

VALLEY WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM & AWARDS 2025



HONOREES & FINALISTS

The 2025 Inside The Valley Women's Leadership Symposium & Awards

THE 2025 VALLEY WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM & AWARDS, held on August 21 at the Hilton Los Angeles / Universal City, brought together a vibrant community of business leaders for a powerful half-day of insight, inspiration, and celebration.

The morning kicked off with energizing Visionary Speaker talks and a series of candid conversations exploring how leadership is evolving in today's workplace. Attendees walked away with practical guidance on leading with empathy, building strong company culture, mentoring rising talent, and cultivating meaningful professional relationships that drive growth. From navigating hybrid work models to redefining networking in an increasingly digital world, the morning programming offered real-world strategies for building a more inclu-

sive and resilient leadership future.

Following the symposium, the afternoon shifted to celebration with a spirited luncheon awards program honoring women who are making an exceptional impact across the Valley region. With a group of outstanding nominees, the honorees recognized this year reflect strength, innovation and dedication in the business community.

This year's awards recognized excellence in the following categories: CEO of the Year, Executive of the Year, Champion of Women Award, Emerging Woman-Owned Business Leader Award, Community Impact Advocate Award, Mentor of the Year, The Accelerator Award, and NextGen Woman of the Year.

Each honoree and finalist is profiled in the following pages — remarkable women

who lead by example, combining business excellence with a deep commitment to their communities.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our Diamond event sponsor **Cydcor**; Platinum event sponsors **Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt, LLP**; **BG Law**; **Boys & Girls Club of the West Valley**; **City of Simi Valley**; **Ecola Termite & Pest Control**; **Fisher Phillips**; **Lewitt Hackman**; **LightGabler LLP**; **Mission Valley Bank** and **Morton Wealth**; and our Gold event sponsors **Coast General Insurance Brokers**; **Pearlman, Brown & Wax LLP**; **San Fernando Community Health Center** and **Sherfina Advisors**. Their generous support makes this event possible.

Congratulations, honorees and finalists!

VISIONARY SPEAKERS



THE 'YES' THAT CHANGED MY CAREER

PATRICE BENING
Morton Wealth



THE RISK THAT REDEFINED EVERYTHING

VERA QUINN
Cydcor



HOW I BUILT TRUST IN A ROOM FULL OF STRANGERS

GEOVANNY RAGSDALE
Boys and Girls Club of the West Valley

The Power of People: Building Relationships that Elevate Your Career



JANICE L. MILLER, ESQ.
Moderator
Miller Haga Law Group, LLC



JESSICA BAGDANOV
BG Law



SUE M. BENDAVID
Lewitt Hackman



TAMARA GURNEY
Mission Valley Bank



SARAH REZNICK
Sherfina Advisors



HANNAH SWEISS
Fisher Phillips

The New Era of Leadership: Shaping the Workplace of Tomorrow



LISA ELKAN
Moderator
Lisa PR



SAMANTHA ARGABRITE
City of Simi Valley



SUSAN FRIES
Ecola Termite & Pest Control



DENA L. KLOTZ
Lagerlof, LLP



AMANDA KOZIOL
Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt, LLP



GUANWEI (RACHEL) TAO

Ballard, Rosenberg, Golper & Savitt Congratulates All the Nominees and Winners of This Year's Women's Leadership Awards.



Katherine Hren

Linda Savitt

Stephanie Kantor

Janet Soultanian

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CEO OF THE YEAR HONOREE

VERA QUINN*President & CEO
Cydcor*

As CEO and president of Cydcor, Vera Quinn has spent over 25 years shaping the company's growth, cultivating top talent, and driving exceptional results for Fortune 500 and emerging brand clients. Quinn began her journey to CEO as a recruiter at an independently owned sales company before launching her own business as

a bookkeeper. She later joined Cydcor, where her deep understanding of sales and business operations shaped her leadership approach.

In 2024, Cydcor achieved double-digit revenue growth for the second consecutive year, setting a company record. Under Quinn's leadership, Cydcor has successfully entered new industries, including home security, consumer packaged goods and experiential marketing, broadening its service offerings and strengthening its market position.

In the past two years, Quinn has championed investments in research and development, enabling the company to provide end-to-end solutions for clients. This strategic diversification has enhanced customer engagement, brand awareness, and sales effectiveness, making Cydcor an indispensable partner for leading brands.

**MICHELLE LEWIS****FINALIST***CEO
SONA*

Michelle Lewis is an Emmy-winning songwriter and composer based in Los Angeles, and a highly influential music creators' rights advocate. Lewis had her first radio hit as a songwriter with Cher's "A Different Kind of Love Song" in 2002. She spent the next 10 years as a go-to top-liner and songwriter, writing hits including the worldwide #1 single "Wings" by the British girl group Little Mix.

Over the past decade, Lewis has expanded into the world of animated television, most notably as a Peabody Award-winning composer of original music for Disney Jr's Doc McStuffins, and Emmy-nominated songwriter of the Nickelodeon series The Loud House.

**GEOVANNY RAGSDALE****FINALIST***President / CEO
Boys & Girls Club
of the West Valley*

In her first year with the Boys & Girls Club of the West Valley, Geovanny Ragsdale led the organization to its first positive revenue year in three years. This marked a turning point, and since then, the organization has been on a steady growth trajectory, closing the 2024 year at just over the \$4 million mark.

Under Ragsdale's leadership, the team has grown from 37 to over 100 team members that support youth development across the West San Fernando Valley. As president and CEO, Ragsdale focuses on high-level strategy, staff management and partnering with stakeholders for the financial viability of the club.

**BETSY HART****FINALIST***Hospital President & CEO
Dignity Health - Glendale
Memorial Hospital and
Health Center*

Before becoming president and CEO of Glendale Memorial Hospital & Health Center (GMHHC), Betsy Hart served as chief operating officer at Northridge Hospital Medical Center (NHMC). In this role, she led operational responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and oversaw key construction projects, including the expansion of the Emergency Department and the establishment of a new urgent care center.

Hart is an active member of both the Hospital Association of Southern California and the American College of Healthcare Executives, contributing her expertise to the healthcare community. Additionally, she serves as chair of the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women campaign.

**AUDREY SIMONS****FINALIST***CEO
San Fernando Valley
Community Health Center*

Audrey Simons has spearheaded the San Fernando Valley Community Health Center's (SFCHC) transition from a community hospital to a state-of-the-art Federally Qualified Health Center. Under Simons' leadership, the SFCHC has experienced unprecedented growth – with a 284% growth factor from 2016-2019. Major projects completed in the last several years include building out the SFCHC Primary Care Center, expanding the Dental Clinic and opening a satellite clinic in Mission Hills.

Prior to joining SFCHC, Simons served as administrator of community benefits for the San Fernando Campus of Mission Community Hospital for 10 years.

Congratulations

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President & CEO

2025 Los Angeles Business Journal - Inside The Valley Women's Leadership Award

Congratulations, Tamara Gurney for your leadership and impact
in Business Banking and Community Development,
driving success for our clients and the communities we serve.



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EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR HONOREE

COLEEN WILSON

*Chief Nursing Officer
UCLA West Valley Medical Center*

In her role as chief nursing officer for UCLA West Valley Medical Center, Coleen Wilson exemplifies the highest standards of nursing leadership, compassion and service. With over 20 years of experience at UCLA Health she has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to patient-centered care and the professional development of teams, individuals and future leaders.

As the lead nurse at UCLA West Valley Medical Center, Wilson helped guide the hospital to its successful integration into UCLA Health. A catalyst for change, Wilson spearheaded the creation of UCLA Health Nursing's professional governance structure, empowering nurses to influence decisions related to their practice. She also championed the adoption of a human-centered leadership framework, laying the foundation for a new generation of nurse leaders.

A dedicated mentor, Wilson fosters a nurturing environment that prioritizes growth, collaboration and clinical excellence. Her influence extends to academia through her role as an adjunct professor in the Organizational Nursing Leadership course at the UCLA School of Nursing's Doctor of Nursing Practice program, where she has taught and mentored future healthcare leaders for the past five years.

**KERRI BROUILLETTE**

FINALIST

*Managing Director;
Chief Credit Officer
Ascent Developer Solutions*

As managing director and chief credit officer of Ascent Developer Solutions (AscentDS), a Los Angeles-based private real estate lender backed by Elliott Investment Management, Kerri Brouillette plays a central role in building the firm's credit platform.

Since joining shortly after the firm's 2024 launch, Brouillette has led the development of AscentDS' credit structure and underwriting processes, helping scale the company from four employees to nearly 70, with a target of \$3-\$5 billion in annual originations. Brouillette brings over 25 years of experience in banking and private equity, with more than \$2 billion in originations and recapitalizations.

**KELLIE BROWN**

FINALIST

*COO
SONA*

Kellie Brown, COO of SONA, is a philanthropically focused marketer and strategist with more than 20 years of global experience in program development, partner relations and fundraising. She has worked for global brands including CNN, the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League, and Hard Rock International – where she led the creation of the Hard Rock Heals Foundation and designed programs that supported the growth of music-based organizations in more than 85 countries.

Brown is the creator of Sound Circle Management, a boutique-sized think tank and development firm focused on mission-based programming and local community growth.

**MARLEE LAUFFER**

FINALIST

*President, Henry Mayo
Newhall Foundation;
Vice President, Marketing
and Public Relations
Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital*

At Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital, Marlee Lauffer serves as both the vice president of marketing and communications and president of the Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital Foundation.

One of Lauffer's biggest challenges was managing the hospital's communications during the COVID-19 pandemic – from the early days marked by uncertainty to latter stages, when messaging around masking and vaccinations became more central. As president of the Foundation, Lauffer led a successful capital campaign that helped fund the hospital's patient tower. Today, she oversees the hospital's Corporate Partners program and several other fundraising initiatives.

**SUSAN SEFFLIN**

FINALIST

*Partner
BG Law*

An experienced bankruptcy attorney, Susan Sefflin has guided and represented a wide range of businesses through the chapter 11 reorganization process as a partner at BG Law for over a decade. Sefflin has represented over eighty chapter 11 debtors – excluding related entities – and has a proven track record of successfully confirming chapter 11 plans of reorganization.

Sefflin focuses her practice primarily on chapter 11 reorganizations and related matters such as 363 sales, insider litigation and trustee representation. She is also a Chapter 11 Subchapter V Trustee for the Central District of California.



Sue M. Bendavid

Chair, Employment Practice Group

sbendavid@lewithhackman.com

2025

MENTOR

OF THE YEAR



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SHAPIRO | MARSHALL | HARLAN

A LAW CORPORATION



CHAMPION OF WOMEN AWARD HONOREE

STACEY MCKINNON

*Chief Operating Officer; Chief Marketing Officer
Morton Wealth*

Stacey McKinnon is the chief operating officer, chief marketing officer, partner, and McKinnon advisor at Morton Wealth in Calabasas. Over the past year, Morton Wealth has seen unprecedented growth, with McKinnon playing a pivotal role in that growth through her leadership, coaching and marketing strategy.

McKinnon meets one-on-one with dozens of Morton team members to ensure they have the tools for success, are fulfilled in their careers, and are doing the activities that both benefit the company and their personal careers. McKinnon has actively supported and led initiatives within Morton, such as its new “Modearn” offering that gives more access to financial advisors for people growing their wealth. She is also an advocate for the company’s “Herself” community, which hosts events and educational webinars designed to support women who are seeking more knowledge in a safe and empowering environment.

Outside of her leadership at Morton Wealth, McKinnon remains an advocate in financial services, coaching for the G2 Leadership Institute, which is a two-year MBA-style program that guides and prepares young professionals to lead advisory firms.



STEPHANIE ALLEN

FINALIST

CEO

AirWorks Solutions

Stephanie Allen is the co-founder and operational force behind AirWorks Solutions, a thriving heating, air and plumbing company that she launched with her husband in 2010. With a background in business and law, Allen has been instrumental in building the internal systems and operational structure that fuel AirWorks’ success.

A passionate advocate for women in the trades and in business, Allen has made it a priority to bring more women into the company, not only in customer-facing roles but in technical and leadership positions. She creates space for women to thrive within the company and actively mentors female team members, helping them grow their skills and confidence.



BRENDA ALLISON

FINALIST

CEO

*Coast General
Insurance Brokers*

Brenda Allison has been at the helm of Coast General Insurance Brokers in Oxnard since 2007. She previously founded and grew a successful firm (Allison Commercial Insurance) before acquiring Coast General and merging the two companies into a unified firm that has since grown to encompass a group of nine brokerages.

A dedicated community advocate and respected public speaker, Allison frequently presents at agricultural conferences on risk management and speaks on financial literacy, children’s issues and women’s empowerment. She is a regular keynote speaker at an annual camp for foster girls in Santa Barbara County and at nonprofit events across California.



SANDRA CHO

FINALIST

President and Founder

*Pointwealth Capital
Management*

Sandra Cho is the founder and president of Pointwealth Capital Management, a boutique wealth management firm specializing in comprehensive, generational wealth management. She has been a financial advisor since 2002 and started her own firm in 2016.

Cho has grown her firm by 800% since founding it in 2016. She currently has over \$400M assets under management and has been consistently in the top 5% of financial advisors nationwide in production. Additionally, Cho has mentored several financial advisors – mostly LGBTQ individuals and women – and is currently sponsoring and training three female financial advisors.



JILL EASTMAN

FINALIST

Founder

*Academy for
Salon Professionals*

Jill Eastman opened the Academy for Salon Professionals in 2008, entering the predominantly male-owned world of cosmetology school ownership. Through her school, Eastman has supported women starting over after divorce or the loss of a spouse, mothers reentering the workforce after raising children, survivors leaving abusive relationships, and professionals transitioning into a new, more fulfilling career path.

The academy focuses on small class sizes, providing students with proven systems to help them become industry leaders. Many of its alumni have gone on to open their own businesses and build successful, fulfilling careers.



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full potential as productive, caring,
responsible adults.*



*Larissa M.
Youth of the Year 2025.
Cleveland High School*



EMERGING WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR HONOREE

DANIELLE ROY

Founder
Morale Matters

Danielle Roy founded business development service Morale Matters when she saw an urgent need to bridge the gap between profitability and people-first culture in business.

With decades of experience in the hospitality and beverage industries, Roy previously directed talent development

for over 4,000 employees at a Forbes Top 25 largest private company. She holds eight certifications in HR and hospitality, and she is on the California EDD Employer Advisory Council.

In 2024, Morale Matters achieved a Small Business Award with the Los Angeles Board of County Supervisors, a Start Up of the Year nomination with the Fortuna Global Awards, and Roy was a featured 40 Under Forty Honoree by the Ventura Board of County Supervisors. Under Roy's leadership, the company has guided dozens of hospitality brands to sustainable growth through tailored leadership development, strategic communication, infrastructure design, results-driven HR, sales, and marketing solutions.



DANIELLE BRINKMAN-MALLARE

FINALIST

President

Brinkman and Company, AAC

Danielle Brinkman-Mallare is a certified public accountant with over 20 years of experience and a track record of leadership in the accounting industry. Throughout her career, she has guided clients through the complexities of tax planning, preparation and accounting, with deep expertise in the service, manufacturing, retail and real estate sectors, as well as trusts and estates.

After launching her career in 1997 at a small firm, Brinkman-Mallare quickly rose to ownership and led the company for more than a decade before guiding its successful merger with Farber Hass Hurley, LLP. In 2024, Brinkman-Mallare founded Brinkman and Company, AAC, with offices in Oxnard and Ojai.



TANYA FLYNN

FINALIST

Co-Owner
Cuts for Mutts

Tanya Flynn entered the pet industry four years ago during the COVID pandemic. As an animal lover, she was excited at the prospect of entering this large and profitable industry and dove head-first into the concept of comprehensive mobile pet grooming. She offset her lack of experience in the industry with passion and drive.

Flynn's Cuts for Mutts concept has persevered and grown – navigating through multiple challenges as a small, family-owned, woman-run business against multiple odds and statistics. While most small businesses with no grants, aids or large financial backers fail under five years, Flynn has been able to avoid falling victim to that statistic due to her belief in the concept and her investment in the community.



SARAH REZNICK

FINALIST

Founder; Financial Advisor
Sherfina Advisors

After earning her Certified Financial Planner certification, Sarah Reznick spent over 12 years advising clients at a prestigious Los Angeles firm. In 2024, she launched her own practice, Sherfina Advisors, in Newbury Park. A subsidiary of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, Sherfina Advisors provides personalized financial advice and strategies to individuals, families and businesses.

As a working mother who navigated a career shift while raising young children, Reznick deeply understands the financial and emotional challenges people face striving to build stability for their families. She works one-on-one with clients to create comprehensive retirement strategies.



CHERISE SMALL

FINALIST

Founder; Licensed Clinical
Social Worker
The Healing Point Therapy
& Wellness

Cherise Small, LCSW, is the founder of The Healing Point Therapy & Wellness and Release2Heal, a wellness brand supporting women navigating emotional exhaustion, identity loss and life transitions. As a licensed therapist and social worker, she has served hundreds of clients through therapy, workshops and digital resources.

In the last year, Small has developed a high-impact course, facilitated community mental wellness events, and completed a transformational book empowering high-achieving women to improve mental well-being. Small regularly volunteers time and facilitates free self-care workshops for women in transition, and regularly provides mental wellness education.



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our Partner Angela Lopez,
for being a 2025
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COMMUNITY IMPACT ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR HONOREE

SARAH JANE CHELIN

*Vice President, Global Risk Management
Bank of America*

A financial services industry veteran with 21 years of experience, Sarah Jane Chelin is Bank of America's vice president of global risk management, where she supports compliance testing and manages nine developers from her offices in Westlake.

Chelin was previously with Countrywide Home Loans, and throughout her career has built highly complex enterprise-wide testing protocols on issues of bankruptcy, commercial flood, Fair Credit Reporting Act enterprise, global wealth & investment management, matters requiring attention, and Servicemembers Civil Relief Act enterprise.

Additionally, Chelin is a nationally recognized therapy dog trainer and handler. For nearly 15 years, she has volunteered with her own dogs in pet therapy to bring joy to people receiving end-of-life hospice care, those living in retirement homes, homeless shelters, children in schools and camps for foster children. In the wake of the recent wildfires, Chelin and her certified pet therapy dogs have been part of the teams responding to an overwhelming number of requests for support from local schools, police departments, ambulance agencies and recovery centers.



STEPHANIE BERGER

FINALIST

President

*Centered Insurance Solutions;
Ellevest Foundation*

As president of Centered Insurance Solutions, Inc. and the Ellevest Foundation, Stephanie Berger has established herself as a formidable leader in the insurance industry while simultaneously creating pathways for the advancement of women in business. With a vision of using business success as a platform for meaningful social change, she regularly represents California healthcare consumers in both Sacramento and Washington D.C.

Berger became the youngest elected president of the California Association of Health Underwriters (2017-2018). She is a founding member of the National Association of Benefits and Insurance Professionals' first Women's Leadership Summit.



LAURA MCHOLM

FINALIST

*Co-Founder;
Marketing Director
Northstar Moving Company*

Co-founder of NorthStar Moving Company, Laura McHolm's career has spanned tech marketing at Atari, corporate law, and, ultimately, innovation in the moving industry by bringing hospitality and sustainability to a field once defined by brute force.

McHolm faced and overcame major challenges, including steering her company through the 2008 financial crisis without layoffs by personally funding payroll, an act of loyalty that inspired her team and ensured long-term success. She also tackled gender stereotypes head-on, proving that a woman can lead, innovate and thrive in an industry not designed with her in mind.



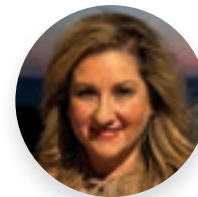
TERRI HILLIARD OLSON

FINALIST

*Esq., AEP, CEPA
Terri Hilliard PC*

Terri Hilliard Olson is an experienced estate planning, elder law and special needs attorney who has dedicated nearly two decades to protecting families and empowering individuals throughout Southern California. A former healthcare attorney and mediator, Olson founded her firm with a mission to simplify complex legal matters and make them more accessible – particularly for underserved and aging communities.

Olson has helped thousands of families navigate transitions with clarity through a values-based practice in a highly specialized field. Additionally, she serves on the Board of Directors for Momentum (formerly the Cerebral Palsy Foundation), where she advocates for individuals with disabilities.



MELINE SIROUNIAN

FINALIST

Partner

Pearlman, Brown & Wax

Attorney Meline Sirounian has practiced workers' compensation defense since 2001. Sirounian represents employers and insurance carriers in complex cases involving injury claims under both state and federal law, including issues regarding Medicare and Social Security. Sirounian develops one-on-one working relationships with adjusters and employers and, valuing a team approach so that all potential issues can be appropriately addressed.

Sirounian has been a tirelessly advocate for her son during his fight against childhood cancer. She has helped build community around the cause by organizing bake sales, gala fundraisers and other events to raise funds for Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

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EACH OTHER UP.**

Patrice Bening
WEALTH ADVISOR, PARTNER



MENTOR OF THE YEAR HONOREE

SUE BENDAVID

*Employment Attorney; Chair,
Employment Practice Group
Lewitt Hackman*

A shareholder and chair of Lewitt Hackman's Employment Practice Group, Sue Bendavid is an accomplished employment attorney with over three decades of legal leadership and advocacy on behalf of employers across diverse industries. In her 22 years at Lewitt Hackman, Bendavid has provided

employers with comprehensive support across employment litigation, counseling, and transactional matters.

Bendavid obtains dismissals and favorable rulings from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, the Employment Development Department, the Labor Commissioner and the Department of Labor – saving clients millions by quashing litigation.

Bendavid is a frequent media commentator, accomplished writer, and dynamic presenter on important workplace issues. Recognized for her role in launching the San Fernando Valley Bar Association's Diversity Committee, she is committed to fostering an inclusive and uplifting environment by actively mentoring others and opening doors for women in law.

**LILIANA LOZANO****FINALIST**

*Senior Director of Operations
Boys & Girls Club
of the West Valley*

Liliana Lozano is the senior director of operations at Boys & Girls Club of the West Valley. She was instrumental in the creation and development of the organization's Future Ready program, which continues to help hundreds of youth graduate on time from high school with a clear plan for their future.

Lozano provides critical support and mentorship to the teams who lead the organization's programs, including Future Ready, College Bound, Keystone, SMART Girls, Passport to Manhood, and Psychomotor. Lozano maintains relationships with community organizations, thought leaders, and influencers to grow the organization's member engagement and experiences.

**JANICE MILLER****FINALIST**

*Managing Partner
Miller Haga Law Group*

A highly recognized legal advisor with over 25 years of experience as an innovative general counsel, Janice Miller is the managing partner of Miller Haga Law Group LLP. She represents the firm's clients in business transactions, real estate leasing, entertainment, intellectual property, licensing and hospitality.

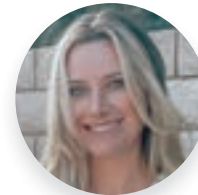
Passionate about educating others in her field, Miller is a noted speaker and panelist at conferences relating to location-based entertainment venues, real estate and leasing, corporate governance, intellectual property and licensing, and emerging areas of the law. Prior to entering private practice, she was NBCUniversal's vice president of business affairs for Universal Studios Hollywood and CityWalk.

**TAMARA GURNEY****FINALIST**

*CEO; President
Mission Valley Bank*

Tamara Gurney is the visionary force behind Mission Valley Bank, serving as its founding president and CEO. With assets totaling \$588 million as of 2024, Mission Valley Bank stands as a foundational bank of the community, boasting 3 branches and divisions offering specialized lending, accounts receivable financing, specialty banking, community development, and merchant services – catering to the needs of over 6,000 clients.

Gurney actively promotes the Economic Valley Alliance, Chambers of Commerce, and a variety of non-profit organizations in the community. Her involvement and mentorship have helped to strengthen local economic initiatives, encouraging entrepreneurship and collaboration among businesses.

**CARISSA MOORE****FINALIST**

*Marketing Manager
Diamond Game*

Carissa Moore has served as marketing manager for Diamond Game for over a decade. She has played a crucial role in guiding the company's rebranding through multiple acquisitions, leading marketing and messaging efforts to ensure smooth integration across sister companies.

Leading a dynamic team of five, Moore not only oversees marketing for multiple markets, products and campaigns but also serves as a mentor, empowering each team member to reach their full potential. She partners with her local university, CSUN, to provide students with invaluable real-world experience, welcoming them as student-shadows and interns, and guiding them through the complexities of the industry.

We proudly support the
Los Angeles Business Journal's 2025
**Valley Women's
Leadership Symposium
& Awards**

and applaud **Susan Seflin, Ashley Teesdale,**
and **Jessica Wellington**, three of our unbelievably
talented legal practitioners!

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ACCELERATOR AWARD HONOREE

GUANWEI (RACHEL) TAO*Global Expert in MedTech Product Commercialization & Strategic Growth*

Guanwei Tao is a seasoned product launch strategist with over 18 years of global experience in the medical device industry. As former senior product manager of Abbott, she is known for bridging innovation with execution and has successfully led the commercialization of more than 27 products across surgical, orthopedic and related industries.

Over the past year, Tao made several noteworthy contributions to the medical device industry. She led cross-functional teams to align product development with market needs, integrating strategic priorities into execution for long-term success. She established foundational market assessments and identified product differentiation opportunities to drive growth. Through strong leadership, Tao has fostered collaboration across marketing, regulatory, and R&D teams, enabling progress despite development constraints.

Tao actively volunteers with Global Renewal, an anti-human trafficking organization focused on leadership development and education in Southeast Asia. She also mentors aspiring entrepreneurs, young professionals and small business owners, helping them build clarity and confidence in their ideas.

**LISA ELKAN****FINALIST***Owner / Founder
Lisa PR*

Lisa Elkan founded Lisa PR in 2012 after working in the field (Guthy Renker Corporation and two prestigious LA law firms) since graduating from UCLA. She specializes in marketing, public relations, advertising, social media marketing, business development and brand management. Elkan has worked with a range of high-profile clients that have been featured in a wide range of publications and media. Elkan is a frequent guest speaker on topics including marketing and business development. She has spoken for many institutions and conferences, including UCLA Anderson School Alumni, UC Alumni Career Network, USC Gould School of Law Alumni, among others.

**DENA KLOTZ****FINALIST***Senior Counsel
Lagerlof, LLP*

Dena Klotz is senior counsel and the managing attorney at the Encino office of Lagerlof, LLP. Her practice is focused on estate planning and trust administration, with years of experience helping individuals and families plan for the future.

Klotz received a Bachelor of the Arts degree from the UCLA and has a master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Phillips Graduate University. Prior to joining Lagerlof, she worked at Corleto, Ackerman & Nussbaum LLP. She received her J.D. from Pepperdine University School of Law and is also licensed as a California real estate broker.

**KERRA DIENER****FINALIST***Partner
Withum*

A tax partner at Withum with over 17 years of experience, Kerra Diener serves corporate clients with accounting for income taxes, tax planning and tax compliance. She also assists multi-national and multi-state business entities including distributors, retailers and wholesalers.

Diener led a Los Angeles team through a complex tax software change as a result of the firm's merger with Withum, and consequently improved office processes. More recently, she implemented training simulations to create improved learning paths for new and experienced staff that involve real replications of work processes and tools to navigate tax returns throughout all stages.

**ALISON PECK, MD****FINALIST***Reproductive Endocrinologist
& Infertility Specialist
HRC Fertility*

With over 20 years of experience, Dr. Alison Peck has dedicated her career to helping individuals and couples navigate the challenges of infertility, transforming countless lives in the process. Her clinical expertise – gained through her residency at the LA County USC Women's and Children's Hospital and her ongoing work at HRC Fertility – is matched by her deep empathy drawn from her own experiences as a mother of three.

Dr. Peck completed her fellowship at the esteemed Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 2006, where she gained comprehensive expertise in assisted reproductive technologies, hormonal disorders and reproductive surgery.

Congratulations to the 2025 Valley Women's Leadership Nominees!



Dee Dee Cavanaugh
Mayor
Award Presenter



Samantha C. Argabrite
City Manager
Panelist

Shaping Tomorrow • Leading Today Join Us in Simi Valley





NEXTGEN WOMAN OF THE YEAR HONOREE

ASHLEY TEESDALE

Senior Associate
BG Law

Ashley Teesdale, senior associate with BG Law, has deep experience representing clients in high-level insolvency law and business litigation matters. Much of her practice focuses on representing debtors, trustees and creditors in Chapter 7 and 11 cases and related litigation, including adversary proceedings regarding objection to discharge, non-dischargeability, and preferential and fraudulent transfer actions. Since 2021, Teesdale has received the honor of being named to US News & World Report's prestigious "Best Lawyers in America: Ones to Watch" list in the categories of Appellate Practice and Bankruptcy and Creditor Debtor Rights / Insolvency and Reorganization Law.

Prior to joining BG Law, Teesdale served a term as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Scott C. Clarkson, United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Central District of California. She also served as a full-time volunteer law clerk for the Honorable Mark S. Wallace, United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Central District of California.

Additionally, Teesdale is an active board member of and treasurer for the Orange County Bankruptcy Forum, having previously served as its secretary from 2023 to 2024.



NEXTGEN WOMAN OF THE YEAR HONOREE

JESSICA WELLINGTON

Associate
BG Law

Throughout her nearly five years as an associate at BG Law, Jessica Wellington has established herself among the most well-respected and highly regarded attorneys in practice areas including commercial bankruptcy and insolvency, commercial collection, creditor rights and remedies, and trustee and fiduciary practice. Prior to joining BG Law, Wellington was a law clerk for the Honorable Judge Victoria S. Kaufman of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California, San Fernando Division. She previously served as a judicial assistant and as an extern for Judge Kaufman.

Wellington has received numerous accolades and honors, including being named a Best Lawyers: Ones to Watch by Best Lawyers in America annually since 2022, and a Southern California Super Lawyer Rising Star by Thomson Reuters in 2025.

Wellington is a member of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association, where she authored an MCLE article entitled "Insolvency: Best Practices and Strategic Approach," published in Valley Lawyer Magazine in 2022. The article provides nuanced guidance on handling the complex issues at the intersection of bankruptcy and insurance.

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CEO / Culturalist
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Chair, Employment Practice Group
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Sarah Jane Chelin
Vice President, Global
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Sandra Cho
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Nicole Conn
Author / Writer /
Producer
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Liliana Lozano
Sr. Director of Operations
Boys & Girls Club of the West Valley



Erin McAnally
Executive Director
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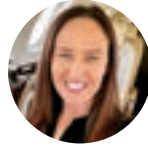
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Chief Operating Officer;
Chief Marketing Officer
Morton Wealth



Janice Miller
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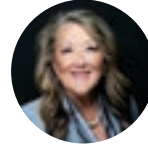
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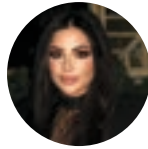
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Audrey Simons
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San Fernando Valley
Community Health Center



Meline Sirounian
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Pearlman, Brown
& Wax



Cherise Small
Founder; Licensed
Clinical Social Worker
The Healing Point
Therapy & Wellness



Marty Stevens-Heebner
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Leeron Tal
Director, Development
& Communications
She Ready
Foundation



Guanwei (Rachel) Tao
Global Expert in
MedTech Product
Commercialization &
Strategic Growth



Ashley Teesdale
Senior Associate
BG Law



Tatevik Torossian
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Grobstein Teeple LLP



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Owner and Founder
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Consumer and Small Business
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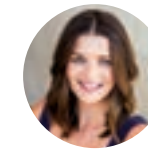
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A Culture Strategy of Growth, Performance and Community



CYDCOR HAS CULTIVATED an award-winning culture, not through slogans or surface-level programs, but through intentional strategies rooted in values that help both its people and business thrive. Led by CEO Vera Quinn, Cydcor has created an environment where people grow, performance scales, and giving back is part of everyday operations. This values-first approach has earned the trust of Fortune 500 clients, as Cydcor delivers in-person customer acquisition solutions that help major brands stand out in an increasingly digital world.

GROWTH THROUGH DEVELOPMENT

At Cydcor, growth begins with people. The company invests in personalized, ongoing development, from AI to public speaking to leadership training. Mentorship, feedback, and hands-on learning are embedded into the culture. This commitment has helped fuel record-breaking results, including doubling revenue over the past two years—an unprecedented milestone in Cydcor's 30-year history. It has also earned Cydcor recognition as a

13-time Los Angeles Business Journal Best Places to Work honoree.

PERFORMANCE THROUGH ALIGNMENT

Cydcor's performance culture is built on clarity and communication. Team members understand the company's goals, their role in achieving them, and how success is measured. Momentum is driven through regular one-on-ones, performance check-ins, and monthly companywide meetings.

Cydcor is also relentless about delivering consistent, high-quality results for its clients. "When you build a culture where people understand what's expected and feel supported in achieving it, they can deliver with strong performance, purpose, and pride," said Quinn.

COMMUNITY AT ITS CORE

Cydcor's "people helping people" philosophy is more than a belief. It is a way of thinking and operating. It attracts individuals who want their careers to create impact in business and beyond. Each year, team members



volunteer hundreds of hours and raise thousands of dollars for causes ranging from child welfare to hunger relief and environmental efforts. Helping others is not extra; it is part of how Cydcor does business.

Through local partnerships and national initiatives, Cydcor's commitment to community is deeply embedded in how the company shows up in the world.

This is all more than culture. It's a competitive edge that strengthens teams, drives measurable success, and ignites future growth.

To learn more, visit cydcor.com.



Proudly Celebrates Two Women Leading with Purpose



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Women in Business are Good for Business

WOMEN BUSINESS COLLABORATIVE

(WBC), led by CEO Gwen Young, represents a coalition of the world's most influential companies and 87 organizations dedicated to advancing women in business. WBC advocates for data-driven results that prove the impact of women on business success.

Even though for decades there has been consensus among business leaders on the importance of increased representation by women, recent debates have questioned the role of women in the workforce. WBC is setting the record straight. Women in business are indeed good for business.

WBC has identified key facts informed by data that reinforce the power of women in business:

- 14 million women-owned businesses in the US represent 39.1% of all US firms, employ 12.2 million people, and generate

\$2.7 trillion in revenue (*Wells Fargo*)

- Organizations with 30% or more women on executive teams are 27% more likely to outperform on profitability (*McKinsey & Company*)

- Companies with above-average diversity generate 19% more innovation revenue than their less diverse counterparts (*Boston Consulting Group*)

- The share of majority women-owned businesses rose from 15.6% to 20.3%—doubling participation in the market since 2020—and their revenues have helped drive economic growth (*Small Business Administration*)

- Minority Women Business Enterprises (MWBEs) generated \$67 billion in revenue, created 221,000 US jobs, and contributed \$19.5 billion in wages (*National Minority Supplier Development Council*)

Women drive business forward. They

make up 57% of the workforce yet hold only 8.72% of CEO positions and 28% of board seats. Women founders receive only 2% of venture capital funding. Women still only make 84 cents to the dollar, with women of color earning less than that.

"These aren't just gaps — they're failures to recognize an undeniable business advantage. The time to close these gaps isn't tomorrow. It's now," said Young. "WBC calls on leaders to recognize that supporting women in business isn't just the right thing to do — it's the smartest business decision."

Through collaboration, advocacy, action, and accountability, WBC mobilizes thousands of diverse professional women and men, business organizations, public and private companies to accelerate change.

Learn more at wbccollaborative.org.

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How working with a Certified Exit Planning Advisor® can improve your business.



Sarah Reznick

Q. Approximately 10 million Baby Boomer Owned businesses are expected to change hands in the next few years. Many of them are very profitable, what can these business owners do to increase to prepare?

A. Business owners should always be preparing their business for sale, even if they never decide to sell. One of the strategies a Certified Exit Planning Advisor® will employ is an assessment of the clients financial and emotional readiness to exit. In this exercise they will find the Profit Gap, and Wealth Gap a business owner may have. Of the Baby Boomers over 80% of their net worth is often locked up in their business, according to estimates from the Exit Planning Institute. Without a value analysis and critical business planning to increase value, sadly most business MAY never achieve a successful exit. We also see many business owners, have lifestyle businesses, meaning that their business is successful because of the business owner, which makes it much more challenging, if not impossible to sell should the owner sell. Through a diligent process, CEPA's can work with the business to potentially change that model.

Q. What people on a business owners' team are critical for a successful exit?

A. The core team of any successful business should include a Financial Advisor, better if they hold both the CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ also known as CFP®, and CEPA designations. This is due to the enhanced expertise in taxation, insurance, estate planning, amongst a number of items they study in their designations. They MAY also need to have a CPA who works with business owners, and legal counsel in the estate and employment side. Working with a CEPA, they will add other critical team members along the way including, Value Advisors, Family Advisors, Marketing, CFO, etc.

Q. Why did you decide to earn your CEPA designation?

A. As a daughter raised in a small business family, I saw through my parents the day-to-day challenges of running a business and a family at the same time. My parents had an extraordinarily successful business that they built over 30 years. They never had a financial advisor, a good accountant or a good legal team. One day, because of not having the right team looking out for them, they lost their business within a matter of weeks. I see the challenge with the business owners I work with, they are working daily in their business and not on their business. I use the knowledge I gained and work to help them see the forest through the trees and get to be able to unlock more of the wealth they worked a lifetime for.

Q. How do I take action?

A. I would suggest starting with a Certified Exit Planning Advisor. You can find a local member through the Exit Planning Institute in your area.

Sarah Reznick, CFP®, ChFC®, CRPC™
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Funding for Women-Owned Businesses

THE ASSOCIATION OF Women's Business Centers (AWBC) recently announced the launch of the HOPE2Women Funding Center, a groundbreaking platform designed to provide small business owners with access to capital, resources, and mentorship.

Stearns Bank, known for its commitment to empowering women entrepreneurs, is partnering with AWBC to create an inclusive ecosystem for small business owners. Together, they aim to provide \$300 million in capital annually to small businesses by leveraging Women's Business Centers across the country by equipping them with the financial support and technical assistance needed to grow and thrive in today's competitive market.

"Together, the national women's business center network, comprised of more than 150 centers, and Stearns Bank, are

making the funding for women owned businesses a strategic priority," shared Corinne Goble, the CEO of the Association of Women's Business Centers. "We are excited to take on this bold goal of \$300 million and are looking forward to ushering hundreds of women's businesses through the process of realizing their business growth potential. When businesses grow, our economy expands, and that impact is needed in almost every corner of the country."

"Stearns Bank is excited to partner with the Association of Women's Business Centers to achieve our \$300 million goal — yes, \$300 million of funding each year — to empower entrepreneurs to access essential capital to grow their businesses at all stages," said Kelly Skalicky, CEO and president of Stearns Bank. "As a majority women-owned and nearly 25% employee-owned

bank that has been growing and financing businesses nationwide for decades, we understand how entrepreneurs build successful businesses across every industry. We are deeply proud to continue investing in Women's Business Centers and the growth of small business owners nationwide to ensure they continue to start and scale their businesses in record numbers."

NEXT STEPS: HOW TO GET STARTED WITH FUNDING

Entrepreneurs interested in learning more about funding opportunities can visit hope2women.org/funding-center for free resources designed to help small business owners. Whether you're looking for a small business loan or guidance toward securing financial support, AWBC and Stearns Bank are here to help.

For more information, visit awbc.org.



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Survey Reveals Key Opportunity Challenges

LAST YEAR, the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) and ADP released the results of a survey of women business owners. Nearly 92% of women-owned businesses are microbusinesses, businesses with fewer than 25 employees. While the businesses may be small, they provide the lion's share of the family income, with 63% of the business owners providing 50-100% of the household income. By giving these businesses the resources to grow, we will see an opportunity to increase wealth in our most underserved populations.

"Women business owners are the drivers of our nation's economy and the leaders in our communities," said Karen Bennetts, NAWBO National Board chair. "By supporting women business owners and providing them with the necessary resources, we are building the bridge to

wealth creation, allowing them to grow and scale their businesses. We appreciate the support of great companies like ADP who recognize this vital section of the American economy."

According to the Annual Business Survey (ABS), women-owned 1.24 million or 21.4% of employer firms in the US. Women-owned businesses account for \$1.9 trillion in receipts, 10.9 million employees, and \$432.1 billion in annual payroll.

One of the challenging pain points described in the survey results is hiring. While hiring has been challenging in many industries, survey results show that 41 percent of NAWBO members report hiring is more difficult than ever before. Many reported losing an applicant to a competitor. Forty-three percent had no staff, so losing out on an appli-

cant could mean the difference between missing or making an order fulfillment deadline.

The good news is that there are strategies to help ease the stress of hiring. Smaller businesses may even have an advantage in making themselves more appealing to applicants, said Kiran Contractor, director of talent acquisition at ADP. "As a small organization, you can take a personalized approach." She encourages small business owners to do their best to determine what applicants value and incorporate that into the offer.

Founded in 1975, NAWBO is the unified voice of America's more than 12 million women-owned businesses representing the fastest-growing segment of the economy.

Learn more at NAWBO.org.



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