I didn't have a specific field in mind, as I felt I could accomplish this in any role."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "I want to be continuing to grow and develop people. People in my company, in my community and people around the world. This is something I live for and that fuels me."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Morning creative writing or reading, then mountain biking to get the adventure fix followed by cooling off at the lake. I'd likely serve at church and host a workshop at my house."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The influence of both (Webconnex co-founder) Eric Knopf and (life coach) Eric Waterbury."

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# Nikky Mohanna

## NIKKY MOHANNA

Principal, Mohanna Development Co.

**Education:** Bachelor's in political economy, UC Berkeley; master's in political economy, London School of Economics

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Entering a very complex, cut-throat industry as a young female and learning all of the technical aspects of construction (traditionally 'a man's world') to value engineer and build with innovation."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To get a Ph.D. in economics and stay in academia."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Revolutionizing the way we build housing through technology and innovative mass production"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When someone responds to a problem by saying 'that's just the standard in the industry,' instead of being motivated to change it."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Touring through unique projects and concepts in cities around the globe and getting inspired by the innovation that already exists"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My mom and dad"

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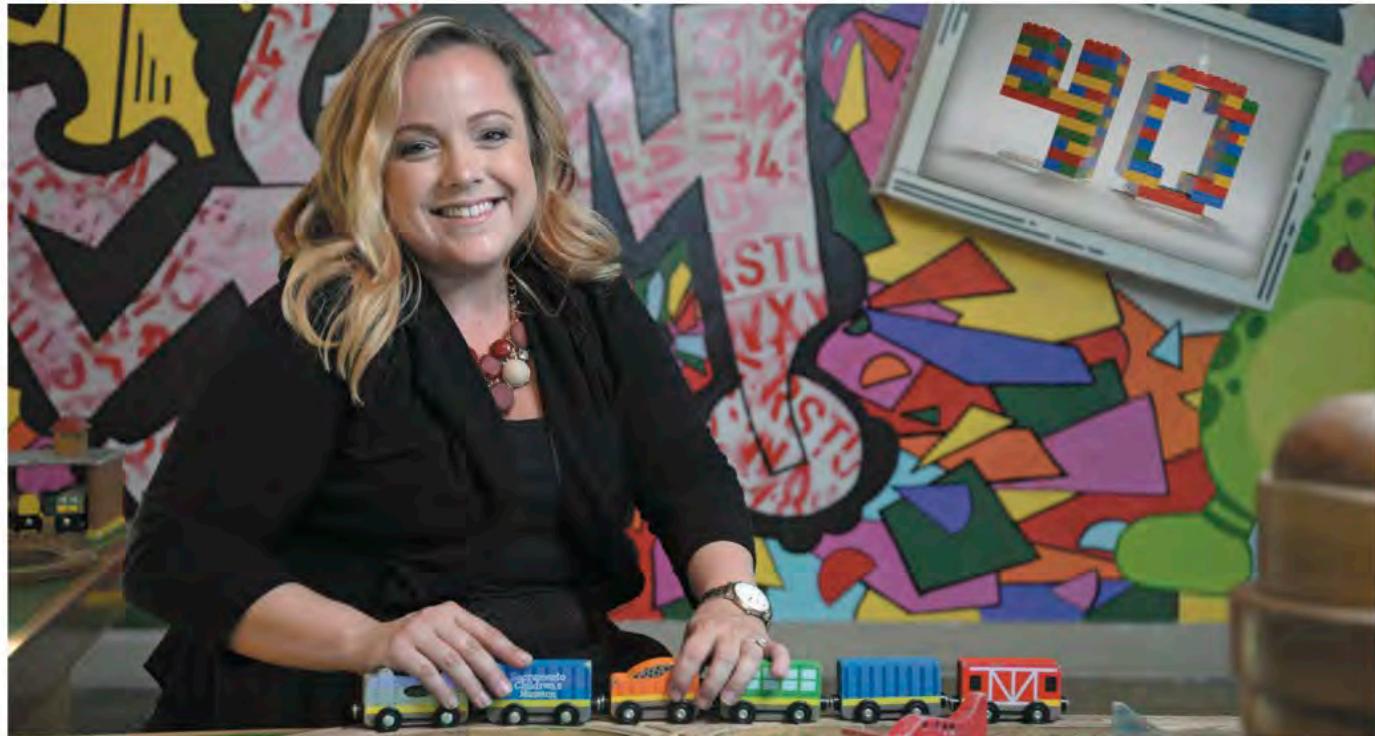
# Sarah Pollo

## SARAH POLLO

President and CEO,  
Pollo Communications Inc.

**P**ollo founded Pollo Communications after a decade of experience working with elected officials and public relations firms. She encourages co-workers to value the importance of going beyond a 9-to-5 job and become a part of their community for both employer visibility and personal growth as well as network building. Pollo started her career as an intern in the governor's office and then rose through the ranks at fast-paced public relations firms before starting her own company in August 2018. Pollo served on the board of Hornets Policy & Politics Alumni, a chapter of Sacramento State

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University's Alumni Association, for three years and now has a lifetime advisory role. She is also a member of the East Sacramento Women's Club, a nonprofit organization that supports Sacramento charities.

**Education:** B.A. in government-journalism; M.A. in government,

California State University Sacramento  
**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Being fired for the first time. This taught me that failure is not always bad and provides an opportunity for growth and reinventing one's self."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To work downtown in a high-rise building at a public relations firm"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Expanding my business and being a mentor to others"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When someone doesn't reply all on an email chain"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "No plans and lots of outdoor activities"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My colleagues who have supported me, including those from my alma mater and previous and current clients. Additionally, the support of my fiancé, Chris, and my family and friends who have helped me get to where I am today."



## COLIN ROE

Regional sales manager,  
Fidelity National Title Co.

**R**oe is responsible for both growing market share for the company's existing offices and establishing five additional offices throughout the region, covering territory from Lake Tahoe to Solano County. Most recently, Roe developed a customer care department within the company to provide client support, which has grown revenues month over month and has expanded into other regions under his oversight and direction. Outside of Fidelity National Title Co., Roe serves on the Young Professionals Network Committee with the Placer County Association of Realtors and was named the Placer County Association of Realtors Affiliate of the Year in 2015. Additionally, Roe serves as a board member for HomeAid Sacramento, where he developed a fundraising event, the HomeAid Poker Tournament, which raised over \$11,000 in 2018.

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# Colin Roe

**Education:** A.A. in liberal arts and social science, Sierra College; B.A. in organizational leadership, Chapman University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "The expansion and contraction of the real estate market. This flux can impact everyone in the industry and at times result in corporate responsibility measures and layoffs. As a naturally empathetic person, this is the biggest challenge."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To be a husband that my future wife could be proud of as a provider, leader and companion."

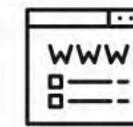
**In 10 years, I want to be:** "A better husband. A great father to our future children and a mentor to the next generation."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People not living what they say. I'm a firm believer in being authentic; be who you are and embrace it."

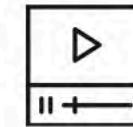
**My ideal weekend includes:** "Spending time recharging a little bit with a lot of family and friends around or just my bride, our puppy and me. It could be a local excursion, relaxing in Tahoe or simply hanging out at our home."

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "The love and encouragement from my family. Over the years, each of them have helped me persevere and grow to achieve what was in front of me."

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# Josh Rubin

**JOSH RUBIN**  
CEO and owner,  
Post Modern Marketing

**R**ubin is the CEO and owner of one of Sacramento's fastest-growing companies in 2018. Post Modern supports both small startups and large corporations in website design, social media and other marketing tools. Rubin values work-life balance within his company and gives his employees a paid day off each year to volunteer for the cause of their choice. The company also offers free marketing and design workshops for the business community. Additionally, Rubin volunteers with SCORE to help mentor entrepreneurs and act as a marketing and design consultant for various nonprofits in the Sacramento area.

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**Education:** College dropout.  
**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Navigating this whole business thing. From financial troubles to failed partnerships to bad hires to abusive customers—having a healthy business is harder than I ever thought possible."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To find a way to stop being a disposable employee and to create a company where employees were valued as people, not numbers. Ten years ago is when I finally started my first company."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "A leader in the community who helps make people, organizations, businesses and the area itself better. I'm just not sure what that looks like just yet."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "Not being honest with yourself, and in turn, everyone else. It's okay to fail, and it's okay to say no. But if you are honest with yourself about what you can do

and communicate it, you'll go far."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Me, lakeside at Lake Mary (Mammoth Lakes area), a cooler of craft beers, a fishing rod, my friends and my dog chasing bears."

**I wouldn't be where I am today**

**without:** "John, Emily, Katya, Amy, Joseph, Alex, Isabel, Vanessa and every other person who has chosen or chooses to get on board this bus. I have the best people working with me and each has made me a better person."

# Vidhu Shekhar

**VIDHU SHEKHAR**  
Manager, KPMG LLP

**W**ith 10 years of experience in public-sector support, Shekhar leads teams at KPMG that support several public-sector organizations to enhance their strategy and operations. Some of Shekhar's projects include working with government personnel to implement process automation capability and supporting three nonprofits serving Medicaid populations. Through KPMG, Shekhar volunteers with KPMG Family for Literacy, which donates books to schools, hosts students for "Come to Work Days" and provides

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mentorship to high school interns. He is a guest speaker at the University of Southern California, the McGeorge School of Law and for the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Program. He is on the board of the American Society for Public Administration and an ambassador for Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs.

**Education:** Bachelor's in architecture, SRM University; master's in public administration, USC

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Getting my father-in-law's approval for proposing to my wife."

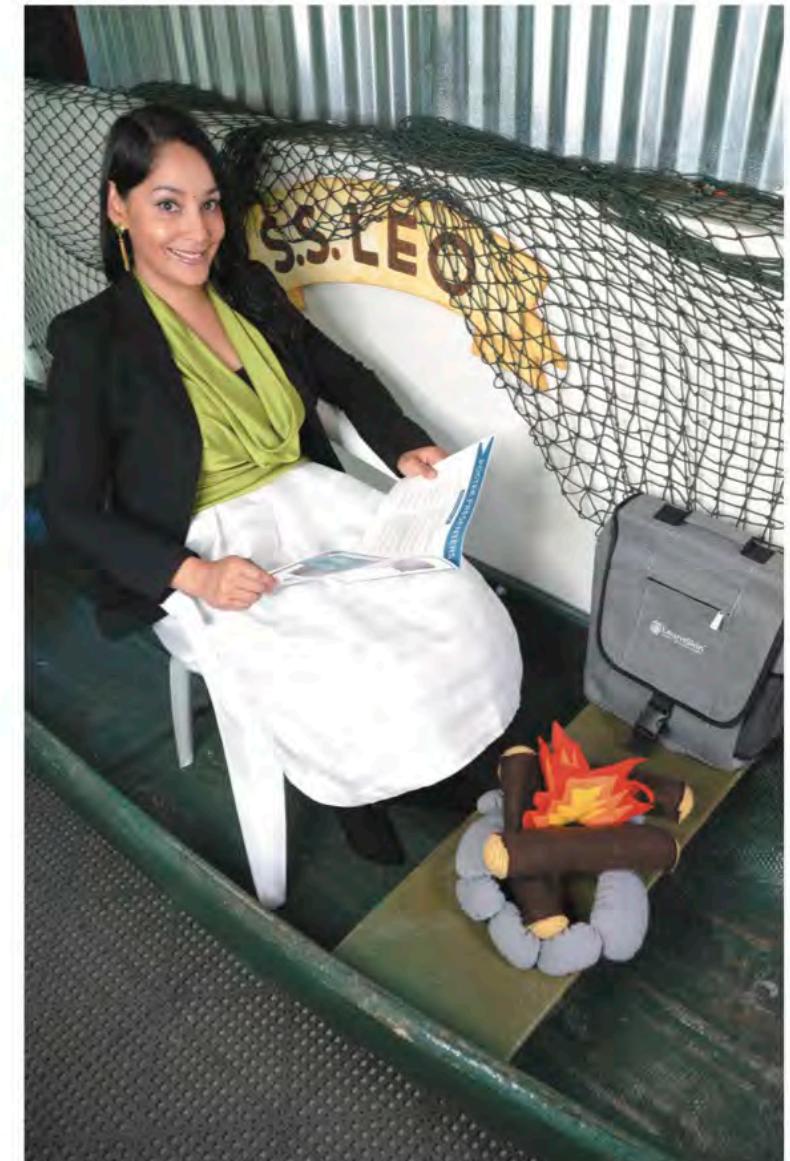
**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Helping build urban spaces that enhanced quality of life"

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Continue making impacts to the lives of Californian through public policy and technology"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When folks use the exit lane to pass you and cut you off"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "A combination of waterfront, good food and the company of friends and family"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My family, especially my grandparents, who raised me; my brother, with whom I still engage in sibling rivalry, mostly on the golf course. And then my wife, who has the toughest job—to put up with me."



# Venita Sivamani

**Venita Sivamani founded LearnSkin (formerly Dermveda), a resource for integrative skin care education, after speaking with fellow UC Davis**

**alumni-turned-dermatologists who lacked educational resources to share with their patients. With a shortage of dermatologists in the U.S., wait times are often lengthy and visit times are short, leaving little time for discussion between patients and physicians.**

**Sivamani combined her educational background with her entrepreneurial skills to start LearnSkin, which seeks to "empower individuals to find solutions to skin concerns that best suit their needs."**

**By focusing on lifestyle management and early education for those with skin afflictions, Sivamani hopes to be able to make a sustainable impact in improving quality of life and overall wellbeing from the "inside out."**

**LearnSkin has grown from pre-revenue**

**last year to nearly \$1 million in revenue this year.**

**Education:** B.S. in human development, MBA, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Bootstrapping a startup. I have learned how to prioritize what truly matters and persevere forward. It has also been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life!"

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To start a school. I have always been passionate about education. It is the key to change."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Leading a global company"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "People who don't follow through"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Hiking with my dogs, yoga or boot camp, getting a massage and spending time with friends and family"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My mentors and support network. Thank you for being there each step of the way and believing in me!"

# Donald Terry

**DONALD TERRY**  
City councilman,  
city of Rancho Cordova

**D**onald Terry serves as a city councilman for the city of Rancho Cordova.

**In this role, he has advocated for lower fees for new housing developments to help spur growth. Additionally, he led the campaign to pass Measure H, a general sales tax initiative that has raised more than \$25 million. The city has invested this money in public safety, roads, sidewalks and educational programs. He has also volunteered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Sacramento.**



**Education:** A.A. in liberal arts, Cabrillo College; B.A. in political science, UC Davis

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Balancing the Sacramento City Unified School District's budget during the recession."

**We were forced to cut tens of millions of dollars every year during my term."**

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "Have a career where I could work to live and live to work."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "A good

**dad, father and son"**

**My ideal weekend includes:** "My family and either at the beach or at the lake"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My wife, my family and my friends"



## NATE ULSH

### NATHAN ULSH

Executive director, Franklin Blvd Business District

**U**lsh advocates and promotes business and economic development on Franklin Boulevard while working to establish a safe place to shop and live for residents, many of whom come from low-income households. Ulsh serves over 600 businesses, 7,000 employees and 10,000 residents, working to revitalize the underserved district by attracting investment and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, he volunteers with youth in the Franklin Boulevard district through fundraising efforts and school clean-ups. He is also on the board of Fresher Sacramento, which provides culinary and sales training to local youth, and is a member of Global Shapers Sacramento, a group of young leaders focused on community development projects.

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**Education:** Associate degree in arts, Clark College; B.S.S., certificate micro-economics, Washington State University

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "Building a profitable, successful business with no business education or experience with lack of capital."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To work for the police department to better my community. After starting my own business, I realized I got the wrong degree and fell in love with entrepreneurialism, economic and business development."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Replicating our success on Franklin Boulevard to other parts of Sacramento and beyond via community building and economic development"

**My biggest pet peeve:** "When people show up more than five minutes late. Argh."

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Watching comedy TV, spending time with family and friends, learning something new!"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "Ambition, persistence and my wife. I came to wonderful Sacramento because of her career and have succeeded because of her unconditional support."

## Jia Wang-Connelly

### JIA WANG-CONNELLY

Senior structural engineer, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

**A**t the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Wang-Connelly takes the lead in the design, construction and renovation of existing correctional and rehabilitation facilities throughout California. Prior to joining the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Wang-Connelly worked as a senior structural engineer with the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, where she reviewed and made construction decisions on hundreds of health care projects ranging from small rural hospitals to new large urban hospitals with construction budgets as large as \$1.2 billion. Wang-Connelly also serves as the chair of the Sacramento Planning and Design

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Commission, is a member of the Sacramento County Building Board of Appeals and a member of the State of California Seismic Safety Assessment Team-earthquake responder.

**Education:** B.S. in civil engineering and M.S. in structural engineering, Tongji University; M.S. in earthquake engineering, University of Patras; M.S. in earthquake engineering, University of Pavia

**The biggest challenge I've overcome:** "On my parents' shoulders, I pulled myself out of the poverty-ridden coal mine town in China through education. Ultimately, I became a successful structural engineer. After being a foreigner in many places, I made Sacramento my adopted home."

**Ten years ago, my main goal was:** "To be an accomplished structural



engineer, working on projects that have a long-lasting impact on the community. I wanted to figure out who I am and how to best serve others with the talents God gave me."

**In 10 years, I want to be:** "Making a contribution to Sacramento, teaching my daughter Cypress the value of service, and giving her a deep conviction that whichever profession she chooses, she has an equal chance to succeed as a woman."

**My biggest pet peeve:** "The under-representation of professional women

scientists/engineers and in higher professional positions of all types both in the public and private sector"

**My ideal weekend includes:** "Reading, meditating, dancing with my 20-month daughter and with my hubbie shouting 'happy happy!'"

**I wouldn't be where I am today without:** "My parents, who sacrificed their dreams so I could achieve mine. They gave me an education and let me go when I decided to come to U.S. to pursue my dreams. My husband who is a good and decent man."

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## TOO MANY TO CHOOSE FROM ...

Many of our honorees had a lot of fun at the Sacramento Children's Museum. Here are extra photos that we had to share:



**Josh Rubin**, CEO and owner, Post Modern Marketing



**Brenda Forman**, Vice president, managing director, Merlot Marketing



**Michael Cox**, Service area vice president, mission integration, Dignity Health



**Jackie Kirkwood**, Vice president of operations, Goodwin-Cole Company Inc.



**Dave Kempa**, Founder and editor, VOICES: River City



**Nathan Ush**, Executive director, Franklin Blvd Business District



**Ashley Mellott**, Chief operating officer and chief of staff, Webconnex



**Nicholas Haystings**, President and executive director, Square Root Academy



**Kelly Brenk**, Manager, community health, Sutter Health



**Christine Mahon**, Associate vice president, marketing and communications, Associated General Contractors of California



**Katherine Bardis-Miry**, President, Bardis Homes



**Colin Roe**, Regional sales manager, Fidelity National Title Co.

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