DEBRA ROSEN
CEO OF THE YEAR
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
YOUR CHAMBER
YOUR VOICE
YOUR FUTURE

Where Small and Large Business Voices Come Together and EVERY Voice Matters.

We Look Forward To Meeting You Soon

July 25  Health Advisory Council
July 26  Leadership Academy: Strategies for Advancing Your Career
August 1 Military Affairs Advisory Council
August 3 Economic Development Advisory Council
August 4 Operation Connect
August 9 Regional Connect Networking @ Venture X SD-Scripps Ranch
August 16 Leadership Academy: Networking Strategies for Board Positions
August 23 San Diego Military Summit
September 14 Honoring Our Region's Heroes
January 19 San Diego Business Summit
March 1 San Diego Women's Week Leadership Conference

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San Diego County's Only US Chamber Accredited Organization
After 23 years as an internal medicine doctor, I wanted a different kind of challenge. I combined my medical industry knowledge with my love for technology to establish Accolade Consultants in 2013.

In 2019, I joined Vistage to build my confidence and gain valuable insights from experienced CEOs I trust and respect. Immediately, I had a confidential group of peers giving me input, pointing out what I couldn’t see, validating ideas and sharing resources. I also have an amazing, supportive CEO coach who is dedicated to my development as a business leader.

In three years, my business has grown 30%, and the staff has nearly doubled. Beyond the numbers, I’m also a better leader with a 10-year vision and a solid plan to achieve it.

I’m Stephen. I live a life of climb.

Dr. Stephen Broomes
Founder & CEO, Accolade Consultants
Douglasville, Georgia
Vistage member since 2019
DEBRA ROSEN
North San Diego Business Chamber
Lifetime Achievement Award Honoree

PAUL BARIBAULT
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

DAVE BROOKE
MyPoint Credit Union

DOUGLAS BRYANT
QuidelOrtho

JILL COLLINS
Audacity Health

JULIET CORRENTI
Radeus Labs, Inc.

CAROL DEDRICH
Girl Scouts San Diego

ERIC DUBE
Travere Therapeutics

STARR EDWARDS
Bitchin’ Sauce LLC

ELIZABETH FITZSIMONS
Episcopal Community Services

NEIL HATTANGADI
Cortica

JULIE LOWEN
Children’s Paradise Preschool & Infant Center

TAD SETH PARZEN
Burnham Center For Community Advancement

GABRIEL PEREZ KRIEB
Chosen Foods, LLC

PETER SIBLEY
EdGate

RICK WILSON
San Diego Regional East County Chamber of Commerce

WINNERS 2023
PNC Bank would like to extend sincerest congratulations to all of the CEO of the Year winners and finalists. Your pursuit of excellence and ability to navigate challenges with grace and resilience are qualities that make you exceptional leaders. This recognition is truly a testament to your unwavering dedication and remarkable achievements in steering your organizations toward success. Congratulations!

For more than 170 years, we have been committed to providing our clients with great service and powerful financial expertise to help them meet their financial goals. We are proud of our long-standing history of supporting not only our customers but also our communities, employees and shareholders.
Debra Rosen Revitalized North San Diego Business Chamber

ORGANIZATIONS: CEO Successfully Navigates Commercial World, Sets Sail in Retirement

IN HER OWN WORDS:
“It is an honor and I am humbled to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award and celebrate with all the CEO of the Year Nominees. There are many people that believed in and inspired me over the years, teaching me how to be the best leader possible in this ever-changing world. As a leader, you are always being watched, and watching others has been a great source of learning for me.”

BY BRAD GRAVES

When Debra Rosen was presented with an opportunity to take over a North County business group 14 years ago, she was told the group had “a few issues.”

“I probably should have asked them to define ‘a few issues,’” she said.

Rosen soon realized the situation was more challenging than what she first imagined.

The organization, then known as the San Diego North Chamber of Commerce, was struggling with debt. It was behind on payroll taxes and rent.

“They were living out of boxes and there were massive liens against the organization,” Rosen recalled.

“The board direction from the beginning was simple; there were issues and we had to fix it or close it.”

With the support of a strong board that was put together by Rosen and other regional leaders, good mentors and a membership that believed in the new team, “we were able to pay off all debt, have liens released and build a fabulous team of colleagues in a year and a half.”

This was accomplished during the recession years of 2009 and 2010.

Fourteen years and a name change later, Rosen marked her retirement from her CEO’s job at the North San Diego Business Chamber on June 30 with a sense of accomplishment.

She handed responsibility for a larger organization (now with more than 800 business members) and a much stronger organization to incoming CEO Chris Thorne.

Lifetime Achievement

Rosen received the Lifetime Achievement Award when the San Diego Business Journal handed out its CEO of the Year Awards on June 27.

Rosen’s retirement may end up being more of a sabbatical.

In the near term, she is looking forward to taking her 45-foot catamaran on an extended cruise. She is going with her husband (whom she introduced during the awards ceremony as Captain Mike), her son and a few other crew members. The plan is to explore the Gulf of California and Sea of Cortez for six to seven months.

She also plans to do some consulting while on the boat.

“There is a lot of downtime and this amazing tool called Starlink that allows me to stay connected from anywhere in the world,” Rosen said. “That was one of the requirements I had before retiring with my husband and traveling, and he made sure it was on the catamaran and ready to roll.”

She plans to stay active in the chamber, as an advisory board member, and attend chamber events while she is in town.

Rosen and her husband Mike have been planning to sail into retirement for five years. They made a trip to Santa Catalina Island in early July.

“My whole career has been around deadlines, schedules, meetings and emails, and it will be different not having this structure,” she said. “I really enjoyed the first week of sailing around Catalina with no itinerary of when we had to be anywhere. We made a few deviations in our journey, knowing we didn’t have to get back for anything.

“However, with Starlink, I was able to stay connected to the chamber so if they had any questions they could reach me. Working and leading have always been enjoyable and it was a tough decision to retire,” Rosen said. “While the idea of retirement looked good five years ago when we put the plan in place, the closer we got to retirement, it was a bit scary although exciting. Thus a sabbatical for a few years to sail as much of the world possible while we are still young and healthy.”

If all goes well with the first journey through the Sea of Cortez, Rosen and her husband would like to sail further south to Panama and head over to the Caribbean in late 2024.

From SDSU to Fifth Avenue

A graduate of San Diego State University with a bachelor’s degree in public administration with a business and marketing emphasis, Rosen said that she had planned on becoming a lawyer but changed her mind after taking a year off from school to go into advertising sales.

Her early business experience was with Sutton Industries and Capital Cities Inc.

The experience reinforced a few key points. She learned early on the value of building relationships and gaining the trust of colleagues and customers.

Rosen also learned to view sales through the lens of a solution provider; “You are not selling an object. You always present a solution to a challenge the customer is facing.”

Sales turned out to be so lucrative that Rosen decided against going to law school. She went to work at the San Diego Union-Tribune, eventually going into management. While there, she developed an interest in business organizations after working with the Gaslamp Quarter Association.

In the 1990s, redevelopment of the Gaslamp Quarter was still in progress. It was no longer a dingy district with businesses serving sailors on leave; it had yet to emerge as the slick entertainment district teeming with crowds. There were no baseball fans; Petco Park was still in the future.

Rosen got to know and work with entrepreneurs such as restaurateurs Ingrid Croce, My whole career has been around deadlines, schedules, meetings and emails, and it will be different not having this structure,” she said. “I really enjoyed the first week of sailing around Catalina with no itinerary of when we had to be anywhere. We made a few deviations in our journey, knowing we didn’t have to get back for anything.

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Rosen got to know and work with entrepreneurs such as restaurateurs Ingrid Croce, David Cohn and Eric VanDenHaute.

“They were all involved with growing the Gaslamp Quarter Association and gave me the opportunity to be involved with them,” she recalled. “This gave me the opportunity to work with small business and really understand what their
challenges were and develop some creative strategies.

“The Paladium was also downtown and it was fun working with Louis Vuitton, Tiffany and Company, Versace, Cartier, and Alfred Dunhill with their display advertising needs.”

The View from North County
After a little more than 14 years with the Union-Tribune, Rosen moved on to her first stint at heading a troubled organization, the Escondido Downtown Business Association, which the city was then threatening to dissolve.

Rosen convinced city leaders to keep the association after she met with every downtown business to determine what they needed from the association.

Four years later, another door opened for her. The San Diego North Chamber of Commerce needed her help.

After taking the helm as president and CEO, one of the first things Rosen did was renegotiate the organization’s lease. Then, after COVID hit, she right-sized the office again, going from a suite that had five private offices, a conference room and a board room to one with a small conference room and three private offices, one of which is kept open for members to use.

One of Rosen’s guiding philosophies is that everything that the chamber does has to be relevant to a majority of its members. “Every dime we spend, every event or program we implement must be relevant to 75% or more of our members,” she said. “If it’s not, we don’t do it.”

Today the organization she rescued is thriving. NSDBC is one of only six California chambers to have a highly coveted five-star rating from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a distinguished accreditation earned by only 3% of chambers nationwide.

During Rosen’s tenure, NSDBC has broadened its reach to include companies well south of Interstate 8. The organization, you must think creatively and not follow the status quo.”

She also spoke on the subject of competition.

“Some of us love it, some hate it, but one thing I have learned is that it makes you better. It brings out the best in us; it forces us to push ourselves, to be more creative and more innovative.”

“As the great philosopher Aristotle once said, ‘Through competition, we improve ourselves.’

“Competition also teaches us valuable life lessons. It teaches us how to lose gracefully, how to be a good sport, and how to handle rejection. And let’s face it; rejection is just a part of life. Unless you’re Tom Brady, then you never experience it.”

She elaborated on her thoughts when reached after the event. Learning about the nature of competition early in her career “allowed me to develop strategic ways to accomplish anything,” she said. “It has never been a desire to impact the competition negatively but rather make ourselves more relevant to the market we are all trying to capture.”

“Competition has allowed me the ability to really understand the weaknesses and strengths of competitors, allowing us to compete at a different level, making us stronger and more relevant to the marketplace.”

“As crazy as this sounds, I like competition,” Rosen said. “It makes the game more interesting and makes us all stronger.”

“Many of my report cards that came home said Debra has some challenges when following directions,” she recalled. “The directions were to color inside the lines but she always goes outside of the lines and will often add her own elements.

“Well, it turns out that is one of the things that were a blessing because when you face challenges in leading an organization, you must think creatively and not follow the status quo.”

She also recalled her mentors and the people, who have influenced her thinking, including:

David Powell. “He believed in me and gave me an opportunity to go into advertising sales right out of college. Dave taught me the strategy behind sales as a 20-something employee just out of college.”

Gary Moore. “An incredible leader at the San Diego Union-Tribune. He taught me the strategy behind sales as a 20-something employee just out of college.”

Mike Aspolo, retired president/COO of Sony and Neal Manowitz, current CEO/COO Sony. “It’s all about the people. Take care of your people and they will follow you anywhere. People are the backbone of your company and if your team is happy, your customers will be happy.”

Deborah Dugan, (former) first female CEO of The Recording Academy. “NEVER, EVER give up or leave your values at the door. Your moral compass is something no one can ever take from you. Always stand up for what is right.”

On receiving her award June 27, Rosen closed her remarks with the sentiment, “It’s OK to color outside of the lines and when life gives you lemons, make a margarita. Cheers!”

Debra Rosen receiving proclamation from County of San Diego, presented by Supervisors Joel Anderson and Jim Desmond.

Debra Rosen and her lab and crew member Cooper. He will be traveling with the Rosen.

Mariel Hemingway joined Debra Rosen as a keynote for a San Diego Women’s Week event.

Chip Brewer, CEO of Callaway Golf, left, Debra Rosen and Brian Lynch, CFO of Callaway Golf enjoy some one-on-one conversation.

Helen Robbins-Meyer, CAO County of San Diego, left, Debra Rosen and District Attorney Summer Stephan attended a recent Chamber dinner.
Episcopal Community Services Meet Clients ‘Where They Are’

**NONPROFITS:** Two Years Into the Job, CEO Elizabeth Fitzsimons Is Leaving Her Mark

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**BY BRAD GRAVES**

Elizabeth Fitzsimons received the CEO of the Year Award in the Rising Star Category when the San Diego Business Journal presented its 2023 awards program on June 27. Fitzsimons is chief executive of **Episcopal Community Services.**

The nonprofit serves the homeless, those addicted to drugs, young children (particularly those needing early childhood education) and those with mental health needs. The organization interacts with more than 7,000 clients, “meeting them where they are,” Fitzsimons told the crowd at the awards ceremony at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine.

**Strengthening Programs, and Finances**

Fitzsimons, who is in her third year leading the organization, was nominated for her award by the ECS communications director, Adrienne Wilkerson.

Under Fitzsimons’ guidance and collaborative leadership, “ECS has experienced a profound transformation,” Wilkerson said. “Her strategic decisions have not only stimulated long-term financial performance but have also brought about substantial progress in our strategic operations.”

For example, Fitzsimons oversaw the opening of a new “safe haven.” In partnership with the city and county governments, the **Community Harm Reduction Safe Haven** serves up to 22 unhoused residents living with chronic substance use conditions. Clients are placed by **Family Health Centers of San Diego.**

The effort was recognized separately in SDBJ’s Healthcare Heroes Awards earlier in the year.

ECS operates a second Safe Haven in Uptown. The facility provides transitional housing and supportive services to chronically homeless single adults with moderate to severe mental health issues. Residents experience supportive communal living in an environment free of alcohol or drugs. Separately, Fitzsimons partnered with a local developer to bring a much-needed early childhood development center to a planned affordable housing development at SDSU West.

“Her influence has led to increased brand recognition, community outreach and the fostering of a more inclusive company culture,” Wilkerson said.

“One of the key reasons why Elizabeth is a strong contender for CEO of the Year is her commitment to inclusive and authentic leadership,” Wilkerson also said. “Since joining ECS in 2021, she has intuitively inspired board members, donors and partners to support ECS in ways that align with their own values and strengths. Elizabeth has also championed professional and leadership opportunities for people organization-wide, creating a sense of purpose and employee engagement.”

**A Trailblazer**

Wilkerson described Fitzsimons as “a trailblazer and dynamic leader, catalyzing remarkable transformations in every role she assumes. She guides ECS towards long-term sustainability, cultivating an empowering and equitable culture.”

Previously at the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, Fitzsimons elevated the chamber’s national profile through various partnerships and initiatives. During her tenure as chair of the San Diego Children’s Hospital, she led a $220 million fundraising campaign.

“Through participation with numerous organizations, Elizabeth exemplifies deep commitment to community,” Wilkerson said. She is active with other influential community organizations.

Serving on the City of San Diego’s Board of Library Commissioners from 2017 to 2022, she played a significant role in the development of library services benefiting all residents. Additionally, her tenure on the board of directors of the Jacob & Cowan San Diego Food Bank from 2016 to 2020, including key leadership positions, contributed to ensuring food security for thousands of people in the region.

**MyPoint Credit Union CEO Reaches Out to Diverse Communities**

**BUSINESS NONPROFITS:** David Brooke Serves as a Mentor and a Guide

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**By Brad Graves**

David Brooke, president and CEO of **MyPoint Credit Union,** received the CEO of the Year Award in the Business Nonprofit Category when the San Diego Business Journal presented its awards on June 27.

“I am deeply honored and humbled to be recognized by the San Diego Business Journal as a CEO of the Year, alongside a remarkable group of accomplished nominees. This recognition serves as a powerful affirmation of the collective efforts of the MyPoint team as we strive to make a meaningful impact on the San Diego community. I take immense pride in the incredible talent that surrounds me – including a forward-thinking board of directors and a team of dedicated individuals who share my passion for serving our members and the community,” said Brooke.

Brooke also takes an active hand in MyPoint’s community stewardship.

“Dave leads our scholarship program and what it is exceptional is that he gets to know the scholarship awardees and their families, and even stays in contact with them during the college years,” Brunner explained. “Also, he meets our small business members one by one. He meets the businesses owners to learn about what they do.”

Brooke also helps oversee MyPoint’s financial literacy programs, including a recent partnership with Anna Sanctuary to offer financial literacy and help open bank accounts for more than 45 Ukrainian families displaced by the war.

**Engaged and Supportive**

The MyPoint organization strives to provide its members with memorable experiences, Brunner said.

“At MyPoint Credit Union, we want to help those doers – individuals, families, local businesses and every one in-between – do more of the things they love in the city they call home. For over 75 years, we’ve been helping our members make the most out of their finances so they can live life on their own terms. Life may be short, but it should be awesome, and that’s why we’re focused on helping our members get the most out of their lives.”

MyPoint Credit Union has partnered with a wide variety of organizations and it positively impacts the following: Accessibility San Diego, BBB Ignite Innovation Center, Burnham Center for Community Advancement, Chicano Federation, El Cajon Home Improvement Association, Empowering Latino Futures, Kim Center for Social Balance, La Revista Binaclular, MAAC, National Library of Medicine, National Latina Business Women Association, North Park Main Street, Oceanside Philanthropy Council, PACE, North San Diego Business Journal as a CEO of the Year, alongside a remarkable group of accomplished nominees. This recognition serves as a powerful affirmation of the collective efforts of the MyPoint team as we strive to make a meaningful impact on the San Diego community. I take immense pride in the incredible talent that surrounds me – including a forward-thinking board of directors and a team of dedicated individuals who share my passion for serving our members and the community.”
JULIE LOWEN is a game changer in early childhood education and a well-known business leader who contributes to the growth and economic development of San Diego with the establishment of high-quality early education centers that serve diverse families at every level. Julie attributes her success and the winning formula of Children’s Paradise to the staff that surround her.

Next to Julie are over 250 successful team members and behind them are thousands more strong, successful women. Congratulations to Julie and her incredible team!
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance Leader Has a Broad Mission

**NONPROFITS:** CEO Builds on a Career That Began With Disney

BY RAY HUARD

Paul Baribault, CEO of the 107-year-old San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, is dedicated to making it the most effective conservation organization in the world.

“I mention San Diego, it’s always, ‘have you been to the zoo?’ It’s the first thing people ask,” said Baribault, who received a CEO of the Year Award in the Nonprofit category.

“I want people to view us not only as a world-class zoo, but a world-famous conservation organization. We are a conservation program that also operates a zoo and a park.”

The Wildlife Alliance is a global nonprofit conservation organization that until 2021 was known as the San Diego Zoo Global, encompassing the San Diego Zoo and the Safari Park.

As the largest zoo-based conservation group in the world, Baribault said that the new name better represents the organization’s focus on conservation and the connection between animal and human health.

The name change also represents Baribault’s drive to form alliances with other conservation groups.

“We’re just out there alone,” Baribault said.

Unlike most other conservation groups, he said that the Wildlife Alliance doesn’t rely solely on donations to support its efforts, but draws funding from the operation of the zoo and Safari Park.

“When the zoo and the park are operating as successful operations, we take the revenue, that profit, and push it back into our conservation work,” Baribault said.

“We’ve been increasing our investment in conservation the last three years in a row.”

**Economic Impact of $2.4 Billion**

Under Baribault’s leadership, the economic impact of the Wildlife Alliance grew to $2.4 billion in 2022 with nearly 6 million visitors.

He also oversaw a major new record, and the organization’s social media reach expanded from 30 billion impressions in 2019, when Baribault became CEO, to 90 billion for the past two years.

“We are constantly in a state of always evolving, that’s key to us as an organization,” Baribault said.

“Growth is important but it’s about quality of experience that’s important.”

His colleagues at the Wildlife Alliance described Baribault as a collaborative leader with a passion for protecting endangered species and developing that same passion in budding conservationists.

They credited Baribault with building on a solid core of executives to help the Wildlife Alliance broaden its reach.

Baribault said that one of his goals is to increase the Wildlife Alliance’s involvement in making it the most effective conservation organization.

Baribault came to the Wildlife Alliance in 2019 after leaving The Walt Disney Studios, where he was vice president of animation marketing and operations and general manager of Disneynature.

He said he joined the Disney organization as a summer job and spent 24 years with the organization.

At Disney, he was a leader of theatrical film campaigns for Disney Animation Studios, Pixar Animation Studios, and The Muppets.

He also oversaw all aspects of the Disneynature film label, including marketing, feature film production, and brand development.

Baribault said he has a “passion for nature and wildlife.”

“I grew up loving to get outdoors with our family,” Baribault said.

In addition to his work with the Wildlife Alliance, Baribault is board chair of the Jane Goodall Institute, an executive committee member of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival and a board member of the Academy of Our Lady of Peace. He was executive chair of the Aspen High Seas Initiative.

Baribault earned a bachelor’s degree in biology with a minor in studio art photography from Stanford University and a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

“I view the recognition to be a great tribute to all the work the organization has done. It’s a great honor to be recognized and, while this award is bestowed upon me, I view it as a recognition of how the organization has evolved, how we evolved our mission and our purpose and our role in the world and also how we engage the San Diego community and increase our role of being a key leader in the community.”
Congratulations to Gabriel Perez Kreib on being named CEO of the Year by the San Diego Business Journal! The 100+ employees at Chosen Foods, as well as millions of avocado fans, truly appreciate your commitment to building a high-growth business that is anchored in integrity, respect, and care for all stakeholders!
CEO of Girl Scouts San Diego Enhances Programs

**NONPROFITS:** Dedrich Cultivates the Next Generation of Women Leaders

**IN HER OWN WORDS:**

"As the CEO of Girl Scouts San Diego, I am honored to be recognized as a top CEO in San Diego. My unwavering belief in the Girl Scouts mission to foster girls of courage, confidence and character is what fuels my dedication; and this recognition offers a valuable platform to amplify our mission and inspire others to get involved.

"A recent CDC report shed light on the significant challenges facing girls today. Sadly, 3 in 5 girls experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and I in 4 girls are seriously contemplating suicide. These findings emphasize the urgency of our mission and embolden our commitment to support girls through these challenges. At Girl Scouts, we provide a nurturing and supportive environment that equips girls with essential life skills, builds resilience, grows confidence, enhances self-worth, and empowers them to overcome obstacles. By doing so, we empower girls to meet their full potential, lead fulfilling lives, and make our communities stronger."

Parzen Leads Successful Burnham Center Rollout

**NONPROFITS:** Securing Finances, Partnerships Highlight BCCA's First 2 Years

**IN HIS OWN WORDS:**

"It is true, when you do what you love for a living, good things happen. I'm very fortunate to work with great people who care as much about our community as I do and who do the work. I've been on the Board of the BCCA and I am a big fan of the organization. My passion is creating opportunities for people to give back to the community."

Parzen was also the legal and strategy architect for the Los Angeles Unified School District and a founder and executive director of the City Heights Partnership for Children. He pivoted to public service and philanthropy in 2000 and has since served as general counsel for the San Diego Unified School District. He also served as executive director of Price Philanthropies, founder and executive director of the City Heights Partnership for Children.

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Join the Community Health Group family today and experience the difference that decades of expertise and genuine care can make in your healthcare journey. Take control of your well-being with a health plan that truly understands and values you. Give us a call at 1-888-244-9505 to learn more about our Medi-Cal health plan and how we can support your health goals. Together, let’s build a healthier San Diego community!

The Community is What Counts

Congratulations Norma Diaz!
Radeus Labs CEO Succeeds by Not Fearing Failure

**ELECTRONICS:** Correnti Creates Company Culture that Encourages Growth

*By JEFF CLEMETSON*

As CEO of Radeus Labs, Inc., Juliet Correnti leads an organization with a mission to engineer computing systems and satcom devices that "transform industry disruptions into elegant solutions." Her success in that mission has led to a string of recent accolades, including recognitions by the National Contract Management Association and the Center for Development of Security Excellence inclusion on the 2021 list of Successful Women in Business to Watch by The Startup Weekly; and being named by Corporate Vision Magazine CEO Monthly as a CEO of the Year finalist.

Correnti’s most recent accolade is being named a San Diego Business Journal CEO of the Year in the Small Company Category. "Winning the CEO of the Year was unexpected and yet fantastic validation of what a small team can accomplish and how many lives we can touch in the community," she said. "It is not always the current belief that focusing on employee culture is the key to a successful business, but we have a firm belief that happy employees make great products and provide great customer support, and this is validation of all of those beliefs. I would like to thank each and every employee, contractor, customer and vendor who have supported us over the last 20 years."

**An Encouraging Leader**

Correnti’s leadership at Radeus Labs has created a company culture focused on product quality, customer satisfaction and employee engagement. That engagement is most pronounced through her mentorship of managers at the company and creating an environment that encourages learning and growth by taking risks, telling her team to “never be afraid to fail.” By allowing for an environment where failure is OK, she has also created an environment where people aren’t afraid to try something new, creating a culture of innovation and ingenuity, said......

*IN HER OWN WORDS:*

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Collins Leads Brand Strategies in Health and Sciences

*By JENNIFER KASTNER*

For her success in Audacity Health’s business growth and commitment to supporting health and sciences, San Diego Business Journal named Dr. Jill Collins, Ph.D. CEO of the Year in the Small Company Category. Collins, Ph.D., serves as the CEO and Chief Strategy Officer of Audacity Health, a La Jolla-based brand strategy and activation agency. Audacity Health works with clients ranging from startups to Fortune 500 companies, specifically focusing on businesses that work in research and life science, diagnostics, medical devices, pharma and consumer health and wellness.

**Commitment to Growth**

Collins’ commitment to excellence and passion for her work has helped transform Audacity Health into a leading healthcare agency, from generating just under a million dollars in 2013 to an impressive $6.7 million in 2022. Throughout her tenure, she has steered the team through 40% growth and expanded Audacity Health’s product and service offering with new paid media capabilities and PR offerings, creating new opportunities and the growth of the company’s growth. She’s been instrumental in executing the company’s people-first model effectively and efficiently. Despite an exceptionally difficult economic environment, her team was able to remain committed to its financial objectives without compromising on the quality of its work or services. Her tireless efforts have enabled the company to recognize and retain its most talented staff while still maintained a healthy bottom line.

**IN HER OWN WORDS:**

“I’m honored to be recognized for all of the hard work and the success our team has achieved at Audacity Health. We strive every day to help biotech and healthcare companies develop emotionally connecting brands with powerful marketing strategies and campaigns that have a positive impact on patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals. We are dedicated to helping scientific and healthcare innovations thrive so they can make meaningful contributions to human health. We are proud of the brands and leaders we’ve had the opportunity to serve thus far and look forward to continuing our mission for many years to come.”

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For her success in Audacity Health’s business growth and commitment to supporting health and sciences, San Diego Business Journal named Dr. Jill Collins, Ph.D. CEO of the Year in the Small Company Category. Collins, Ph.D., serves as the CEO and Chief Strategy Officer of Audacity Health, a La Jolla-based brand strategy and activation agency. Audacity Health works with clients ranging from startups to Fortune 500 companies, specifically focusing on businesses that work in research and life science, diagnostics, medical devices, pharma and consumer health and wellness.

**Commitment to Growth**

Collins’ commitment to excellence and passion for her work has helped transform Audacity Health into a leading healthcare agency, from generating just under a million dollars in 2013 to an impressive $6.7 million in 2022. Throughout her tenure, she has steered the team through 40% growth and expanded Audacity Health’s product and service offering with new paid media capabilities and PR offerings, creating new opportunities and the growth of the company’s growth. She’s been instrumental in executing the company’s people-first model effectively and efficiently. Despite an exceptionally difficult economic environment, her team was able to remain committed to its financial objectives without compromising on the quality of its work or services. Her tireless efforts have enabled the company to recognize and retain its most talented staff while still maintained a healthy bottom line.

**IN HER OWN WORDS:**

“I’m honored to be recognized for all of the hard work and the success our team has achieved at Audacity Health. We strive every day to help biotech and healthcare companies develop emotionally connecting brands with powerful marketing strategies and campaigns that have a positive impact on patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals. We are dedicated to helping scientific and healthcare innovations thrive so they can make meaningful contributions to human health. We are proud of the brands and leaders we’ve had the opportunity to serve thus far and look forward to continuing our mission for many years to come.”

Collins Heads the Quest Diagnostics ACT Against COVID-19 with a Foundation Medicine ONE Testing Partnership, Audacity Health and Helio Genomics Patient Recruitment

*By JENNIFER KASTNER*

Collins Heads the Quest Diagnostics ACT Against COVID-19 with a Foundation Medicine ONE Testing Partnership, Audacity Health and Helio Genomics Patient Recruitment

**DEI and Wellness Commitment**

She has committed to the health and wellness of all employees. Last year, Audacity Health launched a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee as well as a Health and Wellness committee for employees. This year, she took it one step further by rolling out a new telehealth platform that provides better access to mental health resources which were lacking in employees’ current health plans.

**A Role Model**

Collins is described as an influential leader and a role model for all women in business. Through her strategic leadership and dedication to her work, she has significantly impacted the healthcare industry. She has appeared on multiple podcasts and contributes regularly to Forbes, demonstrating her influence and expertise across the business landscape. Coming from a scientific background, she had to manage the difficult transition from the lab into the business world and learn how to navigate corporate dynamics as a female in several companies dominated by male leadership.

**Giving Back**

Collins is a big proponent of giving back to the community. For the holidays, she made a charitable contribution to St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, Women Who Code and Feeding America. In 2022, she introduced a charitable contribution program for employees, which allows them to donate up to $500 per year to a 501(c)(3) organization of their choice. She also volunteers her time and expertise to several organizations in San Diego.

Collins holds a doctorate in medicinal chemistry from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has over 17 years of scientific and strategic marketing expertise.
Congratulations

to our very own

Neil Hattangadi, MD

for being selected as CEO of the Year (Large Company),
and to all other award nominees and finalists.

We are proud to be headquartered in San Diego, honored to serve families and employ
talented teammates in this beautiful city, and inspired to be surrounded by so many
healthcare leaders and innovators.

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EdGate CEO Takes Lifelong Learning on a Journey

**EDTECH:** Sibley’s Career Exploration Tool Garners National Recognition

By JEFF CLEMETSON

As CEO of EdGate Holdings Inc., Peter Sibley is instituting a vision to support lifelong learning that creates new opportunities and career paths for individuals. For his success in realizing that vision, Sibley was named CEO of the Year in the Small Business Category by the San Diego Business Journal.

A Successful Journey

Under Sibley’s leadership, EdGate created and developed Journeys—a state-of-the-art career exploration tool. Google-like mapping tool that depicts education and training pathways that lead to advanced manufacturing occupations. Journeys was chosen as a U.S. Department of Education Career Challenge five finalist in the Reach Higher Career Challenge which included presenting Journeys at the White House, a pursuit spearheaded by Sibley.

Journeys has been described by the Council on Foreign Relations as an online portal that “will allow both high school and college students, as well as mid-career workers in transition, to chart various educational paths to achieve their career goals. Such tools will be enormously valuable for both students and guidance counselors to help inform educational choices.”

Under Sibley’s watch, EdGate has created the largest career and technical education standards database in the world and created an AI-based standards alignment tool for educational resources. EdGate’s standards correlation technology has received several new patents for a proven system to identify, tag and align content to specific standards applicable to curriculum, lessons, assessments and educational resources. In 2022, the EdGate correlation services consulting group of the business reached its highest sales numbers to date.

The success of Sibley’s vision for Journeys was made possible by building a world-class team through a series of acquisitions, including Education World, Fox River Learning, EdGate Correlation Services, Total Reader, SchoolNotes and IDN/TestBuilder.

**IN HIS OWN WORDS:**

“Lifelong learning to attain your personal version of success is the lifeblood of vibrant communities. Our vision at EdGate is to help individuals navigate the increasingly complex and dynamic web of opportunity. By working with employers, publishers, traditional and alternative educational providers, and industry organizations, EdGate demystifies the journey and empowers the individual. The EdGate team thanks SDBJ for its spotlight on the importance of helping diverse and underserved communities enter high paying, high tech industries. We also want to thank Lisa Easterly of Cyber Center of Excellence and Jane Schlosberg of the Future Foundation for their support.

Compassionate Leader

In addition to a nearly 40-year dedication to education in San Diego and around the world, Sibley has also shown dedication and compassion in his management of the team he leads.

“Looking beyond the business itself — the marketing, the sales, the client meetings, the Zoom presentations, etc. — I would like to recognize Peter for looking out for the well-being of his employees and going above and beyond to be a role model,” said EdGate General Manager Gina Faulk in her nomination of Sibley.

Sibley allowed flexibility in scheduling throughout the COVID pandemic, allowing EdGate staff to focus on health and family. He has also personally stepped in to cover different roles at the company when employees had to take long-term absences due to illness.

“Tried to find a way to be helpful to anyone who had a problem,” Faulk said. “Scholarship coordinator and leader of positive professional environment — and if he was all business, he is the boss that everyone should strive to be.”

Educational Experience Shared

In addition to his dedication to EdGate, Sibley also extends his experience in education to the broader community. He currently serves on the University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Advisory Board and on the West Texas University Department of Information Systems Advisory Board. He has also held the position of Dean of the School of Computer Science & Engineering at National University based in San Diego.

Sibley is also very involved with the San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence (SDCCOE). Journeys has partnered with SDCCOE to develop an interactive pilot to map cyber education, training and career pathways in San Diego. This work includes the creation of a cyber-specific version of the Journeys Map that is powered by the National Institute of Cyber Education framework, as well as course catalogs from local universities.

EdGate has also partnered with Junior Achievement San Diego to bring Journeys to students taking part in the JA Finance Park experience.

CEO Dedicated to Fighting Rare Diseases

**BIOTECH:** Dube Developing Life-Changing Therapies

By JENNIFER KASTNER

For his success in Traver’s Therapeutics’ business growth and commitment to supporting biotech and wellness, San Diego Business Journal named Dr. Eric Dube, Ph.D., CEO of the Year in the Medium-Size Company Category.

Dube serves as the president and CEO of Traver’s Therapeutics, a San Diego-based biopharmaceutical company that’s dedicated to identifying, developing and delivering life-changing rare disease therapies.

Financial Success

Dube has helped Traver’s Therapeutics successfully raise $230 million in capital in 2023. In just six weeks’ time — after the U.S. FDA approved of FILSPARI — net product sales reached $3.0 million. Net product sales in 2022 were $200.5 million. First quarter net product sales in 2023 were $50.3 million. The company is now exploring a potential path forward for a supplemental New Drug Application (sNDA) in the U.S. for sparsentan for the treatment of focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), another rare kidney disease.

Award-Winning Leadership

Dube’s leadership has received recognition from some of the most prestigious biopharmaceutical and regional business awards programs, including EY Entrepreneur of the Year 2022, which recognizes exemplary leaders who have ushered in innovation-disrupting industries and created new product categories while lifting their employees and communities. He made The Medicine Maker’s Power List in both 2022 and 2023. He made the San Diego Business Journal’s SD500 Top 500 Executives in San Diego list in 2022. He was also named on Yahoo! Finance’s Outstanding Top 100 LGBT+ Executives Role Model List for 2022.

A Personal Story

For Dube, finding better solutions for patients is personal. He was diagnosed with a rare cancer at 30. It was caught early, which was fortunate since no proven therapy existed if the disease had advanced. The experience led to his decision to work in the biopharma industry. In many cases, patients have no options. He is driven to change this and continues to advance the company’s pipeline of potential first-in-class new treatment options for rare conditions with significant unmet needs. He is committed to strengthening the commercial business and listening to underserved patients while supporting efforts for earlier diagnoses and broader access to care.

**IN HIS OWN WORDS:**

“I feel like I have the greatest job in the world. I work with individuals who are incredibly talented and that’s to bring innovation to families that may be suffering and may not otherwise have hope for a treatment for their rare disease. I see the CEO role in biotech as one of finding great people and then giving them the vision and space to do their great work.”

Giving Back

Families seeking a rare disease diagnosis face many barriers but Dube is committed to helping them find answers. He serves on the steering committee for the Rare Disease Diversity Coalition and is championing ways to improve access to care by removing barriers for underserved communities, promoting access to telerehabilitation and finding new ways to support caregivers and care partners. Under Dube’s leadership, Traver’s Therapeutics is a founding member and supporter of the private-public Rady Children’s Institute for Genomic Medicine BeginNGS Consortium which helps to advance newborn screening for treatable rare genetic diseases. The company is also sponsoring a grant funding program to help diagnose the cause of newborn cholestasis and providing free diagnostic testing to qualified patients to help accurately identify a variety of conditions.

An Advocate

He is a founding member of the recently established San Diego chapter of OUTbio, a non-profit business association empowering the LGBTQ+ community in the biotech industry. He’s dedicated to advancing STEM amongst underrepresented communities in collaboration with SDCCOE. He spearheaded Traver’s support of the Ocean Discovery Institute and partnerships with Biocom California, the San Diego chapter of Healthcare, Education & Advocacy Association and the Southern California chapter of Women in Bio. The company’s philanthropic work extends to patient advocacy organizations.
Congratulations to:

Dave Brooke

On being named as a CEO of the Year in the San Diego Business Journal!

Thanks for helping MyPoint Credit Union and San Diego DO MORE for over 20 years! We are so thankful for your leadership and proud of your contributions to the community.
By KAREN PEARLMAN

Starr Edwards, CEO of the Year winner in the Medium Company category, is a cultivator of real and true humanity. If you follow Edwards around Bitchin' Sauce headquarters, you’ll quickly notice an unforced consistency, whether speaking to a long-tenured senior leader or a recent hire. Edwards maintains an inexhaustible, earnest curiosity that extends to every job and every role.

As her company grew over the course of a decade from a lone market-stand to propulsive national retail distribution, she has ensured that the company truly reflects a signature “Edwards touch.”

Bitchin’ Sauce ranked within 2023’s Top “50 Fastest” list of growing women-founded companies, via the Women Presidents Organization. The list comprised a cross-industry cohort including tech, finance, apparel and more. Bitchin’ Sauce was one of only five food and snack companies to be recognized.

Starting Small

Edwards along with her husband, L.A. Edwards, pioneered an entirely new category of nut-based dips through the invention of Bitchin’ Sauce. The couple started small in 2010 – initially selling their almond-based condiment in the farmers markets and in around San Diego. Ten plus years later, the Edwardses and their five children lead a very nomadic life, bringing their sauce with them wherever they go.

The Edwardses continue to chase their Bitchin’ Vision into new frontiers, most recently with their record label Bitchin’ Music Group, but remain rooted in their mission to make the world a more Bitchin’ place, one tub at a time. Bitchin’ Sauce is now sold in more than 13,000 stores nationwide including Costco, Target, Walmart, Sprouts and Whole Foods Market.

During the past year, Edwards helped her company make the leap to international distribution, with Bitchin’ Sauce items entering into Canadian retail. She also grew Bitchin’ Sauce’s U.S. distribution by more than 5,000 stores and spearheaded the largest innovation push in company history, with seven new flavors of Bitchin’ Sauce rolling out in 2023. Edwards has continually prioritized employee care initiatives – including free on-site childcare and weekly, built-in volunteer hours. Boosts to employee satisfaction have resulted in lower-than-average turnover rates.

The company maintains near 50/50 gender parity on its leadership team and seeks always to cultivate a satisfied, hard-working employee culture – more commonly named by those who work for Edwards as “the Bitchin’ Way.”

Not surprisingly to those who know her, Edwards’ curiosity is matched by an uncan- ny capacity for understanding and a decisive leadership style that marries analysis and intuition together without tension or compromise. Edwards has grown a company that reflects this hybrid “left brain, right brain” quality on a macro scale. Everything Bitchin’ Sauce does is done with devoted care, responsibility and mindful excellence – and yet, in process and in appearance, the output and day-to-day culture of Bitchin’ Sauce suggests an unflustered, non-anxious ambition.

The Edwardses are described as free-spirit nomads with a keen entrepreneurial drive, and although the company now employs more than 90 individuals, it still embraces this joint ethic. In pursuit of this authentic, human form of entrepreneurship, Edwards has taken bold swings in the direction of employee care. Bitchin’ Sauce’s signature on-site childcare program Bitchin’ Kids, free to all employees, remains strong, staffed with qualified caregivers and offering more than $1.6 million in childcare service to date since 2019.

A weekly volunteering effort, built into employee schedules via four hours of “Volunteer Time Off,” has proven to not only be a blessing for the local community, but also a valuable way for staff to put their own work in proper perspective.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

“The Bitchin’ Sauce CEO of the Year award from SDBJ was downright humbling! I was tearing up on stage, just thinking of how we started so small — literally in a tent without walls and a cooler — and here our company was being honored as a medium sized business. We are so thankful for the favor that we have received, thankful for the nurturing San Diego community. And, so thankful for the team that has grown with us and continues to grow our Bitchin’ business!”

Julie Lowen Has a Comprehensive Vision for Childcare

By RAY HUARD

When she was a child, Julie Lowen said, her family was homeless after her father lost his job.

“It was quite harrowing,” said Lowen, CEO of Children’s Paradise Preschool and Infant Centers. “I know exactly what it means to be a homeless kid, to be afraid, to be hungry, to be without shoes.”

That experience, fueled by the death of her younger son at birth, has driven Lowen to be a very vocal and determined advocate for children, families and those in need of housing.

“I’m a strong woman. I’m outspoken. I get my job if I don’t feel there’s a danger,” Lowen said.

Being chosen CEO of the Year in the Medium Company Category by the San Diego Business Journal “was just a shock, wow,” Lowen said.

“It’s obvious that this is all about my team. We have literally sacrificed every penny that we’ve earned and it’s going into making it (Children’s Paradise) bigger and better,” Lowen said. “It lets us know that the synergy that the company truly reflects a signature “Edwards touch.”

Bitchin’ Sauce was one of only five food and snack companies to be recognized.

Expanding Locations and Scope

After founding Children’s Paradise Preschool and Infant Centers in 1993, Lowen has expanded the company to have a staff of nearly 250 people in eight locations, with more on the way, serving nearly 2,500 families.

Children’s Paradise is far more than a childcare center, providing a wide range of social services to families in need, that money to help a family stay in a hotel instead of on the streets or emergency road service for someone who is in danger of losing their job if they can’t make it to work because their car is disabled. “You see, what this does for families is so life changing, it’s so supportive, it really is that missing link in society, that support system that used to be there. Because of the hectic level of our lives, these support systems just fell apart,” Lowen said. “We are a community resource center that’s open to everybody.”

During the worst of COVID, Children’s Paradise provided free take-home learning kits to anyone who wanted them, whether or not their children were enrolled in one of the company’s childcare centers.

Lowen started her career as a bank teller, then became an office manager at ACAL Engineering.

She became a stay-at-home mother in 1989 following the death of her younger son at birth. Her house became a gathering place for her older son and his friends, and that evolved into a home-based daycare, Gingerbread House.

“I desperately needed kids. I don’t know how else to put it,” Lowen said.

It was there that the dream that became Children’s Paradise started, according to Lowen.

Children’s Paradise is building its latest childcare center in Carlsbad, opening in 2024 to serve the tri-city area.

The company also has acquired a former preschool in Escondido and one in Ramona that it plans to open.

Lowen has even bigger plans.

“I have five open construction sites right now. It’s a development process. You just push the projects forward,” Lowen said.

Long term, Lowen said that she hopes the Children’s Paradise model is adopted worldwide.

“We have to have a lot of help, but I’m determined. It has to happen. I’ve seen so many families that are hurting,” Lowen said.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

“I had breast cancer in 2021, seven major surgeries and just went through hell. Coming off that to get back in the saddle in 2022 and to be named CEO of the Year in 2023 is overwhelming.”

FOOD: Starr Edwards Gives the Bitchin’ Brand its Flavor and Attitude

SOCIAL SERVICES: Children’s Paradise Is a Hub for Family Services
Congratulations

Paul A. Baribault
President & Chief Executive Officer
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

San Diego Business Journal 2023 CEO of the Year

We join our global allies to celebrate your incredible leadership, and all you do for wildlife and people the world over. All of us are honored to be on this journey with you as we evolve San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance into the most effective conservation organization for the world. Through your vision, we’ll continue to reach our true potential and look forward to what the future brings as we inspire millions of guests, collaborate with partners throughout San Diego, transform conservation across the globe, and reach countless people in our commitment to a world where all life thrives.
Matching Business Growth and Food Sustainability

**FOOD:** Perez Krieb Increases Revenue and Education Around Avocados

**IN HIS OWN WORDS:**

"Success is not a solo effort, but a collective journey. I am humbled and grateful to receive the 2023 Chosen Foods CEO of the Year Award. Wolverine and Chosen Foods’ history is one of exponential growth. The team believes he’s a perfect facilitator for its board and leadership team and acts as a true visionary at gaining consensus with diverse groups. He is leading the team to continue to increase the investments in the Chosen Foods brand and commercial expansion and to an unprecedented success.

**Background in Leadership**

Perez Krieb previously served as chairman of Quantum Brands and a trade commissioner of Mexico for the U.S. He was the CEO of Intelogik, and CEO of Image Technology. He earned his bachelor’s degree in computer science from the Monterrey Institute of Technology and his master’s degree in business administration from IPADE Business School. He’s attended several courses worldwide, including a recent course at Harvard Business School.

**Giving Back**

Perez Krieb is known for developing relationships and engaging in philanthropic work across the community as he inspires his Chosen Foods team to see his vision for success. He is the co-founder of the Colibri scholarship program that delivers more than 100 scholarships to Hispanic kids — with limited resources to excel academically — who are finishing high school in San Diego and going to college. He also serves as co-founder of Taktika Padel, a Padel tennis club and league in San Diego. He is a board member of Naturally San Diego, a nonprofit organization that has a mission to stimulate conscious growth, foster sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship and develop exceptional leaders while growing the local natural and consumer products industry. He is also a board member for the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce and a member of YPO, a global leadership community that brings together the world’s most transformational leaders.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"Success is not a solo effort, but a collective journey. I am humbled and grateful to receive the 2023 Chosen Foods CEO of the Year Award. Wolverine and Chosen Foods’ history is one of exponential growth. The team believes he’s a perfect facilitator for its board and leadership team and acts as a true visionary at gaining consensus with diverse groups. He is leading the team to continue to increase the investments in the Chosen Foods brand and commercial expansion and to an unprecedented success."

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**DIAGNOSTICS:** Acquisitions, Pandemic Scale Up Highlight Bryant’s Tenure

**QuidelOrtho, which added large-scale diagnostic testing capabilities to the company. For this next phase of the company, Bryant has set a course for the future, with plans to extend QuidelOrtho’s impact to help decentralize and democratize access to testing. In the year since the acquisition, QuidelOrtho moved with speed to integrate the company’s assets while keeping focus on customer disruption and maintaining high levels of service. This allowed the company to drive record revenue quarters, preserve more than 85% of its employee base and complete more than 80% of the integration activities.

**Leading Community Engagement**

Currently, Bryant leads a team of approximately 7,000, which he does by promoting a “can-do” attitude. People who are happy tend to be more productive and capable, and those who are more productive have better outcomes, which in turn makes them happy,” he explains. “It’s a circular thing. So that at our company, we have a bunch of people who are just genuinely happy and productive.”

One of Bryant’s goals at QuidelOrtho is to encourage employees to engage with the community. QuidelOrtho actively participates in careers and volunteer drives; supports the American Heart Association to advance education and awareness of heart disease; sponsors community blood drives; and funds research initiatives at San Diego State University’s newly formed Research Corridor. That is on top of the company’s programs to provide free COVID-19 tests to higher-ed facilities and to fund the Quidel Safe at Home program providing tests outside Petco Park.

Bryant has also led QuidelOrtho’s commitment to environmental sustainability, which includes monitoring the impacts of waste generation and energy and water consumption and implementing efficiencies at its facilities and its product manufacturing that mitigate risks, reduce costs and address impacts.
3 Ways Your Company Can Help the Food Bank

1) **Volunteer**
   Volunteer at the San Diego Food Bank’s 90,000-square-foot warehouse in Miramar or the North County Food Bank’s 70,000-square-foot warehouse in Vista.
   » We offer 2- or 3-hour volunteer shifts Monday through Saturday.
   For more information, visit: SanDiegoFoodBank.org/Volunteer or NorthCountyFoodBank.org/Volunteer

2) **Donate Through Payroll Giving**
   Donate monthly through your company’s payroll giving program. Your donation could be doubled with a matching gift from your employer. To see if your employer participates, visit: SanDiegoFoodBank.org/Payroll or NorthCountyFoodBank.org/Payroll

3) **Host a Virtual Food Drive**
   Host a company-wide Virtual Food Drive!
   » You can donate food easily online via the Food Bank’s website.
   » Using your logo, we can customize a Virtual Food Drive for your business!
   » Set up a competition between departments to see who can raise the most food. For more information, visit: SanDiegoFoodBank.org/Virtual or NorthCountyFoodBank.org/Virtual

Every $1 donated provides 2 meals!

The Food Bank is a 4-star Charity

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SanDiegoFoodBank.org | NorthCountyFoodBank.org
Cortica CEO Expands Clinics Across 7 States

HEALTHCARE: Hattangadi's Business Serves Children with Neurdevelopment Conditions

BY RAY HUARD

When Neil Hattangadi and his wife, Suzanne Goh, founded a clinic that was to become Cortica in 2013, there were just the two of them.

Goh, a neurologist and neuroscience researcher, is the company’s co-founder and chief medical officer.

“We had to bring on great clinicians to provide care, so we quickly grew,” Hattangadi said. “Within three months, we were up to 25 employees. By 2017, when we formalized Cortica from our original clinic, we were about 150 employees.”

Receiving the CEO of the Year Award in the Large Company Category “is entirely a reflection of our team,” Hattangadi said.

“I have great executive leadership with deep experience, and across the entire company we have mission-driven, passionate teammates who span both operational and clinical roles,” Hattangadi said. “They put their heart and souls into their work for children with autism and their families.”

Cortica provides care for autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions, including ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), speech delay, sensory processing disorder, genetic syndromes such as Down’s Syndrome, and cerebral palsy – “really anything that affects the brain,” Hattangadi said.

A Central Resource

“His goal with Cortica is to provide diagnosis and treatment for a variety of conditions in one place so families don’t have to scramble to get the care they need.”

“A parent often has to navigate between a general pediatrician, multiple physician specialists, depending on the complexity of the child’s condition, and non-physician specialists, like behavioral therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychologists, social workers, counselors and more,” Hattangadi said. “We’ve shown that by bringing all services a child and their family need under one roof, we can improve outcomes, improve the patient and parent experience, and reduce cost to insurance.”

He also wants to make those services – which might otherwise be available only to those with high incomes – available to the general public.

An Affirming Approach

Cortica uses what Hattangadi said was “a neurodiversity-affirming care model.”

“The neurodiversity movement is based on the viewpoint that differences in neurology and behavior aren’t deficits, because there is no single right or normal way of being,” Hattangadi said. “Our neurodiversity-affirming care model supports an autistic person’s development, while not attempting to change their personal characteristics. As a society, in our educational systems and in our workforces, we must embrace the strengths and harness the contributions of neurodiverse individuals.”

As of this year, the company has 1,700 employees in 23 centers in seven states – California, Arizona, Texas, Illinois, New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Partnering with health plans, Hattangadi said that the company will add other states to its roster.

“We have long-term aspirations of expanding internationally as well, as there is a critical shortage of autism diagnosis and treatment around the world. We have patients flying to us from abroad who then want us to create a solution for them. Autism prevalence has increased from 1-in-500 25 years ago to now 1-in-36, so this is a national and international healthcare crisis,” Hattangadi said. “It really demands our attention.”

Describing himself as “a generalist physician,” Hattangadi attributed his interest in treating autism and other health issues related to the brain to Goh.

“Autism is her life’s work. I saw how impactful her clinical work was and how it changed families’ lives and I wanted to take her model and scale it across the country,” Hattangadi said.

Hattangadi has a bachelor’s degree in biomedical engineering, chemistry and economics from Duke University.

A Rhodes Scholar, he received a master’s degree in computer science from the University of Oxford and his M.D. degree from Harvard Medical School.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

“I’m truly humbled and grateful, especially after having been a finalist for many years. I know there are many great CEOs in San Diego, leading some of the world’s best companies, so it’s truly an honor to be among them. I’m also very grateful to the San Diego Business Journal for cultivating a strong business ecosystem. My family moved to San Diego from NYC 12 years ago and fell in love with it. We feel so fortunate to have all the outdoor activities and culture of San Diego alongside a thriving business community, so we could build a national company based here with great San Diego talent.”

Congratulations to the winners for everything you do to make our community strong and resilient.

John Van Cleef
Finalist for 2023 CEO of the Year

Thank you for your dedication to CRC’s mission and your commitment to our clients and community.
“I feel like I have the greatest job in the world. I work with individuals who are so incredibly talented and committed to one purpose—and that’s to bring innovation to families that may be suffering and may not otherwise have hope for a treatment for their rare disease. I see the CEO role in biotech as one of finding great people and then giving them the vision and space to do their great work.”

Eric Dube, Ph.D.
President and CEO, Travere Therapeutics

Congratulations to Eric Dube for being named a San Diego Business Journal CEO of the Year award winner. We are proud of the way you lead at Travere with an unwavering focus on the lives of people touched by rare disease.

At Travere Therapeutics, we are in rare for life. travere.com | @TravereRare | #InRareForLife
Going All Out for Outstanding CEOs

San Diego's leading chief executive officers and their supporters gathered at the Hyatt Regency Aventine in La Jolla on June 27 to celebrate the San Diego Business Journal's CEO of the Year awardees. The sold-out event included various buffet-style food offerings and cocktail bars and featured the presentation of awards to 16 of the region's most outstanding CEOs across a wide spectrum of industries and company sizes. The highlight of the presentations was the Lifetime Achievement Award given to North San Diego Business Chamber CEO Debra Rosen. The San Diego Business Journal CEO of the Year Awards were presented by sponsors PNC Bank, City National Bank, The Jacobs & Cushman Foundation San Diego Food Bank and San Marcos Trophy & Engraving.
Outstanding Leadership, Personified.

Congratulations Peter Sibley

Peter has led EdGate, parent company of Journeys Map, ExACT Alignment, Total Reader, Schoolnomics, and other properties for over 30 years, always with patience and a steady resolve to provide the best service and systems available. He is well known in the San Diego area for his support of education, technology, and cybersecurity ecosystems.

Small Business CEO of the year

We are fortunate to have a leader with such outstanding qualities at the helm of EdGate.

Leading with purpose.

Congratulations to Frontwave CEO Bill Birnie!

2023 San Diego Business Journal CEO of the Year Finalist
Congratulations to Carol Dedrich on being named CEO of the Year in the nonprofit category!

Thanks to her thoughtful leadership, Girl Scouts San Diego is able to build girls of courage, confidence, and character throughout San Diego and Imperial counties.

sdgirlscouts.org | @sdgirlscouts

Congratulations Steve O’Connell

On behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, we thank you for 21 years of leadership and service as President and CEO of North Island Credit Union.

northisland.ccu.com  Facebook  LinkedIn  Twitter  @northislandcu
CONGRATULATIONS ANDREW NELSON ON BEING A CEO OF THE YEAR FINALIST!

In 1977, Andy began working for Willis Allen Real Estate and in 1980, was named president. In 1995, Andy purchased all remaining shares in the company from Willis Allen Sr. Willis Allen Real Estate is the largest independently operated real estate company in Southern California. In 1914, the firm began matching buyers and sellers in La Jolla, then a sleepy enclave. Today, Willis Allen Real Estate serves residential clients with 7 strategically located offices and over 200 agents with an industry best for average sales volume per agent.

Andy has been involved in many community outreach programs including Scripps Health, San Diego Hospice, and La Jolla Community Foundation to name a few. Andy and his wife Tracy have three adult kids; Drew and his wife Cindy; Tim and his wife Ashley; and Lauren Gray Nelson. They have five grandchildren.

www.willisallen.com  858.459.4033  DRE# 01204280
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On behalf of the team at CMR, thank you for 19 years of leadership and dedication to our company, clients and community.

The Computers 2 Kids community congratulates Chéri Pierre
Computers 2 Kids CEO
for being selected as a finalist for the 2023 CEO of the Year award and for being a leader in strengthening digital equity in our region.

Congratulations Brynne!
DestinationConcepts.com
Your leadership continues to create the curve in our industry and inspire our team, clients, and peers.

Congratulations Elizabeth Fitzsimons
Thank you for your strategic leadership and dedication to the critical community needs of homelessness, addiction, early childhood education, and mental health issues in the San Diego region.
Congratulations to Nathan Rogge, CEO of First Pacific Bank, for being recognized as a 2023 CEO of the Year Awards finalist. Presented by the San Diego Business Journal, this award honors local executives and their contributions to company growth, leadership, and community involvement. We celebrate Nathan and all 2023 honorees.

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Congratulations to David Wellis for being recognized as a finalist for CEO of the Year 2023.

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Congratulations to Haiku's Eric Basu for being honored as a 2023 SDBJ CEO of the Year Finalist!

Learn more at Haikuinc.io

Congratulations! Ricardo Singer
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Congratulations to all the winners of SDBJ’s 2023 CEO Awards

“I was so impressed and honored to be present with so many dedicated, talented and amazing individuals.”

Jeanne McAllister

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Lenny Leszczynski for being selected as a Finalist for CEO of 2023!

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SD 500
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Being one of the San Diego Business Journal Award Finalists is a true honor and a great indicator that the journey we have chosen to embark on in search of TAG’s ethos is the right one.

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SDBJ Awards Standout CEOs

LEADERSHIP: Outstanding Execs Celebrate Accomplishments

By BRAD GRAVES

The San Diego Business Journal’s CEO of the Year Awards brought San Diego’s business leaders to the Hyatt Regency at Aventine on June 27 to celebrate excellence in leadership. The evening event honored 16 CEOs in all. Full coverage is in the special section at the center of this issue. Awards were presented to leaders of publicly traded and privately held companies. There were separate award categories for large, medium and small companies. Nonprofits as well as business nonprofits were honored.

HCAP Partners Commits to 2 Tech Ventures

PRIVATE EQUITY: Fund V Includes New Employee Benefit

By BRAD GRAVES

HCAP Partners, a diverse-owned private equity fund with offices in the University Town Center area, announced multimillion-dollar investments in two tech companies: industrial automation.

ResMed Grows SaaS Platform

MEDTECH: Somnoware Acquisition Latest Buy

By JEFF CLEMETSON

ResMed (NYSE: RMD) is expanding its sleep management software platform. The company announced July 5 it had acquired Somnoware, Inc., a Charlotte, North Carolina-based provider of sleep and respiratory care diagnostics software.

“Are we very excited about this acquisition,” said ResMed North America General Manager Bill Shoop. “Somnoware’s offering has been well received in the marketplace and it naturally complements our ecosystem of digital solutions across the patient care pathway. Our team is excited to add Somnoware to our portfolio of solutions to help physicians, sleep labs, and HMEs drive greater efficiency and deliver better patient care.”

Somnoware offers both diagnosis and care management software solutions that streamline the processes of physicians as well as sleep and pulmonary function testing labs. The software’s features include diagnosing and evaluating a patient’s sleep and respiratory care test results, ordering PAP treatment equipment, setting up

Trovata’s Tech Taps OpenAI

FINTECH: Platform Tracks Cash Flow Across Multiple Banks

By JENNIFER KASTNER

Solana Beach software company Trovata is harnessing the power of OpenAI to accelerate its next-gen cash flow management platform. Traditional cash tracking has been done manually with spreadsheets—an arduous process that requires
Debra Rosen, the recently retired CEO of the North San Diego Business Chamber, received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Rosen continues her work with the chamber as a member of its advisory board.

The Rising Star Award was presented to Elizabeth Fitzsimons, CEO of Episcopal Community Services.

Dave Brooke from MyPoint Credit Union won in the Business Nonprofit category, as did Rick Wilson of the San Diego Regional East County Chamber of Commerce.


Winners in the Small Company category were Juliet Cortica of Radeus Labs Inc., Jill Collins of Audacity Health and Peter Sibley of EdGate.

There were four winners in the Medium Company category: Eric Dube of Traverse Therapeutics, Starr Edwards of Bitchin’ Sauce LLC; Gabriel Perez Krieb of Chosen Foods LLC and Julie Lowen of Children’s Paradise Preschool & Infant Centers.

Rounding out the honorees were winners from large companies: Douglas Bryant from QuidelOrtho and Neil Hattangadi of Cortica.

Some 135 companies nominated their chief executives for recognition.

Sponsorships Make Program Happen

PNC Bank was the Presenting Sponsor for the CEO of the Year Awards. City National Bank, an RBC company, was the Diamond Sponsor.

The Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank returned as Charity Event Partner. The Trophy Sponsor was San Marcos Trophy & Engraving.

Judges for the event were Donna DeBerry, president and CEO of the County of San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce; Jessica N. Grounds, chief executive officer of Corporate Directors Forum; Lois Kohut, vice president and bank manager for City National Bank; Jason Paguio, president and CEO of the Asian Business Association of San Diego; Alan Prohaska, regional president and head of corporate banking for greater San Diego, PNC Bank, and Garry Ridge, chairman emeritus of WD-40 Company, and winner of the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Being a CEO is truly a calling because you are involved with your head, heart and hands,” said one of this year’s judges, Alan Prohaska, regional president and head of corporate banking for greater San Diego at PNC Bank. “The CEOs on this year’s list are impressive: they have created new opportunities, faced numerous challenges and thrived. They are inspiring leaders who are engaged with employees and investors and committed to the San Diego region.”

Several of those who came to the podium during the evening of June 27 event spoke of adapting business models to the unpredictable environment of COVID.

“This is a very talented group of nominees who have managed their companies through some of the most challenging economic dynamics of our time and have emerged stronger,” said program judge Lois Kohut, vice president and manager of City National Bank’s Downtown San Diego office. “City National couldn’t be more proud to be one of the premier sponsors of this year’s CEO Awards.”

Kimberly Layton, chief advancement and communications officer for the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank, presented several of the winners, highlighting their innovation, connection to the wider community and the way they inspire their nonprofit’s various stakeholders.

In his remarks to the audience, winner Perez Krieb of Chosen Foods said he found it remarkable that two food companies were being honored in a city with such an emphasis on biotechnology.

San Diego is a hub for natural food, the CEO said, making reference to Chosen Foods’ product, avocado oil. Several used their time at the podium to advocate for community needs.

Kimberly Layton noted that the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank provides food for more than 500 nonprofit organizations. In addition, the food bank participates in 200 direct distributions per month. Many clients have jobs and homes but are unable to afford San Diego’s high cost of living, she said. The food bank also sees elderly people living on fixed incomes as well as members of the military.

“We are a very easy nonprofit to support, and I wouldn’t be a good chief advancement officer if I didn’t say that,” she added.

Carol Dedrich of Girl Scouts San Diego spoke of a recent Centers for Disease Control report that said three out of five girls were experiencing persistent sadness and hopelessness, and one in five girls were on the verge of committing suicide, or wanting to attempt suicide. “Startling statistics that are coming at us,” she said.

“What we do in Girl Scouts is we build around our young girls and young women a safety net, a safety net of encouragement, of mentoring and support,” she said. “This, she said, allows program participants to build courage, confidence and character. Individual volunteers support this effort, as does the business community.

Dedrich, like many others who accepted their trophies that evening, said their award belongs to all in their organization. View the awards ceremony here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwzDZ8c5-wg
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