



THE TOP 100 **INNOVATORS**
and *Entrepreneurs*

Featuring
**RHYAN
WALCOTT**



THE TOP 100 MAGAZINE

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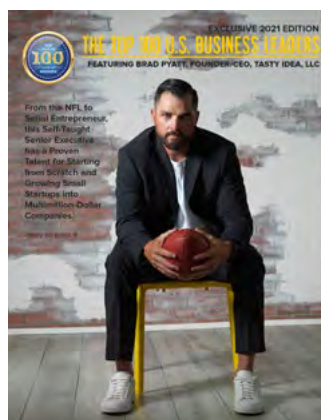
The Top 100 Innovators
& Entrepreneurs 2023

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The staff of *The Top 100 Magazine* would like to express their gratitude for having the privilege of working with some of the brightest, most accomplished, and esteemed thought leaders in the world.

Through the combined efforts of our account directors, writers, production staff, and artists, as well as the cooperation of everyone who is featured in this extraordinary edition, I believe we are presenting a comprehensive view of what innovation looks like today.

I know that our readers will be equally enthused by these stories and appreciate the tremendous fortitude, dedication, and perseverance of these individuals, along with the many sacrifices they have made in the pursuit of their dreams.

It is my sincere wish that each and every one of these amazing professionals continue to experience success and my pleasure to present *The Top 100 Innovators & Entrepreneurs Magazine*.

Joseph Nunziato
CEO, Redwood Media

THE TOP 100 INNOVATORS and *Entrepreneurs*

Celebrating
our 15th
Year of
Publishing

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**THE TRAILBLAZERS. THE LEADERS.
THE CHANGE-MAKERS. THE DREAMERS.**

We bring the stories of extraordinary people to the world.

RHYAN WALCOTT

Q & A



As a kid, Rhyan Walcott was mesmerized by the boy genius out to save the world in *Dexter's Laboratory*. He'd tinker for hours with his chemistry playset, absorbed in his fascination with medicine and science. It's a passion that drove him through a 15-year career in laboratories and business—working in both environmental science labs and esoteric clinical laboratories in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina; serving as CEO for established and start-up businesses; and helping the build of laboratories throughout the US. Through the lens of both a business and laboratory leader, Rhyan knows what physicians need most to care for their patients: fast *and* accurate lab results. Today, as CEO of [Meridian Diagnostics](#), a clinical diagnostic reference laboratory based in Colorado Springs, he's making sure they get it—within just 24 hours. “Our results are triple-checked because we know the massive responsibility that we have, not only to ensure that medical professionals have accurate information, but have it fast,” Rhyan says. “We take seriously that patients’ lives are in our hands.”

To Rhyan and Meridian Diagnostics, the thousands of tests they provide each month for hundreds of physicians and healthcare providers represent not just data points, but a life, a person, a family, a future. This is what drove them to build one of the most high-tech labs in the industry providing myriad testing services to

clients nationwide. It's what pushed their dedication to be at the forefront of emerging diagnostics, which allowed them to help usher health care professionals and their patients through COVID-19 and fueled them to provide a “one-stop shop” for long-term care and nursing home clients, offering wound care, and onychomycosis, UTI, and viral testing services.

While every Meridian Diagnostics staff member is committed to their mission, for Rhyan, the passionate leader who transformed this lab from ordinary to extraordinary and increased client volume by 3500% in just six months since taking the helm in March 2022, it's what he was born to do. “It took a lot of sleepless nights and a lot of hard work, but it was absolutely a labor of love,” he shares. As he steers Meridian forward, Rhyan also helps laboratories and businesses nationwide to succeed through APEX Professional Solutions, a consultation and management firm that he founded in 2021 with his wife, Samantha Walcott, who has worked in the diagnostic healthcare space for over a decade and serves as Chief Quality Officer for both APEX Professional Solutions and Meridian Diagnostics.

About Meridian Diagnostics

Meridian Diagnostics offers services to clinics, laboratories, employers, and health care organizations, and long-term care facilities, and strives to help medical professionals make better health care decisions through functionable, accurate, seamless, and timely diagnostic testing. With a focus on quality, reports are issued within 24 hours and supported through rigorous validation standards and skilled experts. Meridian offers a host of advanced testing services: wound care and onychomycosis, customizable toxicology panels utilizing liquid chromatography mass spectrometry, UTI with antibiotic resistance, blood panels, COVID, viral testing, pharmacogenomics, and urinalysis. Further, Meridian can often detect pathogens, analytes, and infections that other labs might miss—and when a life is on the line, this could make all the difference.

We spoke with Rhyan to learn more about Meridian Diagnostics, his role in their transformation, and his work to help other businesses and labs succeed.

Q: What makes Meridian Diagnostics so different, Rhyan?

First, we know that physicians need accurate, comprehensive results, and they need them quickly. We provide triple-checked reports within 24 hours, which doctors can access through our online portal or via email or fax. Second, we make the entire process easy and seamless, with a client relationship specialist who works with our medical professionals from beginning to end so that they don't have to wait 48 hours or more for a response. We provide testing supplies, ensure samples are returned to us in an expedient manner and reports are accessible the following morning.

Q: Meridian is now focusing on onychomycosis testing services to help your long-term care and nursing home clients. Tell us about this.

Onychomycosis is a chronic fungal infection of the nails that affects 50% of people over 70 years old and 20% of those over 60. It can be incredibly painful and cause physical impairment, undermining their quality of life, so it's important to identify the causative agent to ensure appropriate treatment. Our nail fungal testing detects dermatophytes, yeasts, and molds via nail clipping samples.

Q: You have a record of both building innovative labs from scratch and contributing significantly to the growth of health care companies. What compelled you to join Meridian and lead its transformation?

I'd been working Meridian for a few months at the same time I was running my own company, APEX. I could see not only the promise in what they *could* be, but how to get them there. Most importantly, they were passionate about their mission, and I wanted to be a part of it. I joined as



CEO, restructured the lab, rebuilt the entire team and model, and together, we transformed it to what it is today. We couldn't be prouder.

Q: Tell us about APEX and how you're helping other labs and businesses succeed.

APEX Professional Solutions is a culmination of my three passions: science, entrepreneurship, and helping people. We provide consultation and management services to businesses and laboratories nationwide, helping them enhance operations to better align with their missions and expand their portfolios. Our services span from lab management, regulatory consulting, inspection preparation to business intelligence, project management, inventory control, and more.



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GARRY RAI

Founder & CEO

Garry Rai, founder of Zumin Inc., has always been a disruptor in the real estate industry. When he first joined the industry 15 years ago, he recognized that the traditional approach of prioritizing sales over customer experience was not the right way to go.

In 2014, he set out to change the status quo by founding Zumin, a company that equips real estate professionals with everything they need to better serve their clients - from financing to legal to home improvement advice, products and innovative programs. Zumin is a one-stop-shop that turns the real estate brokerage and service industry on its head, taking real estate professionals to new heights of success in the process.

Garry has created a better experience for agents and homeowners alike by celebrating innovation and integrating solutions into their services. Zumin is a platform that challenges traditional ways of doing real estate across many sectors, with innovative programs that bring professionals together to do better for their clients and homeowners.

“With all the recent market changes, we feel we’ve achieved our goal of developing programs that concurrently allow more earning opportunities for realtors and better educate homeowners.”

Their problem-solving software, with uses for proptech, fintech, and construction tech, gives homeowners unbiased, tailored solutions while simultaneously benefiting agents and every stakeholder involved. They help realtors, contractors, investors, and speculators act in the best interest of buyer’s and seller’s, improving the entire experience at every level.

We sat down with Garry to learn more about Zumin and their “outside-the-box” solutions.

What compelled you to start the company?

We started as a real estate team at a leading brokerage in Ontario, but quickly realized our mindset and direction didn’t fit within the traditional franchise model. We had to decide whether to make a pivot away from this, to create something that was wholesome, solution based, and prioritized encompassing the needs of clients. The overall real estate landscape lacked this, and we wanted to disrupt that by generating programs to educate homeowners, buyers, and investors so that they were informed while making some of the most important financial decisions of their lives.

Tell us about some of your new, innovative programs and how real estate agents can benefit from them.

With all the recent market changes, we feel we’ve achieved our goal of developing programs that concurrently allow more earning opportunities for realtors and better educate homeowners. The market’s continuous evolution requires realtors to pivot to remain informed and relevant to their clients. The programs we’ve developed facilitate that and allow real estate agents to earn more through cross-organizational initiatives. We have further implemented trademarked programs, such as Renovate Now, Pay Later™, that help alleviate the ongoing stress homeowners face when deciding if pre-sale renovations will bring a higher return on their investment. This is paired with our experienced and knowledgeable agents who can provide valuable advice on what improvements will be advantageous to the sale, current market demands, and a comprehensive review of recent sale trends. This program has proven to be prosperous for realtors by bringing them forward as industry specialists and helping them secure deeper and stronger client relationships.

What do you enjoy most about your work, or what drives you?

My drive comes from finding and implementing the best solutions for our clients. The success is when our clients realize there are programs out there that will help them more than they ever imagined. Their stories

are priceless, and when you're able to make a difference in a person's quality of life, there's just no better way to measure the success of what we do, and why we do it.

The most important aspect of this is maintaining the integrity of our profession in everything we do. Buyers and sellers are all looking for the same thing, to work with informed professionals who will educate them in the process and help them find solutions supporting their individual needs. Everyone has a story, and every story is different. Cookie-cutter programs don't work. This is what we do differently and what we want to share with realtors, so they can serve their clients well, with all the industry tools needed to drive success.



Zumin is a platform that challenges traditional ways of doing real estate across many sectors, with innovative programs that bring professionals together to do better for their clients and homeowners.

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A business leader and entrepreneur who's spent 30 years leading, founding, and working with startups, James has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to leveraging technology to take an idea to success. After playing a major role bringing a company from 100 employees to 5,000 with a \$3 billion market cap right out of college, James dedicated his career to making businesses succeed by looking towards the future of what "business" looks like. He started his first company, GenXL in the early 2000s. On the heels of that success, he developed processes and procedures for productively working out of the office in the early 2000s, when not popular and underutilized. Eight years later, he started one of the first telehealth companies, Connections365, far ahead of the trend.

"The Xela Business Platform was specifically designed for consultants to build and extend their business online, giving them everything a startup needs to launch and grow—all in a single platform."

While his remarkable entrepreneurial journey is marked by successes, James knows well the inherent risks of failure that startups carry, and spent eight years developing a company and a platform to help them avoid pitfalls, harness their innovations, and flourish. In 2020, Xela was born, and with the final polish in place, in August 2002, James launched the Xela Business Platform, specifically designed for consultants to build and extend their business online, giving them everything a startup needs to launch and grow—all in a single platform.

The Xela Business Platform integrates all the key technologies that businesses need to succeed into a single, easy-to-use platform—video, calendar, client payment, coworker communications, and much more. It integrates directly and seamlessly into the client's website, and its solutions are all fixed-time and fixed-cost for consistent delivery. Services include a custom website, one-on-one support, and the Xela Business Platform that uses insight from leading business consultants to get online businesses up and running in record time, all for one low monthly fee. Since launching, Xela is serving an ever-growing number of clients, including gig workers looking to set up their own businesses, and ushering them into a brighter future.

JAMES SIMS

FOUNDER & CEO

James Sims has worked with inventors and entrepreneurs his entire career, and today, his company, Xela, a play on his children's names, is the culmination of everything he's ever done to benefit entrepreneurs, helping them strike out and build their own businesses for future success. "This is the greatest explosion of entrepreneurs, solopreneurs, startups, and gig workers in the country's history. Now, they need support to thrive," says James. And he knows what it takes to get them there.

We met with James to learn more about what inspired Xela, how it's changing the way business is done, and what drives him.

What compelled you to start a company dedicated to serving specifically consultants, small businesses, startups, entrepreneurs, and gig workers?

Over the past couple of years, primarily because of COVID lockdowns, there has been significant change in the priorities and logistics of the standard brick-and-mortar workforce. Many individuals with specific skill sets have realized there are other options to get compensated for their expertise without having to go into the office. They need a way to create their own business that's cost effective, differentiated, and able to get to market quickly. I wanted to use my experience and expertise to help them succeed. It's that simple.

Did your own obstacles or "headaches" as an entrepreneur serve to inform Xela's service model to eliminate these for others and support their success?

Absolutely. The true value of Xela is providing four key components to maximize our clients' success: People, Platform, Process and Pricing. The People component is our ability to bring the right people with extensive startup experience to our clients' businesses to stop those "headaches" from happening and guide new business owners away from common mistakes.

Tell us about some of the services that you provide.

Xela provides a comprehensive process to start online businesses for entrepreneurs that has been developed over 30 years. They include business ideation, market research, branding, web development, finances, advertising, and one-on-one and tech support. All services are provided with a fixed-fee, and pricing options are available for all to start their own business without significant upfront cost and risk.

What is one piece of advice that you'd give to aspiring leaders and entrepreneurs?

If you decide to start a new business, make sure it's something you really love. It will take more time, effort, and commitment than expected and having a sincere interest will get you through the times you want to throw in the towel or when you think you were crazy to do this in the first place.

What do you enjoy most about your work, James?

Freedom. I've been fortunate to be able to work on interesting and amazing projects out of an office for over 15 years. Being able to create businesses for individuals to live a better, more satisfying personal and business life is my goal for Xela and it's extremely motivating.



The true value of Xela is providing four key components to maximize our clients' success:

**PEOPLE, PLATFORM,
PROCESS AND PRICING.**



XELA

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Terry E. James

CEO & Founding Partner



This is not the story of a man in pursuit of money or power, fame or status. It is one of an inspirational business and community leader led by family, faith, and philanthropy and driven by a profound sense of purpose—to lift up as many people as possible. He’s a champion of inclusivity, diversity, and bringing people together, and he’s spent a veritable lifetime doing precisely this. Now, as he enters the next chapter of his life, Terry has an even greater mission in mind. “How do we impact more people, more lives, how do we deepen these connections?” he shares. “This is what excites me the most about where I’m at today, and the future, that at this point in my career, I can say, ‘Okay, now we can do these things that *really* matter and make a widespread impact.’”

With this in mind, in 2020, Terry reached beyond the real estate corridors to become the COO and cofounder of Offleash’d, a social app created by pet people for pet people—and a venture that he considers “the biggest thing he’s ever been a part of.” Given its immediate popularity upon its launch in the summer of 2022—with over 20,000 people engaging across all platforms in Seattle and beyond in its first six months and Offleash’d already being considered as one of the top five startups by *Seattle Inno’s* 2022 *Fire Awards*—Terry is well on his way to seeing his bigger dream realized: to touch millions of people’s lives. As of January 1, 2023, Terry has been elevated to the role of CEO of Offleash’d and is excited to lead the company as it expands into California launching in LA February 11th, 2023 and across the country moving forward.

About

There is no doubt as to Terry James’s extraordinary career. He rose from a young financial advisor with Morgan Stanley over 20 years ago, where he won the *National Sales Director Award* before moving to UBS Financial Services. In the early 2000s, Terry left the financial services industry to focus on his real estate ventures, where he participated in over half a billion dollars in transactions. He’s also a successful serial entrepreneur and founder of the James Real Estate Group companies, which includes a construction/development company, a consulting firm, and serves as a real estate licensee for Compass in Bellevue, WA, the top-producing office in the state and the #14 producing office in the country. There is no dismissing the many well-earned awards that have marked his journey. Yet, he’d humbly tell you that his success was merely a by-product of a bigger mission.



offleash’d

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“

We see ourselves as a movement rather than an app. Pets break down the barriers between people and allow them to connect in a way they normally wouldn't.



Q: What is Offleash'd?

From dating to friendships, Offleash'd is about more than a casual online connection. It's a safe, inclusive community where users can connect and engage with fellow animal lovers. From pet parents to animal enthusiasts, Offleash'd joins people based on a mutual love and appreciation for the furry, the finned, the feathered, the leathered, the slithery, or the maned. "We see ourselves as a movement rather than an app," Terry says. "Pets break down the barriers between people and allow them to connect in a way they normally wouldn't. When you come to Offleash'd, you have an instant commonality with others because you all have this shared interest." As Offleash'd continues to expand to every major city in the U.S., they're rolling out an "Events and Groups" feature to connect with people across the country. Whether looking for friends in the free app's "Social Mode" or that special someone in "Dating Mode," get ready to mingle with those who share your passion!

We spoke with Terry, who shared more about Offleash'd, some sage advice for young leaders, and the bigger mission of an app that is changing the definition of "social."

Q: With all your accomplishments as a business and real estate leader, you view Offleash'd as the most important endeavor you've ever been a part of. Why is this?

In every role, and in every one of my companies I've always strived to help others. Offleash'd will give us the ability to potentially touch millions of people's lives. It's a way to connect through pets, letting pets be the new driver of how relationships are formed, whether platonic or romantic, and regardless of income, background, socioeconomic status, race, or sexual orientation. We all need more love, more connection, and this brings it into our daily lives based on a simple, instant commonality. If you have a love of animals, you already know the person on the other end has a shared quality.

Q: What has the response been from Offleash'd users thus far, and can you share some of the new features you'll be rolling out in the future?

The response has been everything we hoped for. Users are excited by the idea and opportunity to be a part of a platform that allows them to feel an instant connection with others, regardless of who they are or what kind of pet they love. Next, we'll be launching our "events" feature that will bring users together on an even deeper level.

Q: What advice can you give to other aspiring leaders and young people as it relates to success

When you have achieved success, then you can use that to help other people—now you have the resources, the ability, the credibility and the voice to do so. You'll face obstacles, especially people of color, women, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups. We all do. It's just how we meet these challenges and then having the perseverance to overcome them that will determine our success—whether in life, in career, as a community member or as a citizen, however we define it.

Q: You also see a bigger mission for Offleash'd. Tell us about this.

If you can use that as platform for conversations about race, religion, sexual orientation, etc., then together, we're pushing society and humanity, forward, and having pets as part of that conversation. I'm so excited about this, to use this as a bridge for mental health awareness, open, honest discussions about race, and deeper connections.

LEO MOSS

Founder & CEO



As leaders, our role is not to just make our companies better, it's to make the industry better.

Chicago. Built by entrepreneurs, driven by ingenuity, grown with an uncommon brand of determination and passion, and sustained by the Midwestern attitude of “we’re all in this together.” It is the nucleus of international trade and commerce—and one of the most critical logistics and transportation hubs in the country. At the center of it all is one of the industry’s most respected and trusted authorities—Leo Moss, founder and CEO of Fruition Logistics, a full-service, third-party logistics company specializing in temperature-controlled LTL and FTL transportation, warehousing, and consolidation.

He’s a logistics expert, consultant, and advisor, an industry speaker and learned voice at DAT conventions—and the leader of a company whose reputation with both customers and carriers has seen the company grow to double itself every year. Underlying it all is a passionate entrepreneur who, in 2014, started an enterprise driven to transform the way business is done. In doing so, he’s forever changing the entire industry. “We are very aware that families across America are relying on all of us, and we’re working hard together to deliver for them,” Leo says.

“We don’t view our job as merely moving cargo; we make America move.” – Leo Moss.

From their headquarters in Chicago, Fruition Logistics serves the entire U.S., with strong partnerships in regions across the country to facilitate the movement of freight from origin to destination. Specializing in temperature-controlled transportation for *both* full (FTL) and less-than-truckloads (LTL), they make sure every load arrives safely and on time. And their commitment extends far beyond the successful delivery of cargo, as does Leo’s vision for what a third-party logistics company *should* be.

“Since 72% of food in our grocery stores is brought by truck, we, as an industry, should ensure that our supply chain is as efficient as possible. My goal is to help people—shippers, carriers, businesses, and individual families. I truly believe that we must care for each other in order for all of us to thrive,” Leo shares. “This is why I started Fruition Logistics and what drives me to do things differently.” The sincerity of his words rings in Fruition’s nearly decade-long reputation for exceptional service and personalized attention designed to increase efficiency and provide significant savings to their customers. They work closely with each of them to understand their individual needs—and stay by their side every mile of the way to ensure the safe transfer of cargo.

How the vision of a “better” logistics company grew to a mission to help an industry

“Logistics beats hard in my chest, and I knew there was a better way.” – Leo Moss

In late 2011, Leo was a warehouse manager in Las Vegas, NV, handling shipping and receiving procedures, controlling inventory, managing employees, and running daily warehouse operations. A former master sergeant in the Israel Defense Forces with a degree in communication and political studies, Leo hit the ground as proven leader skilled in logistics. A few years later, he moved to Chicago. It was there that his vision for Fruition was born. “Over my career, I saw drivers, vendors, customers being treated poorly, and seeing that day in and day out really changed something in me. You *can* do things differently,” he explains. Leo launched Fruition Logistics shortly thereafter. As their reputation quickly spread among both customers and carriers, they grew from a regional provider to the logistical epicenter for clients nationwide. Soon, logistics companies and business owners everywhere were turning to him for advice. And Leo was happy to help. Today, as Leo and Fruition continue to deliver on their unfaltering promise to those they serve, he’s also serving a much bigger mission—to lead the evolution of an industry that holds in its hands the very livelihood of an entire nation.

The *Top 100 Magazine* spoke with Leo to learn more about his views on what it means to be a leader in this critical industry, and his work to lift up other entrepreneurs, as an advisor and investor.

Leo, while you lead a thriving logistics enterprise, you’re also helping other companies and the industry as a whole, as an advisor and a public speaker. Why is this important to you?

I believe that our job as leaders is not only to make our own companies better, but to make the industry better as a whole: We’re helping the logistics industry with software, technology integration, payment and accounting solutions and strategies. Our collaboration helps streamline processes from drivers to dispatchers to industry CFOs. When a process is streamlined, it makes the industry more efficient. It is imperative that we, as leaders, recognize the industry’s challenges, and collaborate to overcome them. The goal is to streamline processes and help the industry save time by providing resources and data. My objective is to better serve the market and the economy as a whole so that the supply chain can keep moving.

What excites you about working in the logistics industry?

I really enjoy working with clients, and I’m helping a handful of them—Relay Payments, Trucker Path, DUKE.AI, Truck Park, Cinch Try, and others --matching technology with user needs by complementing it with past and present experiences. I also look forward to weekly meetings, where we work to improve new and existing products in all aspects of the logistics industry. I know I’m making a difference because I experience it within my own business. Coming from the trenches on the broker side, I’m able to see the specific trends in the industry and relay information to the advisory board for them to make more informed decisions. As both a founder and an entrepreneur, I leverage my set of tools and experience, my own insight, and my network to help other businesses.

What is one piece of advice you’d give to business owners, Leo?

Look at your business from a bird’s-eye view; not just top to bottom, but from bottom to top. Engage, question, research existing and new processes, technology; dare to take a chance and talk to everyone you can in the industry. The more opinions you get, you start to realize which advice to take and try.



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About

The American Dream can be broadly interpreted as a belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success. Many believe that this is achieved through hard work, sacrifice, determination, and risk-taking rather than by chance. This year, Crystal Cleveland decided to overcome her fears and in January 2022, she set out to build her own American Dream. Today, as the founder of Xebec International Logistics, LLC, she leads a global logistics company on a parabolic rise.

The awe-inspiring success of Xebec International is not the product of luck or millions in capital from investors. It is the culmination of one woman's determination, passion, and 15 years of experience in international trade compliance and logistics, working for some of the biggest names in the industry— Halliburton, Schlumberger, Mitsubishi, Mahindra USA, and Crane Worldwide Logistics. "I could see the spark of Xebec, the dream," Crystal says. That "spark" spread like a wildfire, soaring to over \$1.4 million in revenue in the first quarter of its founding.

Within a year, Xebec moved thousands of metric tons of goods across the globe. Among her clients are Global Organics, one of the nation's largest organic sugar importers, and Sumitomo, a leading Fortune 500 global trading company. With headquarters based in Houston, Texas, her plan is to focus on continued growth. While many business leaders might bask in the spotlight of success, Crystal gives the credit to those she feels deserve it. "I would not be here without my brilliant team," she shares. "They walked away from thriving careers to come to work for me, and together, we made this happen."



Crystal
CLEVELAND

FOUNDER OF XEBEC INTERNATIONAL LOGISTICS

Q & A

About Xebec International Logistics

Founded on the core values of quality, efficiency, and integrity, Xebec has more than a decade of experience pioneering and refining transportation and logistics solutions that are secure, flexible, and designed to globally ship any product. Providing transportation, customs and compliance, and warehousing and distribution services, they support their clients every step of the way, delivering complete logistics solutions so that their clients can focus on innovations and growth. Further, as supply chains around the world are becoming more expensive and complex, Xebec's 4PL logistics solutions and a team of experts manage all their clients' logistics service providers and operations, providing peace of mind in knowing that products are delivered securely and on time. Xebec offers import and export services, customs brokerage and consulting advice, and warehouse-supply chain solutions that are coupled with 24/7 monitoring and expert guidance.

We had the pleasure to meet with Crystal to hear more about her extraordinary journey—and it's an inspirational tale for the ages.

Providing transportation, customs and compliance, and warehousing and distribution services, they support their clients every step of the way, delivering complete logistics solutions so that their clients can focus on innovations and growth.

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You started in logistics by accident, and now you're leading an extraordinarily successful international transportation and logistics firm. Tell us about your career journey.

When I was 25, I wanted a better future for my children. The job market was slim for someone that did not have a degree. I applied for a logistics position within Halliburton and even though I had no previous experience, the hiring manager acknowledged my drive and eagerness to learn and offered me the position. Working full-time and juggling a family, I went back to school and received my master's in business administration. The experience I gained from a handful of companies in roles as a senior logistics specialist, trade compliance consultant, and customs compliance and safety manager, gave me a breadth of experience across all sectors of the industry, which culminated in the founding of Xebec.

You took Xebec from an idea to where it is today in less than a year. Will you share this story with us?

Looking back, it still seems very surreal. I had no credit, no capital, no investors, or family money to fall back on, but I was determined. I told my fiancé, "I need six months to make this happen." He said, "I know you, and if you believe in something this much, there's no stopping you." With the little savings I had to invest, I took my last \$400 and filed for the formation of the company. I took one consulting job which led to me obtaining all the required licenses and permits to operate. Using social media, the company took off. Success, however, I believe should be credited to my team, who have supported me since the beginning. I believe the sky's the limit for us!

What drives you the most, Crystal?

My goal in life has been to show my kids that nothing can keep them down and that you can succeed regardless of obstacles along the way. I have always pushed my limits and set my personal goals to a higher standard. Every day I put my boots on the ground and tell myself "let's go!" My family is my motivation and when I hear them say "I am proud of you" it only makes me work harder and strive to make the company stronger for all to enjoy.



Mark DiCarlo



Hélène Thibieroz



Environmental pollution kills more people every year than smoking, hunger, war, natural disasters, murder, AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria *combined*. If that information seems shocking, Mark DiCarlo thought so, too. When his research uncovered this harsh truth, his first thought was, “No one should have to live like this.”

Instead of lamenting, Mark sprang into action and decided then and there to dedicate his life to solving the urgent issue of air pollution. Together with CEO Hélène Thibieroz, who brings more than 20 years of biomimicry and natural science solutions experience, he founded Rainlons, an air pollution reduction and climate change prevention company that eliminates pollution and greenhouse gases from the air via a unique combination of negative ions, electrons, particles and water/precipitation. Mark has published three patents for eliminating pollution and greenhouse gases using biomimicry, which involves creating systems based on natural processes. Hélène’s experience includes hands-on expertise in energy, smart building, transportation, and waste management, and the creation of the We Grow Green Tech accelerator, which helps green companies with conscientious tech make real, lasting impacts. She uses her experience mentoring world-class accelerators and green startups to create models that are both effective and can be realistically scaled for business, all inspired by nature and at affordable rates so that their impact can be far-reaching.

Rainlons is unique in that their technology addresses both carbon dioxide as well as other air pollutants, and works without external energy, and though just founded in 2019, the company already has two proven functional technologies for eliminating air pollution, which they will deploy later in the year. And they’ve already caught the interest of automotive, oil, and gas companies, as well as pollution reduction equipment manufacturers and government regulatory bodies.

We sat down with Mark and Hélène to learn more about how their innovations are helping to tackle air pollution, about what inspires them, and some exciting new developments.



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What inspired you two to pursue careers focused on the environment?

Mark: When I retired from the Air Force Security Forces, I missed the sense of purpose and helping people on a daily basis, so I started researching serious problems facing the world that I could dedicate my life to trying to solve. When I studied pollution, I was shocked at what I found, so I decided to throw myself into solving that through biomimicry.

Hélène: I have always been connected to the environment, from my childhood in a little village in France to my passion for swimming and the ocean. Like more and more of us, I couldn't sit on the bench anymore just observing the tragic degradation of our beautiful planet.

Hélène, will you share a few of Rainlon's recent exciting developments?

We've entered a very exciting phase and are at an inflection point. We now have two working prototypes for our exhaust technology, with development and commercialization avenues in both energy and transportation spaces.

Mark, how does your unique technology work?

Air pollution's toxicity derives from the chemical properties of the pollutant's molecular composition. Our technology works at the molecular level to eliminate that toxicity. In this case, it's a unique combination of negative ions, electrons, particles and water/precipitation. A feasibility study determined the patented innovation could reduce airborne pollutants by up to 99%, including particulate matter 2.5 and smaller, and CO2.

As Hélène mentioned, we're currently developing two types of tech. The first can be incorporated into mufflers or tailpipes and HVAC and exhaust systems. We recently completed third-party validation testing and proved it can eliminate pollution, including carbon dioxide, from a diesel engine. Everyone focuses on CO2, but we focus on CO2 and all other air pollutants as well.. Our solution is so inexpensive, and you can apply it anywhere there's pollution, without external energy driving it, and it will eliminate the pollution. We're also developing a Direct Air Capture system that captures and transforms pollutants and CO2.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Mark: The thing I love about Rainlons is my team. I've been very fortunate to be able to assemble a brilliant group of like-minded individuals who truly want to help other people. One of the things I enjoy most in the world is helping people.

Hélène: I see a CEO as a business architect, and I love being able to manage business components, people, and cultures, and execute quickly amid risks and unexpected events. Being an engineer at heart, I love being able to scale and executing technology and see the direct impact for our people and planet.



Hélène Thibieroz



Maxwell Utter

April

PARSONS



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I wanted to build my company around serving the client *their way*, not *our way*, or in a way that fits within a narrow model or definition of client service as defined by the corporate ‘playbook.’

That same year, April left the corporate world to found Prime Community Management, a firm that sees themselves as more than just a management company, but as a part of the very communities they serve. Prime specializes in multiple types of homeowner associations, including single family, condominiums, townhouses, master plan communities, and new developing communities—but with a boutique style that puts the people at the center and an unwavering dedication to delivering total peace of mind. Driving it all is their guarantee to “make your community the ideal home for you and your neighbors.” And with 24-hour accessibility and accountability, customized management, and financial planning, they mean it. “I wanted to build my company around serving the client *their way*, not *our way*, or in a way that fits within a narrow model or definition of client service as defined by the corporate ‘playbook,’” April explains. “I’m not just serving this community—I’m part of this community. I was born here, raised here, and these are my people, my neighbors, my community, and they matter to me.”



A native Nevadan, April Parsons was born in Las Vegas and has always lived and worked in the state she’s proud to call home. For two decades, she had flourished as an expert in community association management, with a career that spanned from working with smaller management companies and large national firms to involvement in acquisitions and mergers to the board of directors for the Nevada

Community Associations Institute (CAI), where she also served as president. By 2014, as she marked her twentieth year in the industry, working as an executive with a large management company, April had amassed extensive experience in managing communities of all sizes—from small to a variety of master planned developments consisting of single-family homes, condominiums, or townhomes. But, to her, something was missing from an industry dedicated to serving people—attention to the *people* themselves, both the residents and leaders of these communities. She was determined to change it.

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Prime's purpose is delivering total peace of mind.

In 2018, just four years after opening their doors, Prime was recognized as *CAI Management Company of the Year*, and today, they've grown into one of the largest community management companies in Nevada, with two offices in Las Vegas serving over 115 communities with over 25,000 homeowners, as well as builders and developers. "We're spreading sunshine throughout Nevada communities," she shares.

We spoke with April to learn more about what makes Prime so different, how communities are flourishing as a result, and what drives her boundless passion to serve them.

How is Prime different from other community management companies?

We are a boutique style management company and tailor our services to the association's needs. Our methods provide a unique outlook on association management. Having managed many different types of communities, we've always been influential in implementing solutions to help them achieve their objectives. Excellence is essential. We utilize advance equipment and systems to perform our job, but that will never take the place of the caring people who work for our communities. Prime's purpose is delivering total peace of mind.

How is Prime's unique management style contributing to the success of your clients' communities?

Prime's company culture is in alignment with the association's expectations in customer care. We maintain a respectful,

courteous, and friendly atmosphere both in the office and at off-site offices. Our staff forms a partnership with the board of directors to provide the most effective management of our clients' communities. Our success comes from professional trust and guidance to assist the board in the everyday operations. Our staff is accessible, financial statements are timely and accurate, phone calls and emails are returned daily, and our communities flourish as we place a value on time and understand our clients are volunteers. We have several communities that are in the first phases of development, and we work with our developers and builders to ensure the community is set up for success.

What do you enjoy most about your work, or what drives you?

I enjoy having the opportunity to turn a negative outlook of a homeowner association into a positive experience. In the past, I've worked for management companies, both private and corporate, and feel that I bring a unique perspective to community management. I'm very hands on and enjoy working with my Prime family. I was born in Las Vegas, and this is my home, if I can provide an ounce of positive influence on my community that is what I intend to do. I truly believe that when you summon your courage to make changes, amazing things can happen.

April is a Supervising Community Manager in the State of Nevada and holds Association Management Specialist (AMS) and Certified Manager of Community Associations (CMCA) designations from the Community Associations Institute (CAI).



Steven L. Yeffa

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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We are believers
in imagination.

The adventure of a lifetime, for the kid in everyone. Welcome to FLIGHT.

Fifty years ago, as a child mesmerized by space exploration, Steve Yeffa watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. It was a passion that never waned. Today, as CEO of Flight Adventure Parks, he’s living the dream with FLIGHT, a first-of-its kind indoor entertainment venue rooted in the spirit and adventure of flight—from spacecraft to aircraft, hot-air balloons to helicopters. It all started with a rocket ship trash can, and flew with the culmination of childlike wonder and a mountain of expertise from the brilliant minds of a company that lives and breathes this core value: “We are believers in imagination.”

In August 2022, Steve and this driven group of believers realized their dream with the celebration of the opening FLIGHT’s newly retrofitted, 26,000-square-foot park in Springfield, Virginia, the first in its 13-park network to unveil the reimagined aviation theme. They were joined by famed aviators Captain Hoot Gibson, a former five-time NASA Astronaut and TOPGUN graduate, and Captain Tammie Jo Shults, the renowned hero of Southwest flight 1380 and one of the first females to fly the F/A-18 Strike Fighter, both of whom are members of the Flight Adventure Park Advisory Board. “This is such an exciting time for FLIGHT,” Steve says. “I work with some of the best people I’ve ever worked with in my life, and together, we made this happen.” From ziplining through the cargo bay of a space shuttle, riding a rocket through takeoff, bailing out of an aircraft into a giant airbag, and descending the evacuation slide of an aircraft, FLIGHT is an adventure built for the kid in everyone—regardless of age.

“Developing a strategy around this has been fun and challenging. We survived the pandemic, and through our retrofits, we’re thriving by offering an optimally safe and fun environment in which our guests can play,” Steve says. If anyone knows how to execute a turnaround, it’s Steve. When he joined Flight Adventure Parks in 2019, he brought

with him three decades of experience in international corporate management and finance gleaned from roles as executive VP and CFO of LSI, and as executive VP, CFO, and CEO of SAFE Security. And while, undoubtedly, his strategic and business acumen helped to drive the turnaround success of the companies he's served, Steve also looked to pioneering aviation figures for guidance. "Again and again, I've turned to their examples to illustrate how business leaders can overcome what seem like insurmountable problems to build stronger, more resilient organizations," he shares. Now, as FLIGHT takes off in its new, awe-inspiring form, Steve gives the credit to the FLIGHT believers who made it happen. "I have been blessed to have very loyal and hardworking teams with whom to develop our strategic objectives," he says.



We sat down with Steve to hear about how a fateful encounter with a trash can inspired one of the most imaginative entertainment venues in recent history, and learn more about his own journey, his heroes, and his belief in miracles.

FLIGHT emerged from your simple encounter with a trash can. Will you share this story with us?

In 2019, when I joined the company, my wife and I moved to Virginia. At that time, it was called Flight Fit n Fun—purely trampoline parks. I knew the business could be turned around, but I didn't yet have the vision for what it would become. We were visiting the Air and Space Museum in D.C. and I saw a trash can shaped like a rocket, and said, "That would look great in our park!" As we walked around the museum, we were getting more inspired and starting really thinking what our park could be if it were aviation themed. I thought, "Why don't we change the name to just FLIGHT?" I started working with graphic artist, and thought "How fun would it be to zipline through the cargo bay of the space shuttle, or jump on the evacuation slide of an aircraft, or ride a rocket through a turbulent takeoff, or climb an inflatable space shuttle?" Our FLIGHT team brought these to life during the COVID shutdown, and they're all at our newly retrofitted park in Springfield—including the trash can that started it all. When I came home from the grand opening, hanging out with astronauts and pilots, I told my wife,

"These are the people we call friends? This is our life? I never believed this would be so much fun, and I never believed it would be me!"

You've always admired aviation leaders, some of whom are your close friends. Who are some of your most inspiring mentors?

I was very blessed early in my career and given opportunities that I try to pass on to others now. I have many heroes, and one of them is Arne McDaniel. He hired me right out of college and brought me with him to his next company, and taught me all about finance. He was a major source of inspiration throughout my career. I still visit him, and we swap old stories, and I love sharing with him what we're doing now at FLIGHT.

You not only believe in the power of imagination, but in miracles—two in particular. Will you share these with us?

I'd love to. I'm a two-time kidney cancer survivor and I'm married to the love of my life, Stacy Eriksson. We were engaged in college, broke up, and spent 37 years apart. She came to my office in August of 2017, and we got married two years later. I'm the beneficiary of miracles, and she's one of them. Now we pass on the wonderful blessings that we've received through our community work with kids.

Steven also serves as chairman of the International Adventure and Trampoline Parks Association (IATP), president of the DeMolay Foundation of California, Inc.; deputy member of the International Supreme Council, Order of DeMolay; and vice chair of the Finance Committee for the Grand Lodge of California, Free & Accepted Masons.





LARRY HIP P

Chief Executive Officer

As CEO of the Atlanta-based global payments and financial service provider, Brightwell, Larry Hipp brings nearly 20 years of experience in finance, software engineering, and product development to lead a team in solving the world's most seemingly unsolvable problems. On top of that, he also brings an almost indescribable determination to make a meaningful impact on people's lives. This rare intersection of skill, drive, passion, and empathy is where transformation is born.

In March 2020, Larry was closing his fourth year as chief operating officer for Brightwell, which holds among their accolades five awards for *Top Places to Work* by *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. For over a decade the company had thrived in managing the global payroll distribution for some of the biggest names in the cruise industry. Then the propellers stopped—and so did the revenue. This is the story of a remarkable company that, amid a global pandemic, refused to abandon those they served and the leader who transformed them into a purpose-

driven, passionately user-centric firm on a mission to deliver products that serve *real* people.

A People-first Company on a Mission to Do Good in the World

Today, with Larry at the helm, Brightwell is grounded in the core value of “Users First,” and living out their mission to create products that help people and businesses send money securely across the globe with a suite of cross-border payment solutions that are simple to use, easy to integrate with, and enable customers achieve measurable results. From startups to Fortune 500s Brightwell processes and secures billions of dollars each year. Their innovative products—ReadyRemit and Arden—provide access to securely send money to over 90% of the world's population across 140 countries, while proactively preventing fraud to mitigate risk and protect the bottom line for businesses.

“Our ‘purpose driven’ change was driven by empathy for and understanding of the humans that use our product. Many of them are selfless and hardworking people who have made the ultimate sacrifice to leave their home country in the hopes of greater financial opportunities,” Larry says. “Turning our focus on solving their problems was truly a transformation in our company, and that human-centric element is now incorporated into everything we do.”

We spoke with Larry to learn more about Brightwell, their human-centered culture, and the passionate team driven to positively impact lives around the world.

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We dove into R&D with the core value of “Users First” and the renewed mission to connect people to financial services through frictionless user experiences.

While many companies gave up during the pandemic, you led the awe-inspiring transformation of Brightwell and the development of new products that are making a real difference in people's lives. Will you share this story us?

When the pandemic hit in 2020, I was appointed the CEO. At the time, Brightwell had only one product that served one industry—cruise lines—and we suddenly had no revenue. But as a team, we banded together and asked ourselves what we were best in class at. At Brightwell we have profound empathy for the people who we serve that work on those cruise ships, and we wanted to make a difference for more people like them around the world. They became our “why,” our North Star. We dove into R&D with the core value of “Users First” and the renewed mission to connect people to financial services through frictionless user experiences. Again, when we looked at what we were best at, it was clear, global remittances and fraud monitoring rose to the top, and we launched two new products, ReadyRemit and Arden. Our motivation to make payments more accessible *and* secure has everyone in the company pulling together for the benefit of our users—program managers, fintechs, Fortune 500s, *and* the thousands of hardworking individuals working to support their families across the globe. In turn, the trust we've created with them has helped Brightwell's suite to become leading products in the market.

You've been guided your entire career by the desire to serve people, not profits. How is that philosophy reflected in Brightwell's culture and your team?

Most people in my seat start with “let's make a product that will make us money.” You can be successful that way, no doubt. But I see the pyramid as upside down, led by what we want to do and *why* we want to do it, and then hiring people deeply connected to that mission and vision. Those people are going to build a better product. Our entire team is passionate about helping people, and they believe in our culture and our core value—to put our users first. They don't see their job as just a paycheck; they see it as a purpose.



“ Our entire team is passionate about helping people, and they believe in our culture and our core value—to put our users first. They don't see their job as just a paycheck; they see it as a purpose.

One of my favorite quotes is from Patrick Lencioni: “If you could get all the people in the organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.” These words have always been a core part of my strategy and inspired me to push my teams to be stronger than the competition with more people, money, and advantage through a shared vision and drive to make a difference in the world. The level of sacrifice and commitment from our team here to not only hold the line during the shutdown, but also build for the future, will always be a special moment in time for Brightwell. I have never been so proud of a group of people.

What do you enjoy most about your work, Larry? What drives you?

I love a challenge, and I love setting a marker out into the future, and seeing that vision realized. This is what drove me as a software engineer early in my career, and EVP of technology and operations at a prominent digital product development agency, and now as CEO here. When you can see the impact of your work on *people*, there is nothing more fulfilling. With Brightwell, we saw the impact we made on the employees of cruise ships for years, and now we're seeing the impact of our bigger mission here. This is my greatest joy.

Larry holds a BS in management information systems from Auburn University, an MBA from the University of Tampa, and is Scum Master certified.



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Doug Frederick

FOUNDER & CEO

About 60% of the U.S. workforce lives with a chronic disease—that's six out of every 10 people, most of whom go untreated for lack of access to treatment or preventative care. For Doug Frederick, this is completely unacceptable, and in 2020, he left a flourishing career that spanned 15 years in finance and five years in health care to change it with the founding of HealthCues—a group health care management platform that is ensuring that the people with the greatest health needs get access to the disease prevention programs they need. They focus on prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, and treatment of chronic illnesses, providing people with additional health services beyond their primary insurance. “We want to automate common sense when it comes to health,” says Doug.

With more and more employers across the nation working with HealthCues to address this gap in care, the firm has already served over 75 companies across the country, connecting vendors, employers, and employees in unexpected ways

to create win-win solutions for everyone, while offering personalized, affordable, and effective health care. It's earned them the IMA *Healthcare Platform of the Year Award* in 2022 and the *Healthcare Leader of the Year Award* in 2021—and a standing ovation from those whose lives they've touched.

We sat down with Doug to find out more about how HealthCues is reshaping the health care field to the benefit of employers and employees alike, and what drives him to improve the lives of others.

What compelled you to start HealthCues, and how is it different from other health care management companies?

A few years ago, a friend of mine in insurance showed me a similar product. I said, “If this is real, I'll quit my job and join them.” It wasn't real, so we spent 18 months putting the program together the right way. HealthCues provides benefits

along with financial incentives for employers and employees. The employer wants to keep employees healthy, while the employee gets an increase in take-home pay for being on the program. For me, it's about doing good for everyone. The goal is for people to live longer, happier, healthier lives by providing access to care their primary insurance doesn't cover, which is preventative care for chronic disease.

Chronic disease impacts not only health and quality of life, but morale, productivity, and workforce retention. How is HealthCues working to address this?

Currently as a nation we spend \$4 trillion on medical care, and a large percentage of that is chronic disease. The three ways to fight chronic disease are prevention, early diagnosis, and effective treatment. Our whole program is about prevention, so we work to get employees health risk assessments through health coaches and biometric screenings. If a diagnosis is made, we work to get that person treatment. We help people make informed health choices by providing health education.



HealthCues provides **BENEFITS** along with **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES** for employers and employees.

Employee engagement is critical to getting people healthier and a big part is making benefits easy to understand, personalized, and affordable. How is HealthCues helping both employers and employees benefit from this?

Statistically, happy, healthy employees lead to more profitability, so employers need to be hands-on from day one. Many of our employers hold incentives and contests to encourage healthy habits and activities. We also have a four-week enrollment period where we reach out to educate employees, with an 800 number they can call with questions, and a state-of-the-art tracking app. We issue a monthly "Do you know" newsletter with information on various topics. There's no lack of engagement with our program.

How does HealthCues get the employer, employee, and benefits provider on the same page?

The whole program is about engagements and programs people really use. So we send monthly reports to show which are being used and we constantly look for new programs and reach out for feedback from both employers and employees about what they want so we can make it a better experience.



HealthCues has enjoyed an overwhelmingly positive response from both employers and their employees. Can you share some of the feedback with us?

The employers resoundingly said it helps dramatically with retention and recruitment, and the employees feel their employer does care about their long-term health. Many of the employees are enjoying benefits they wouldn't normally receive, and they enjoy the financial increase in their take-home pay.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Educating people on how easy it is to lead a healthier happy life. This isn't rocket science. We all just need to automate common sense when it comes to our health. I want to impact people's lives and make health care and health insurance a reality for everyone.

Doug graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in finance.



HealthCues
WORKPLACE HEALTH SOLUTIONS
www.healthcues.com

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“You can have all the technical knowledge and expertise, but you have to care about the lives you’re touching. That’s why we do what we do.”

Jeff Yuen

FOUNDER, PRESIDENT, CEO

As the founder, president, and CEO of Jeff Yuen & Associates, Inc., with over 32 years of compliance and regulatory experience, Jeff Yuen is widely recognized as a CGMP and compliance expert by both the industry and FDA’s Office of Compliance. It is well-earned respect for the leader of an FDA regulatory and compliance consulting firm with a 24-year record of helping biotech and pharma clients prepare medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and biologics with nearly a 100% “first time” PAI success rate with respect to CGMP. Yet driving JYA’s extraordinary record is not professional ambition, or profits, or industry status. Rather, the values of a leader who has devoted his entire career to the welfare of others—as a peace officer/investigator with the State of California, Food and Drug Branch and a CSO for the FDA, then as Commander with the U.S. Public Health Service, with numerous PHS commendations and achievement medals, including Vice President Al Gore’s *Hammer Award* for leadership in the areas of innovative biotechnology and industry outreach programs.

This is the story of the convergence of education, career, family, and faith that led Jeff to establish one of the world's most well-respected consulting firms for the pharmaceutical and biological industries, driven by their unwavering values to serve the greater good. "We look at both our clients and the patients whose lives we touch," Jeff says. "You can have all the technical knowledge and expertise, but more than anything, you have to care about the lives you're touching. That's why we do what we do."

Jeff Yuen & Associates, Inc.—Bringing Life-Changing Medical Devices and Drugs to Market Faster to Help People Sooner

Founded in 1998, JYA works with biotech and pharma clients worldwide to ensure successful FDA inspections and to resolve their FDA regulatory and compliance issues. The firm is purpose-built with 50/50 FDA and industry experts—comprised of former FDA national experts, specialists, supervisors, consumer safety officers, compliance officers, microbiologists, chemists, and center personnel, and complemented with former industry quality, compliance, operations, and regulatory affairs experts. JYA specializes in sterile and non-sterile dosage forms, small and large molecule products, vaccines, medical device, combination products, cell and gene therapy products, and provides Sterility Assurance expertise.

As Jeff leads the growth of JYA to serve the swell of new medical research, discoveries, and drugs by both Big Pharma and startups alike, he now embarks on a bigger mission. "This last chapter of my career will be devoted to giving back to charitable causes to fulfill my duty as a person, a leader, and a Christian," he shares.

We spoke with Jeff to hear more about JYA and their expansion efforts, and the story of how the hand of Providence delivered him on a lifelong mission to serve the greater good.

Where does your passion for medicine and public health come from and how did it lead to JYA?

My dad. He was a surgeon, and as a kid, I'd do rounds with him. By my teens, I knew I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I'm also a Christian with a deep-rooted belief that God opens and closes doors for a reason. I was denied 38 times for med school, yet got into the public health program on my first attempt. God closed the medical school door intentionally to open the public health door for me to serve the greater good in my roles in government service, health departments, a peace officer for the FDA, and then for the federal FDA, which ultimately converged into JYA. I always used to tease my dad that he had his patients, but I had the world, serving communities and countries.

Tell us a little more about JYA and why this work is so important to you.

JYA is a public health organization that provides important regulatory and compliance consultation to pharmaceutical,

medical device, biotech, and biologics companies seeking FDA approval and/or commercialization of medical products in support of patients with unmet medical needs. Our work reflects our inherent passion for enabling people access to a better life and good health free from the burden of spiritual, emotional, and physical pain.

With the unprecedented surge in innovative new biotech and pharma companies, you're growing to meet this increasing demand. Will you tell us about your team and some of your expansion efforts?

Science and research continue to move at the light speed to meet the demands of a pandemic and chronic diseases where there are few or no options when patients fail to respond to traditional or current dosing regimens. JYA's growing network of experienced veterans from inside and outside the FDA work closely with our clients to ensure that their medical products are both safe and effective with minimal side effects. Importantly, Gary Brennan and Monique Mendoza will assume the day-to-day operations, allowing me to take on more a strategic advisory board member role starting in 2023. As a role model, we believe that we can be not only consultants, but also "life coaches" to those working or aspiring to be the next generation of quality and operations leaders.

What single piece of advice would you share with other aspiring leaders?

Remember to do what's right, even in the face of business pressures. The right decisions are not always the easy ones, but they do define your integrity and your legacy. Value the people that are closest to you and let them know that they are appreciated by dropping them a simple email or text to let them know you're thinking about them. Walk humbly and learn from your mistakes!

Jeff, let's end with where we began—your devotion to serving the greater good. As part of your lifelong mission, JYA is also very active in supporting organizations and causes. How are you giving back?

Long before JYA existed, God placed a burning passion and humble desire in me to make a difference and to give back to society and the world. There remains much for all of us to do as citizens of the world, whether that be working to ensure that spiritual, emotional, and physical healing is made accessible to those who are deprived or preserving the natural wonders of this planet. When my father passed, I reflected on my life and where I'm supposed to be going. For us, it's about giving back, and I'm committed to doing my part.

Jeff holds a BS in biological sciences from UCI, An MPH from UCLA, and an MBA from National University.

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BRYAN WALTON

FOUNDER

GREG SACK

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When a 20-plus year business leader and an award-winning entrepreneur join forces to start a new venture to disrupt and modernize the cleaning world, great things happen.

Such is the case with Bryan Walton and Greg Sack, the passionate architects of PINCH. Their technology is a game-changing, on-demand cleaning app that's blowing the doors—and the dust—off an industry that's been stuck in the mud for ages. With an innovative model launched in May of 2021, their app is designed to benefit both customers *and* cleaners. PINCH is ushering in a shinier, easier, more profitable future for all. Based in Charleston, South Carolina, PINCH is the quintessential story of “If you build it, they will come.” Come as they are, in droves, with tens of thousands of registered users across three states. So, what makes PINCH so different?

PINCH—Redefining the Cleaning Service Industry and Changing Lives in the Process

Serving both B2B and B2C clients, PINCH brings together qualified cleaners and customers in a seamless, easy app where customers can get on-demand cleaning services without the hassle of searching for the right cleaner, interviewing, and verifying credentials. PINCH solves this problem with a massive labor pool of pre-screened and qualified cleaning professionals that are insured through the platform. There's no contract, no waiting for estimates or negotiating fees. They simply download the app, enter their property details, get instant pricing, and book a cleaner.

For cleaners, they get free job notifications, and get paid through the app at zero cost so that they can keep all their hard-earned money. PINCH eliminates the cost of marketing and administrative tasks. “I'd been in the tech space and medical device arena for decades, then this idea came to me, and we put together a fantastic team to bring this to market,” Bryan says. “We truly are changing the way people look at cleaning and solving the problems that have plagued them for eons.”

We sat down with Greg and Bryan to learn more about PINCH and how they're modernizing the cleaning industry through disruptive technology.

Q: Bryan, what compelled you to start PINCH?

My entire career has centered around giving people a better quality of life through innovative technologies. In 2020, I saw a significant need for one of the most important aspects of life—the home. I started PINCH to provide expedited cleaning services “in a pinch.” At the same time, I noticed that cleaners are very challenged in capturing clients on their own. I saw the solution—bring them together in an app that benefits them both. The cleaning service industry has been operating the same way forever. We’re something new, but we’re different, we’re better. You can use this app as an individual, a commercial business, or a leasing manager running unlimited units in an apartment complex.



We truly are changing the way people look at cleaning and solving the problems that have plagued them for eons.

Q: Greg, tell us what brought you to PINCH and how you’re helping to scale the company.

I’ve been an investor and entrepreneur for years, and sold one of my previous companies, Bongo International, to FedEx in 2014. Shortly after, I started a property management company based in Tampa, Florida. I’ve felt the pain of having to call multiple cleaners to find one available when needed and at an acceptable price. When a cleaner cancels, it’s time-critical because you have people moving in and out the same day. When Bryan introduced me to the PINCH app in 2021, my eyes lit up. I thought, “This solves so many problems for me—and others!”

Q: Bryan, PINCH’s B2B service model has been an immediate success. How are your customers, and specifically vertically integrated apartment complexes, benefiting?

Our true benefit and what excites the whole team is that we have a massive—and growing—labor pool, and we’re solving a huge problem in the multi-family space. These large complexes are challenged to speed up their process of turning over units. Our technology automates booking of cleaners at the time maintenance has the unit ready, rather than being bound by the cleaner’s schedule. If a unit is sitting vacant, waiting for repairs or cleaning, these complexes lose money. With PINCH, cleaners are ready to turn over a unit the same day or next.

Q: PINCH is designed to help cleaners thrive. Tell us about this.

Cleaners love our concept! Rather than spending thousands of dollars trying to build up a base of customers, PINCH provides new jobs in an on-demand setting. Cleaners are provided with an SMS message notifying them of a new job within their service area. Upon review, the cleaner is able to see specific details of the job, including the type of cleaning, service date, and pay. The first cleaner in that service area to accept the opportunity wins the job.

Q: Greg, what’s on the horizon for PINCH?

We have seen explosive growth in the Southeast and have aspirations of becoming a nationwide brand. Additionally, we have seen such a high demand in the multi-family and short-term rental spaces that we plan to devote a significant amount of time and energy in growing these verticals in 2023.

PINCH

Meet DAVE Palmstein

The American manufacturing renaissance is on as “Made in America” makes a roaring comeback, with U.S. companies—General Motors, Intel, and U.S. Steel among them—moving factories back from China to domestic shores. At the same time, the U.S. is experiencing the greatest explosion of new companies in history, with investors pouring over \$700 billion into startups in 2022. Spurred by the global supply chain chaos, the pandemic, and the U.S.-China trade crisis, the nation is now poised on the cusp of what could be one of the most historic eras of invention and manufacturing since the Industrial Revolution. This is the intersection where Dave Palmstein lives, breathes, thrives—and delivers.

Dave was one of the first American business pioneers to take manufacturing to Asia over 30 years ago; a visionary leader with a well-known record of not only building new divisions for multinational corporations, but helping to grow fledgling companies into thriving enterprises. His career spanned from factory development manager and process division manager for highly automated robotic manufacturing operations in the Far East and Colorado, to the founder and managing partner for over 10 highly technical product companies, and leadership roles in over 35 tech startups. He’s also the author of a performance management model designed to build high-tech companies at an 80% success rate with ROIs greater than 35%.

Now, as the founder of Birch Creek Innovations (BCI), Dave leads an enterprise on a mission to help revive and grow America’s status as an innovation and manufacturing powerhouse with “Flex Factories,” a groundbreaking model three decades in the making. “This will enable us to do things we’ve never even dreamt of,” Dave says. “We are forging ahead, building flex facilities, coupling humans with robots to produce smart products, and furiously charging forward to become the leader of Made In America operations.” And he’s bringing a swelling number of companies and investors with him.

Birch Creek Innovations: “Flex Factories” Fueling the Comeback of U.S. Manufacturing

Headquartered near Kansas City, BCI’s goal is to make “Made in America” synonymous with “globally competitive,” with an innovative and highly competitive disruptive technology platform for product development and domestic manufacturing. As a single-source, high-efficiency

development center and “Flex Factory,” BCI provides client customers who produce technology products, such as medical devices, computer peripherals and IoT devices, with services, systems and contract engineering for the entire product lifecycle—development, pre-production ramp, volume manufacturing, and product replacement. BCI utilizes Industry 5.0 technologies, a proprietary six-phased development model, and human/robotic coupling for highly competitive manufacturing to help customers outperform their competitors. As BCI continues to support the growing demand from companies across industries, Dave has also established the Made in America Institute to help accelerate the revival of American manufacturing and innovation.

We sat down with Dave to learn more about BCI, their Flex Facilities, and how companies and investors alike stand to benefit from the reinvention of “Made in America.”

Dave, you spent over 30 years developing a product development and manufacturing model that takes companies from idea to a thriving enterprise to exit. Tell us about this and how it’s benefiting not only your clients, but investors.

The model provides a clear and methodical roadmap to successfully build product companies—not just products. It starts with innovative development for products that solve significant problems, thus creating great demand and company value. Product designs are transferred to manufacturing at lightning speed where full volume production and yields are reached in record times. Through human/robotic coupled work centers, products are produced at or below Far East production costs. When production is at full scale, new product versions are immediately developed so as to outpace any competition. As a result of this proven model and flexible factories, customers receive high-quality products in very short time frames; companies become highly profitable and extremely competitive; their values skyrocket; and investors are handsomely rewarded with exceptional equity valuations.

For well-established companies that are moving their factories back to the U.S., the process can often take years. How is Birch Creek helping them simplify it?

To really be successful for future “Made in America,” these companies must develop a highly efficient operation. We

Founder & Managing Partner



help companies by working with them to develop what we call a “Flex Factory.” Most companies need to start with a clean slate operation and maybe even a new division of the company. The key is to not build or alter a facility to build a single product, but to build an infrastructure to design and produce high quality, globally competitive future products that are yet unknown. Emphasis on speed, flexibility, innovation, and cost in every aspect of the Flex Facility is an absolute must.

This Flex Facility and the operations within it must be able to change over from one product to another within minutes or hours instead of weeks, months, or even years, as is common today. Costs must be cut one-third to one-half of what is common today. We use a program we call “Near Zero,” in the Flex Factory to squeeze out labor content, reduce utility and facility costs, network all equipment to Industry 5.0 standards, and optimize human and robotic capabilities. Well-established companies must leverage their buying powers with suppliers to cut lead times, chop costs, and delivery times. Long supply chains are typically broken down into supply links of domestic manufacturers and middle-supply depots are eliminated wherever possible.

As this reversal continues to accelerate, what do you see as the future outcome for U.S. companies and the economy as a whole?

For companies to be successful with Made in America programs, there needs to be a relentless pursuit to push domestic factories to be able to compete in global markets. When this is done effectively through Flex Factories, domestic companies can compete with anyone. The Made in America wave is growing and accelerating. Companies need to plan and find ways to enhance their facilities at the same pace or faster than their product development. As they do, they should experience increased growth, profits and company value, thus reducing U.S. dependency on foreign countries and return domestic manufacturing to be a dominant contributor to the U.S. economy.



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Barbara Roberts

WRITER
SPEAKER
COACH
ENTREPRENEUR



Barbara believes that success for an innovator requires passionate love of the problem, not the solution. Since leading a sit-down strike in the second grade until girls could carry the American flag, Barbara has been obsessed on how she could innovate to help women get their fair share of the economic and political pie. In the last fifteen years, she has added a passion for a second problem: how to teach others to start and grow businesses that innovate and create more work and wealth equity.

Barbara's biggest hope and goal is to use her passion for innovation to make everything she touches a little better and fairer, and to help others do the same.

Recognized as an expert on all stages of entrepreneurship and women's economic progress, she now is a writer, speaker, and coach. Over the last fifteen years, she has designed numerous entrepreneurship programs, particularly for women and minorities, as an entrepreneur in residence at Columbia Business School and Hofstra University's Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Recently, the Columbia Alumni Association honored



Barbara Roberts teaching innovation to the directors of New York's Entrepreneur Assistance Centers.

Driven by an unwavering desire to help others, the natural innovator was a socially responsible entrepreneur before the term became buzzworthy.

her as the keynote speaker for their She Opened the Door to Entrepreneurship initiative. "We women who were born or came to the United States right after World War II are the first in the history of humankind to have the educational, financial, and legal rights to create our own wealth," she states. "My biggest innovations were everyday firsts, like wearing pants to an office. I have worked my entire life to create programs

for women to take advantage of this." Last summer, she was awarded one of Crane's Business's first diversity and inclusion awards as a civic hero.

Driven by an unwavering desire to help others, the natural innovator was a socially responsible entrepreneur before the term became buzzworthy. Some of her proudest innovations were as president of the stock photography company, FPG International, where she partnered with 3M and Kodak to create the first systems for distributing photographs using CD's and the internet. In 1990, most ads only used white models. She also was honored by the Clinton White House for producing the first high-end stock photography showcasing models of all races working and socializing together, leading advertisers to show the true diversity of America. Barbara's biggest hope and goal is to use her passion for innovation to make everything she touches a little better and fairer, and to help others do the same.

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ILONA & IRINA

Znakharchuk

Mango passionfruit coconut. Raspberry chocolate. Berry vanilla. With all the amazing cakes, tarts, and more at Solodko Boston, it might be hard to choose just one. That's because Ilona Znakharchuk and her sister, Irina, create desserts that exude elegance through timeless, classic aesthetics, and delicious ingredients. "We focus on creating things that are as delicious as they are pretty," Ilona says. Welcome to Solodko's world of edible art.

Solodko, "sweet" in Ukrainian, was founded during Ilona's sophomore year at Boston College. After seeing the beautiful desserts in their native Ukraine, she and her sister saw a distinct lack of them in the Greater Boston area, so they set out to introduce Eastern European desserts to their local community. They sourced and adapted recipes from a Ukrainian pastry chef and developed their own unique menu through careful trial and experimentation. Today, at their new location in Brighton, Massachusetts, they create custom cakes for special events,



and pay homage to their roots by offering Medovik, the classic Ukrainian honey cake. As they prepare for the grand opening of their storefront and cafe, Solodko has already been featured in *Gusto Journal* and provided desserts for the 2022 John F. Kennedy Library Foundation May Dinner, where Ukrainian president Zelenskyy was a 2022 *Profile In Courage Award* honoree. "It was truly a humbling experience to be able to represent Ukraine with our desserts," Ilona says.

We sat down with Ilona to learn about her culinary journey, where her inspiration comes from, and just how sweetly business is going.



How long have you been in the culinary field?

I started in 2019, my sophomore year in college. I baked on the weekends and posted to Instagram, and orders came in from all over campus. They called me the "macaroon angel." I started to do more research on running a food business, but it was difficult to find information on permits and licensing. After reaching out to the director of Boston College Dining, and receiving some information from him, I thought, "How am I going to do all this?" But then a friend told me about the Boston College Shea Center's Accelerator Program for student startups. I participated in the program in 2020, and in 2021 we obtained our first commercial kitchen. At the time, my sister and I both worked in finance, and that really helped us with the administrative and financial aspects of running

Co-Founders

“

We focus on creating things that are as delicious as they are pretty.



a small business. As much as we're artists at heart, we're also entrepreneurs. Creativity and business become more satisfactory when they go hand in hand.

Where do your ideas come from?

They come from anywhere. I look at cake as edible art. An artist can make a painting inspired by a nature scene and it's the same with cake. I was really into fashion growing up, so I sometimes see a beautiful dress in a store, and it inspires me to design a cake. The texture on a wall, a piece of architecture, anything. Cake as edible art is a fairly new idea; it's uncommon to view something so temporary as "art," but what goes into creating a cake is as involved as what goes into creating a painting or sculpture. There's another layer of complexity too, because it has to taste amazing! Music has also been a big part of my life, and it's similar to baking in that there are multiple moving parts. It takes timing and patience to assemble all these pieces into a cohesive whole. My sister constructs the individual parts while I usually assemble the final product.

Can you share one of your favorite cake designs?

We love gold. A lot of our cakes have edible gold accents. How often do you get to eat gold? We also work a lot with textures. Sometimes we use really unique tools. For example, to get our velour cake effect, we use a spray gun made for painting walls. Our kitchen often looks like we're doing construction with all the tools!

What inspires you?

My sister and I are determined to be successful. Our parents came from Ukraine and sacrificed so much to give us this opportunity. Whatever we do here has to make them proud. Another motivating factor is helping and inspiring other people. When a soon-to-be mother beams at her baby shower cake, it's so fulfilling, and we're very thankful for the opportunity to brighten someone's life. It makes all the hard work worth it. We also find joy in mentoring others. Recently, a friend wanted to open her own food business and was just as overwhelmed as I was three years ago. It was satisfying to share what I had learned throughout my journey in order to help her in her endeavors.

SOLODKO

• B O S T O N •

Founder & CEO

CHAD Silverstein



The Retreat, is changing education with its VR and augmented reality, where learning takes place inside interactive classrooms in the metaverse.

Chad Silverstein is a successful entrepreneur driven by the desire to help others succeed. He's been leading and coaching individuals and teams for as long as he can remember. Chad started his first business in 1997, out of his apartment, before graduating from The Ohio State University. His company, Choice Recovery, Inc. was recognized as a *Top Workplace* winner for over a decade, twice being ranked the *#1 Business to Work for in Ohio*. As an industry outlier, Chad built technology that eventually led to launching his second company, [re]start, a career development platform that connects people to meaningful employment opportunities. Chad recently sold his first business on its 25th anniversary and he's now starting the next expression of his serial entrepreneurial journey.

In 2018, Chad started using Playbook Builder. An online training and development platform that he eventually invested in, became a reseller of, and has now become a partner of, working side by side with the founder.

In 2021, Chad discovered Genius X, an innovative tech company whose new app, The Retreat, is changing education with its VR and augmented reality, where learning takes place *inside* interactive classrooms in the metaverse. As a visionary, Chad was immediately inspired by the opportunity to participate and join Genius X as a course creator, lead investor, and now a board member. He looked to his own learning and experiences that enabled him to succeed and has launched three educational courses now available for purchase inside the Oculus headset. Chad sat down with us to share more about his journey.

Q & A

Q: The underlying driver of nearly all your companies is the desire to help others succeed. Why is this important to you?

I started pursuing professional development opportunities early in my career and have been blessed to learn from so many incredible entrepreneurs. I love giving back and feel I have a responsibility to do something with all these great tools, resources, insights, and knowledge. Sharing my experiences and seeing how it's been able to help so many others make me feel like I'm on the right path and doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.



I specifically designed my courses around career development, entrepreneurship, and leadership because these topics are generally not taught in school, and they should be.

Q: Your newest endeavor is Genius X and its virtual reality education app, The Retreat. Can you share some of the benefits of VR learning, the types of courses offered, and how people can participate?

I'm really excited about virtuality reality and being one of the first coaches to launch courses in the metaverse. Our new app, The Retreat, is one of the first educational experiences people can engage with inside the Oculus. Until now, gaming, fitness, and health have been their focus, but now that coaching and training is possible, people will get a chance to learn and grow in ways they've never been able to before—online from home—and feel like they're with someone one-on-one. I specifically designed my courses around career development, entrepreneurship, and leadership because these topics are generally not taught in school, and they should be.

Q: Tell us about Playbook, how it helped you, and how you're helping other businesses succeed by using it.

When I first started my first business, I had no clue what I was doing. It's hard starting and running a company, and you often feel isolated when you have chronic problems that keep coming up. I have never come across a tool like Playbook. I use it to train employees before they start, streamline all of my core processes using video, text, and screen share tutorials, and I leverage the communication tool and use it externally for my sales and marketing efforts, which works extremely well now that everything is being shared digitally. With Playbook, I never have to repeat myself, nor do I have to worry about one person being the only one who knows how to do something and fearing losing them. I "Playbook" everything and make sure everyone who will benefit gets access. I stopped working in one of my businesses and was still training new people years later who I never met. It's become a way of running my business and allows me to integrate everything I need for all my companies.

Q: Let's talk about [re]start. This was your second successful venture, but really the first one in which your visionary instincts and determination to help others came together. What compelled you to start this company and how are businesses benefitting from it?

[re]start is my magnum opus. I created the company inside my collection agency in 2013 because most of the people we

called told us they couldn't afford to pay their bills because they didn't have enough money, or because they weren't working. So, we figured, why not try to help? It made a lot more sense than chasing them. I pulled one of my collectors out of her position and told her to start helping people find new jobs. It didn't take long before my entire team caught the buzz. When COVID hit, I built a multi-user platform app that connects jobseekers with a career advisor. I didn't realize it at the time, but [re]start was having a much bigger impact that I could have imagined, and once people started sharing their experiences, I knew we had something special. It helped us attract better employees, more clients, and created a ton of great marketing assets because the best kind of marketing is when other people tell your story for you. Today, I get to share [re]start with other companies who care and want to help their customers when they fall behind financially. It's a win-win for everyone.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your work, Chad, or what drives you?

I love finding better ways to do everything, especially when things don't make sense. It's my natural reaction to find solutions when something leaves me shaking my head wondering why it's being done a certain way for so long. Whenever I hear someone say "it's always been done that way" I can feel changes coming. I'm always thinking of new ideas and even though most aren't that great, occasionally, I hit a home run.



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Adolfo Heller Cohen

Chief Executive Officer

Gelatys is reshaping the frozen dessert industry by bringing a new sensorial experience and is putting a whole new spin on the traditional Italian gelato staple with the goal to reach \$100MM in the next five years. The gelato brand is an awe-inspiring, unique shaped, artisanal gelato that will awaken your senses. Guaranteed!

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“ We want to bring joy and an unbeatable palate experience with Gelatys, one frozen sweet treat at a time.

Gelatys was founded by Adolfo Heller Cohen, a native Chilean with 20 years of entrepreneurial experience under his belt, who moved to the United States in 2017. He established a manufacturing plant in Miami that combined food with tech, using advanced machinery to create the unique, artisanal process for which Gelatys is known. After just one year, Adolfo and his team had crafted a unique recipe for success, with the right creamy consistency and delayed-melting for a true experience like no other in gelato and sweet treats. The brand opened its doors with only a single kiosk at a mall in Miami in 2017.

In 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, Gelatys boldly transitioned and entered the grocery retail arena, and is currently present in over 4,000 grocery stores including Whole Foods, Target, Publix, Albertsons, and Walmart, to name a few—complete with their own specialty freezers—in 25 states. “We’re constantly innovating, and introducing new products to wow our consumers,” Adolfo explains. “We want to bring joy and an unbeatable palate experience with Gelatys, one frozen sweet treat at a time.”

Adolfo, a true entrepreneur, founded a triad of companies while he was in college in his native Chile. He also created one of the first e-commerce sites in Latin America at just 20 years old, before getting into industrial civil engineering and working as an executive at major corporations. The bold and trailblazing business adventurer started with a vision of becoming an unparalleled innovator who shakes up the premium ice cream industry. “I’ve always been in retail, and I loved gelato,” Adolfo shares.

Available in assorted shapes and a variety of mouth-watering flavors such as Chocolate Volcano, Coconut Breeze, and Greek Yogurt with Blueberry Sauce, with decadent fillings, and offerings that include traditional, vegan, and light options, these sublimely sweet frozen treats are the first of their kind in the United States.

CODY Perez

MBA & Master of Real Estate

Growing up in the Bronx, Cody Perez has always been fiercely determined to make a positive difference in the world around him. “There are a lot of communities that have faced systematic issues such as redlining and the War on Drugs, which has led to them falling into economic hardship and disrepair,” he states. “I want to utilize real estate and cannabis as a mechanism for economic growth in these areas.”



Cody was named a *Future Leader in Commercial Real Estate* by Trepp and was the recipient of a tuition fellowship at Cornell University, where he now serves on the Real Estate Council advisory board for diversity, equity, and inclusion. As founder and chief executive officer of Grimm City Investors, Cody helps a real estate impact investment development and advisory company that focuses on sustainable development in communities, working with impact-oriented and minority developers on various projects across the country. In its first two years of operations, Grimm City Investors has transacted over \$200 million in deals. With special interest in the cannabis asset class, Cody also started the lifestyle brand, High Life Luxury Cannabis, which is centered around upscale experiential cannabis consumption.

Prior to launching his own ventures, Cody spent three years at JP Morgan in their corporate and investment bank, working in a variety of areas including foreign exchange product management and strategic execution, among others. He managed businesses with revenues in excess of \$4 billion annually, and \$50 billion in new deposits from some of the largest corporations globally. He also supported the finance departments of the company’s large corporate clients, providing services required for business operation. “It was a great position, and I was very appreciative for the experience,” he states. “Ultimately, I realized that I wanted to do something that would have an impact on the world and specifically in communities similar to those where I grew up.” From there, Cody followed an entrepreneurial path that marries his own passion for real estate and cannabis with *purpose*. “Being able to go out on my own and generate traction and stability has been my biggest achievement,” he shares.

Cody holds a master’s in real estate and bachelor’s in business administration with a concentration in entrepreneurship from Cornell University.

HIGH LIFE LUXURY CANNABIS

Jeff Hoege

Senior Manager
Of Operations

“ If I can make the world a better place and make someone’s life better, I’m going to do it. I measure my success by the success of those around me. ”

Jeff Hoege is a natural leader. His leadership was further nurtured by a family history of military veterans and his own Army career. Jeff’s personal and professional life centers around improving the lives of others. “I see it as my responsibility to share my knowledge and expertise to help others grow,” he says. Jeff has been in operations management for over 20 years, and in the Six Sigma space for a decade. He was the team lead responsible for fulfilling government contracts that provided life-saving mine-resistant, ambush-proof, all-terrain vehicles. His role included coordinating manufacturing operations, procurement, and engineering teams. Jeff’s efforts resulted in delivering the product months ahead of schedule, which was recognized and rewarded by a commendation from military leadership and meeting the Secretary of Defense in person. During his tenure at Amazon, Jeff was the leader responsible for paradigm-shifting innovations, including creating a performance model for all delivery drivers worldwide and Photo-on-Demand, allowing drivers to provide a photo confirming package delivery.

Jeff is launching new facilities and reimagining **the virtual mail of the future.**



EARTH CLASS MAIL
A LEGALZOOM COMPANY

In his current role at LegalZoom, Jeff uses his expertise and decades of experience to analyze and improve processes for the Earth Class Mail (ECM) product. Since assuming his tenure at ECM Jeff has been responsible for the company’s turnaround, reducing delivery time by 95% while doubling capacity through end-to-end process improvements while managing the operations through the acquisition by LegalZoom. At present, he is launching new facilities and reimagining the virtual mail of the future.

On an altruistic level, Jeff created a real estate company that provides quality affordable housing for disenfranchised communities through outreach. He is also currently planning his next philanthropic endeavor, ensuring children in disadvantaged communities can eat a warm meal at school every day. “I’ve had to work hard for everything in my life,” he says. “If I can make the world a better place and make someone’s life better, I’m going to do it. I measure my success by the success of those around me.”

Jeff graduated from Northland College and received his LSSBB from the University of Wisconsin.

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Jennifer Gibson

President & Founder

Jennifer Gibson worked as a financial advisor for over a decade for multiple well-known, high-profile firms such as TIAA, Morgan Stanley, and Northwestern Mutual. She helped clients plan for their future and understand the complexities and opportunities of the markets. However, she always remembered getting her MBA at Brandeis University's International Business School. There, she met classmates from 72 different countries and her eyes were opened to global issues faced by millions. This exposure sparked a passion for international affairs. This passion, in combination with her love for finance, led to the creation and repurposing of traditional capital market-based financial models to help solve global humanitarian crises. Today, Jennifer is currently working to bring forth a self-sustaining, capital markets-based model that will seek to provide business capital to entrepreneurial refugees and small-to-medium-sized businesses who commit to hiring, promoting, and training refugees in host countries.

The initiative seeks to fund refugee related businesses, while giving them access to international markets at non-exploitative interest rates. In fact, using a revenue based model, they



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"We ultimately strive to not provide a Band-Aid, but to change the system oppressing refugees through repurposing traditional Wall Street models and redistribution of global capital."

would only pay the loans back if they profit. "We will work to set each company up with an international buyer of the good/service they are providing, and a business mentor who can help it meet those companies' targets," Jennifer explains. "The idea is that our lenders will be able to grow their business and pay a certain percentage of revenue back for a predetermined number of years based on their success. After that, 100% of the business and revenue is theirs. Once cash flows from this lending are normalized, we will seek to securitize the loans to allow the capital markets to fully sustain the program, thus making it independent of future necessary philanthropic or government budget dollars. We ultimately strive to not provide a Band-Aid, but to change the system oppressing refugees through repurposing traditional Wall Street models and redistribution of global capital."

Now, Jennifer is working on pulling in the best and brightest minds with experience in running programs like this. These include large philanthropic leaders and organizations, leading private equity firms and banks, and government agencies like USAID, as well as international leaders who share these values. "Having worked in capital markets, I think there's a missing piece and an opportunity," Jennifer says. "Right now, projects are started with an eye on profit potential for shareholders. My focus is to create a self-sustaining project to serve the refugee community that can operate at cost plus a minimum required return. I believe the idea could change the world for millions."

Jennifer is also the founder and president of Maslow's Light, a social justice focused non-profit.

PETE

Founder & CEO



With more than 20 years of leadership experience in the public and private sectors, Pete Kristofferson founded Global Trade Alliance of America, Inc., in 2021. Based in Washington, D.C. and New York City, the organization is a service-oriented import and export trading company that helps accelerate the exchange of goods and services. Through comprehensive partnerships worldwide, from shipping logistics to U.S. government-backed trade finance, Global Trade Alliance of America has developed networking capabilities for profitable international business. Their dedicated experts and community managers are available to offer advice during every state of importing activity including the area of import and export trade financing alternatives. Serving as an effective advocate of mutual business interests, Global Trade Alliance has worked with hundreds of clients around the globe. Their state-of-the-art technologies use machine learning and cloud-based services with social networking capabilities, comprehensive content, and corporate advisory. With a philosophy rooted in extensive market knowledge and personal relationships, the objectives of each entity involved are carefully evaluated to help ensure flawless and profitable transitions.



As the leader and CEO of the thriving firm, Pete oversees the organization and works to maintain strong, positive relationships with elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels. He also provides assistance with international cooperation, diplomatic relations, lobbying

at the local level in the strategic area of Washington, DC, and throughout the United States and Bulgaria. "It makes me happy to have such a great atmosphere around me, where I'm able to travel and get more deals done successfully with my business partners of the world," he states. "Bringing positive energy with my lobbying from officials, politics, governmental professionals, and diplomacy is really what I enjoy most." Pete helms a triad of other ventures as well, serving as president, CEO, and co-founder of Acdaris Inc. and Pete Luxe-Worldwide Capital Media Group, Ltd. He's also president and co-founder of Global Trade Automotive Alliance, Inc- an innovative electric car corporation.

Pete holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar." He's an executive board/advisory council member at Executive Programs for School of Business at George Washington University and the University of Richmond and is currently pursuing a PhD from the University of National and World Economy.

Kristofferson

As the leader and CEO of the thriving firm, Pete oversees the organization and works to maintain strong, positive relationships with elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels.

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Austin KIRTLEY

“ One of the ultimate reasons we started this company was to help people find success in the businesses they set out to build. ”

Differentiating yourself in the vast food and beverage industry can be a challenge even for the savviest of companies. Fortunately, they all have an experienced, innovative ally in KESI Management. This Indianapolis-based management company serves everyone from startups and family-owned businesses to billion-dollar companies, providing them with insight and problem-solving to help them bring their dreams into reality. Agnostically leveraging automation and technology, co-founders and managing partners, Austin Kirtley and Mehrdad Erfan, create personalized plans to drive sustained, scalable growth. Their dedication has earned them a 95% retention and return rate and has seen KESI grow over 100% each year since its founding in May 2020.

Austin Kirtley brings over a decade of experience in large-scale fresh produce distribution, RTE manufacturing, and the industrial greenhouse industry to KESI. He cultivates relationships with clients and drives innovation through strategic consultation. His multitude of different experiences and being exposed to a host of different facilities, companies, and cultures, each with its own unique challenges, allows him to see not only the bigger picture, but the parts that make the whole. “One of the ultimate reasons we started this company was to help people find success in the businesses they set out to build,” Austin says. “Most clients and partners have something holding them up and one of the most satisfying things we do is help them remove those barriers to achieve success.”

Mehrdad ERFAN



Mehrdad Erfan is the other half of KESI, covering the responsibilities of a traditional COO and CFO and managing the company’s largest accounts. He has over a decade of experience in the manufacturing industry, with a large portion specifically in produce manufacturing. He’s handled facility design, layout optimization, automation, product flow management, and client-facing negotiations in both union and non-union environments and across various departments and disciplines. Mehrdad’s background in data and engineering allows him to draw on multiple methodologies to drive growth and deliver value. “My greatest satisfaction is seeing the client’s vision come into reality, seeing them happy it’s running, working, and done,” he says.



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PETER G.

BOWEN



Driven by the opportunity to make investments across diverse industries that will have high societal impact, Peter Bowen leverages the knowledge gleaned from his own entrepreneurial pursuits to help others. He began his career 15 years ago in hospitality operations, which transitioned into management consulting - primarily the restructuring of hotels. Thereafter, he served as general manager at Sonder, where he launched the company's New Orleans market, writing the company playbook for launching new markets as it grew to over 1,000 units from its \$1 million startup budget in just two short years. In 2022, Peter joined Dirks Companies as chief administrative officer, managing their disaster response, hospitality/real estate, and construction services/landscaping divisions. "For me, it was really an opportunity to continue my entrepreneurial passion while finding ways to give back," Peter shares.

“ We prioritize our investments into minority-owned businesses that we can propel through capital, experience, and back-office services to help scale rapidly and avoid traditional pitfalls of entrepreneurship.



Dirks
COMPANIES

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Dirks Companies is intently focused on the development and evolution of the human experience, with a primary objective to help and grow social entrepreneurial endeavors. "We prioritize our investments into minority-owned businesses that we can propel through capital, experience, and back-office services to help scale rapidly and avoid traditional pitfalls of entrepreneurship," Peter states. Focused on investments that benefit society, such as renewable energy and disaster relief, the company's previous investments include Energea, Clearworld, and PosiGen, among others. With special emphasis on early-state startups and small, minority-owned companies poised for growth, the organization has served dozens of companies to date.

Prior to joining Dirks Companies, Peter launched consultancy, PostScript Hospitality, and scaled the company through acquisition by Hotel Asset Value Enhancement (HotelAVE). The organization grew to over \$8 million in revenue, tripling client ROI for projects executed. Major clients included Four Seasons and Omni Hotels. Peter also served as deputy chief administrative officer for the City of New Orleans, founding the Office of Business & External Services (OBES), where he helped execute the mayor's vision of transforming New Orleans from the "city of N.O." to "the city of Yes!"

Peter holds an MBA in hospitality and agribusiness from the University of Guelph and a bachelor's in hotel administration from Cornell University. He's both a certified sommelier and certified in FEMA ICS 100, 200, 300, 400.

Luke Fleury

CEO &
Founder



Luke Fleury has been a contractor and real estate developer with his company, Fleury Properties, since 2017. He eats, sleeps, and breathes real estate, and in just five years, has done more than \$50 million worth of real estate developments. That incredible, continuing success is in part due to Luke's diligence in finding the best deals on services and materials. "It can translate into millions in revenue," he explains. But he knows well that finding the best pricing can also be a hassle, with countless hours of scouting out the lowest rates on projects and materials, as he's faced the exhaustive task himself. He knew that contractors and developers everywhere must be facing a similar challenge.

Tired of wasting time searching for deals, in December 2020, Luke co-founded DIBBS Technology, and in the spring of 2022, launched the iOS and Android app-based marketplace designed specifically for contractors. The marketplace connects buyers and sellers of services and materials making it easier to find the right items at the right price and in the right timeframe. "A lot of contractors are inundated with projects," Luke says, "and the process often requires multiple searches, which takes a lot of time." DIBBS allows for extra customization and ensures that postings reach a wide network of contractors,

suppliers, homeowners, and more, while simultaneously reducing friction in the bidding, buying, and selling processes. By being able to connect these tradesmen, suppliers, and homeowners, users can source bids more efficiently saving time and money on all sides.

DIBBS is available to homeowners, contractors, and suppliers across the U.S. After less than a year in operation, the DIBBS app is already being used by over 1,000 contractors, several hundred suppliers, and several hundred homeowners. DIBBS also won the American Business Association's *Stevie Awards Startup of the Year* for 2022 and was featured in a national Google Play campaign highlighting new apps in the U.S.



Luke may not have a tech background—his degree from the University of Rhode Island is in economics—but he knows what people in real estate and construction need on multiple levels. "I made this app easy to use for contractors like myself who are hesitant to use technology," he says. "These issues are close to my heart."

Meet Sarah Barkwill

Sarah Barkwill is the founder and CEO of Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions Corp., a Canadian-based firm with a global reach that helps businesses align with their overarching objectives. Founded in 2020, the firm brought in six figures during its first year alone with a diverse roster of clients in various business sectors—a clear testament to not only the company's success, but Sarah's commitment to helping enterprises thrive. The privately owned firm champions the idea of a supportive employee culture, where happy employees generate satisfied customers and more profit, with independent consultants who view employee engagement as a critical component for the overall success of an organization. As such, they partner with clients who recognize the value of investing in the employee experience, operating under the pretense that client successes and their own are essentially one and the same. With special focus on companies who count employees among their greatest assets, Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions provides bespoke programs for each business based on their unique objectives.

The process starts with a business assessment session to better understand the company's strengths and weaknesses along with their strategic objectives. From there, the team at Eyes on HR Consulting Solutions analyzes the information and uses it to curate tailored programs that increase employee engagement, productivity, and profitability. Prior to launching the company, Sarah's experience as an executive director of human resources as well a senior HR consultant has given Sarah an intimate understanding of the priorities of larger organizations, with regard to talent management

Together, Sarah and her changemakers are empowering organizations to reach their full potential while maximizing profits.

and shifting company culture. Her extensive experience serves as the foundation for her latest professional endeavor. Now, as the leader of her own flourishing firm, Sarah leads her team of talented culture designers, and engages with clients at the strategic level, while effectively managing every aspect of the business. Together, Sarah and her changemakers are empowering organizations to reach their full potential while maximizing profits.



Founder & CEO

Sarah holds a B.A. with honors from Queens University and an HR Management Certificate from Ryerson University.



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Brian J. Esposito

Ranked among the world's top 10 CEOs for 2020/21 in *The World CEO Rankings Awards* by Adria Management, LLC, Brian J. Esposito, the founder and CEO of Esposito Intellectual Enterprises, LLC (EIE), is an award-winning serial entrepreneur and business leader. He is a core part of the innovative team that built Nodle—the world's largest wireless network and ecosystem of connected devices, as well as Turncoin, a registered SEC digital security that shares 100% of the revenues generated from its TheXchange's VirtualStaX platform with Turncoin holders. TurnCoin is the only revenue sharing digital security that derives its value and yield from the sale of VirtualStaX. TheXchange is the First Global Talent Exchange and a one-of-a-kind platform that is set to completely reimagine and disrupt the global fan economy. TurnCoin is presently sitting at just under a \$15B valuation and has the full support and investment from icons such as Drew Brees, Patrick Mahomes, Randy Jackson, David Meltzer, Luke Bryan, Von Miller, Cam Jordan, and many more.

One of Brian's early businesses ranked among *The Fastest-Growing Private Companies by Inc. 5000* for six consecutive years. In December 2019, as well as August 2022, he was featured in *The Corporate Investment Times*, the next-gen investment magazine in the Middle East. In 2022, he co-led the development and launch of ChainTech Labs, licensed and registered out of the DIFC in Dubai, UAE. ChainTech Labs holds NFT project sensations and communities such as BAPES/BAPESCLAN, CubeX, Apiens, and Bloodlines. It also developed a revolutionary NFT airlines rewards system in partnership with Etihad Airways. With over 20 years of experience in high-profile executive roles involving complex business challenges and high-stakes decisions, Brian founded Esposito Intellectual Enterprises (EIE) in New York in 2013. Wholly owned by Brian, EIE currently consists of 90+ entities, 150+ joint ventures around the world, and operates in over 25 industry focuses. There is just one degree separating any industry or market that Brian may want to enter and do business in. With a technique that he spent years perfecting, Brian connects not only the right people, but the right people at the right time. "Integrity is at the core of who we are and what we do at EIE. We strive to do good business with good people," he says.



ESPOSITO INTELLECTUAL ENTERPRISES
LLC
TIME IS OUR MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY

With more than 20 global locations, which include Dubai, London, Chicago, NY, San Diego, Singapore, Stellenbosch, LA, Seattle, Asbury Park, and San Francisco, among others, EIE sources and invests in many exciting developments

in the beauty, fashion, technology, music, entertainment, charities, government, transportation, blockchain, crypto, Web3, Metaverse, IoT, eSports, and hotel development industries, as well as others. Brian's specialty is taking a company's vision and launching it into the market with the correct team and resources to ensure its success. "Time is our most precious commodity," he says. "I have the ability to be a connector, but I also know when to stand back and let the magic happen, and to ensure that I am part of the upside of bringing those parties together."

When potential partners come to Brian for assistance, he joins them with a company, or companies, within his holdings that will be the most beneficial for them, and if they need to raise money, he can open those avenues through this vast network. "In this chapter of my life, this is what I love to do. I utilize my experiences, relationships, resources, and



assets to work with establishments from start-ups to *Fortune 500* companies—helping them create new opportunities and self-sustaining business models that can grow from positive cash flow, eliminating the need to raise capital," he says.

Brian's job is to protect his integrity and that of the firm's holdings, projects, partners, clients, employees, and investors, while delivering value and win-win situations. "This means that I'm a man of my word, no matter what," he says. Unafraid of creating and seizing business opportunities, expanding into new markets, and launching innovative products and services, Brian also understands the importance of knowing who *not* to do business with. "Making money is a byproduct of doing great things with great people, and you can damage your reputation, integrity, and network by dealing with the wrong person or getting involved in the wrong situation," he explains.

Brian's commitment to helping entrepreneurs extends beyond the walls of Esposito Intellectual Enterprises. He has participated in hundreds of podcasts, expert panels, live interviews, and webinars, in which he shares his journey and experiences. "I talk about the nitty-gritty and the reality of how hard it is to own and manage a business, dealing with banks and partners, etc. This really resonates with the listeners, the realness of it," Brian says. "Everyone can be an overnight success if you were to wake up each day a little smarter, a little wiser, and little stronger than the day before." — Brian J. Esposito.

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Mahsa Ghavamian

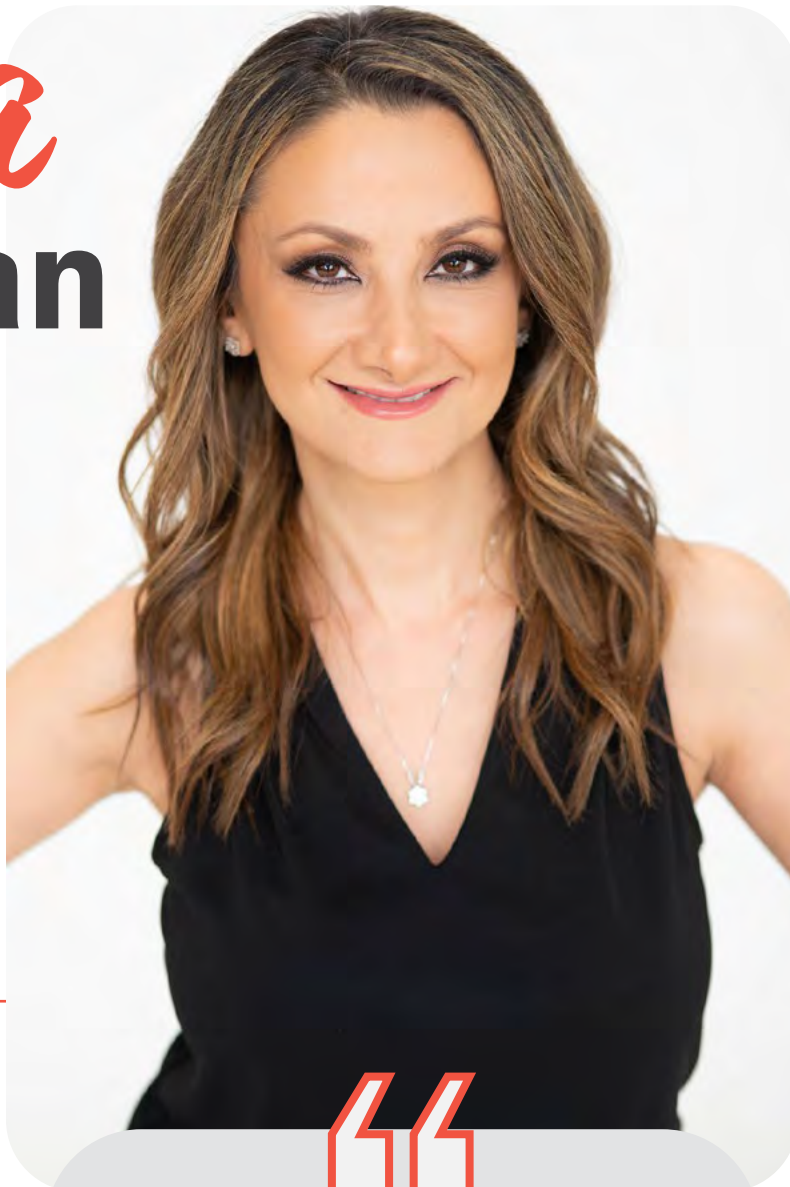
When Mahsa Ghavamian started painting with her daughter, she assumed it would just be a hobby. But when she saw her then-seven-year-old daughter's joy at her own blossoming artistic skill, Mahsa knew this was something more. "I thought, if we can do this together and have so much fun, why not create a space where everyone can do the same?" she says. So, in January 2019, Mahsa launched Canvas n Cup, leaving behind the comfort zones of the corporate and nonprofit sectors, where she'd worked for over two decades since graduate school. Today, that "space" stretches across the country and beyond bringing people together through virtual painting sessions, and the company has grown into an international art supply wholesaler.

Founder & Owner

Canvas n Cup, located in Westborough, Massachusetts, offers a variety of creative courses, including acrylic painting, ceramics, and more for artists of all ages. They run summer and after-school programs for kids, as well as company outings, parties, and events, and have hosted companies like Google, Facebook, and the Mayo Clinic. When the pandemic hit and businesses everywhere shuttered their doors, Mahsa refused to give in and abandon the artistic community. She launched virtual events to bring creativity and joy to people anytime, anywhere, during that difficult time, and teach them that creating art doesn't require expensive materials. "When there was no canvas available anywhere, I taught people to paint on cardboard boxes via Zoom," Mahsa says. "We had a blast!" They also hosted virtual events for universities like Harvard, MIT, and in-person events with over 400 participants at University of Massachusetts in Amherst.



www.canvasncup.com



What kept me going was believing I was offering joy and comfort to families during hard times and seeing them enjoy themselves. I believe in doing good in the world.

After experiencing the supply shortages during the pandemic, Mahsa was inspired to break into wholesaling, offering artist-grade supplies to studios and individuals at a fraction of the retail cost. She even left painting kits on doorsteps during the pandemic so people could keep creating and held virtual painting sessions to keep people engaged and connected. "During COVID, many people threw in the towel, but I'm proud that I never did," she says. "What kept me going was believing I was offering joy and comfort to families during hard times and seeing them enjoy themselves. I believe in doing good in the world."

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MEGAN Broccoli

Megan Broccoli is the founder and CEO of Voi, a company that's changing the way corporations manage their vehicle fleets. Founded in 2019, Voi is the only automated violation management solution that simplifies the process of finding and resolving parking, camera, and toll violations across the nation. "The reality is, we all get parking tickets and traffic violations, and I knew there had to be a better way for people to stay on top of this before it even becomes an issue," she states. The entire process is not only innovative, but also completely automated. "What many people don't think about is the fact that one fleet could be exposed to hundreds of agencies that all have a different way of reporting their information," she states. "We take these fragmented systems and homogenize the data so that it's both readable and actionable." In doing so, the company effectually creates interoperability between various agencies through software that connects with authorities to track and handle fees, such as tolls, with efficiency and immediacy before they even have the chance to become violations.

Given Voi's success right out of the gate—immediately turning a profit in its first month—it seems people were just waiting for Megan's revolutionary idea. Today, the firm's growing list of clients include commercial enterprises, ride-sharing and rental car companies, and delivery and logistics fleets. It's no wonder Megan earned a spot on the elite list of *Top 30 Miami Female Entrepreneurs* and has been featured in *Forbes*. Prior to launching Voi, Megan worked in the utility scale solar industry for a couple of years after college, which was where the idea for her company was born. "It started as a model to serve individuals years before, but we pivoted to serve companies and businesses," she shares. It's safe to say her company has since changed the entire landscape of fleet management, and for the better.



By enabling the ability to monitor an entire fleet of vehicles for parking tickets, speed, red-



Founder & CEO



What drives me is creating efficiencies and making things that people have to deal with every day a bit easier by using technology as a solution in order to simplify their lives and create more peace.

light and bus camera violations in real time, Voi gives businesses the power to act quickly before a situation escalates, ultimately allowing companies to avoid costly penalties that often include late fees, booting, impounding, and registration holds. The company actively manages toll accounts to ensure an entire fleet is accurately represented with payments that are always up to date. It also works to match every citation to the driver who had the vehicle at the time the violation occurred, making every attempt to hold the driver liable, then transferring the liability within the issuing agency. The end result for Voi clients? Significant savings and invaluable peace of mind. "Our customers see a 30% to 50% decrease in what they were paying for tickets and tolls because we're proactively dealing with this on their behalf," she states.

While Voi continues its upward trajectory, Megan's motivation remains as pure as it was the day the unique vision for the company first emerged. "What drives me is creating efficiencies and making things that people have to deal with every day a bit easier by using technology as a solution in order to simplify their lives and create more peace," she shares.

Megan has a bachelor's degree in finance from Florida Atlantic University. She's currently on the board for Florida Organic Growers where she's served as president since 2016.

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Chairman, President, & CEO



JAMES SAPIRSTEIN

James Sapirstein knows what it's like to roll with the punches and not let a few knockdowns deter him from striving and succeeding. After moving to Brooklyn from Argentina, he became the first of his family to graduate from high school and go to college. He was immediately attracted to the pharmacy field because it continually gave him new opportunities to discover new medicines and help countless people. He graduated from the Rutgers University College of Pharmacy, earned an MBA from Fairleigh Dickinson, and launched into a remarkable 37-year career with top-performing pharma companies such as Eli Lilly, Roche Labs, Bristol Myers Squibb, and Gilead Sciences, serving in nearly every role from sales to general management to CEO in locations around the world. As he gained valuable medical and social insights into developing medical products for the people who need it most, James put it to work, from navigating global pandemics to establishing a life-saving organization, and, most recently, leading a gastroenterology company, First Wave BioPharma, which aims to develop therapeutic products to serve unmet medical needs around the world. But it's a budding success story that almost never happened.

In 2018, James had essentially retired to a quiet life in Florida, when he received a phone call in 2019 from AzurRx BioPharma asking him to take the helm as CEO. He accepted and, 18 months later, acquired another company and renamed the new entity, First Wave BioPharma. The company develops pharmaceutical products designed to alleviate chronic ailments. For example, niclosamide

reduces the inflammation of ulcerative colitis and delays the disease's progression. "We believe niclosamide has the potential to treat several inflammatory bowel diseases including Crohn's disease," James shares. In addition, they also have adrulipase, a product for treating a life-threatening digestive disorder faced by cystic fibrosis and chronic pancreatitis patients.

While he's enjoyed an enviable career that might have many leaders seeking the spotlight, James' humility contradicts his remarkable accomplishments. "I'm a pharmacist first and foremost," he says. "I really care about patients and want to put medicine out there that actually works." This is also why he was involved in a number of philanthropic projects like Secure the Future, which he founded 23 years ago. This community of medical professionals has been working to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and has saved millions of lives. He was also integral in launching Viread and Truvada, crucial drugs for those living with HIV.

"My biggest motivators are the small victories," James says. "When we receive good data that we've spent years fighting for, that keeps me going." He also loves to see the growth of his team and colleagues. "Some of my hires have moved on to become CEOs themselves," he says. As someone who honors his own beginnings, watching people overcome hardships, be that be a chronic illness or a humble origin, and go on to live successful lives and help others, this is what drives James every day.

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NAHOM Assefa

Driven by his ambitious nature, Nahom Assefa works towards increasing the value and success of communities countrywide one property at a time. His interest in real estate was enhanced while he was working full-time as an IT specialist at one of the largest Fortune 500 companies in the world. Just one month into his role with Bank of America, he launched Nahom Buys Homes in October 2019. A few months later, he executed his first deal as an independent real estate investor, followed by a second. Nahom left the corporate world to pursue real estate full-time—and he never looked back.

Based in St. Louis, Missouri, Nahom Buys Homes specializes in providing valuable services in the real estate industry, working with buyers, sellers, and investors. To date, they've transacted over a million dollars' worth of deals across St. Louis, with plans to enter the Houston market by year's end. "We seek out properties with the primary objective of enhancing their neighborhoods and communities, by either personally rehabbing them or finding investors that can work towards significantly increasing their value," Nahom explains. "We make the process convenient, simple, and enjoyable." While the company is currently focused on single-family homes, they're working towards plunging even deeper into the commercial space market, including apartment homes and retail commercial buildings.



Founder & Investor

“ What I love about my job is getting to help people every day. ”

“With every deal we do, we go into it with this intention: How can we provide service and value, and in what ways can we do this?” he shares. “We look to partner with local investors, not compete with them.” Nahom also puts special emphasis on developing networks with other investors and collaborating with local realtors to sell properties. While his role involves a great deal of negotiating with buyers and sellers, and working with private and hard money lenders, underlying it all is knowing that he’s making a difference in the lives of others. “What I love about my job is getting to help people every day,” he says. Nahom plans to build schools in his native country of Ethiopia by using the network and influence he’s amassed through his business.

Nahom holds a bachelor's degree in information technology from the University of Missouri.

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ANNA

Victoria Ting

PASTORES



“

Everyone is held to a higher standard, and we're so passionate about the care we provide to our senior residents.”

Executive Director

a nursing home. From there, she worked as a health and wellness coordinator, then health and wellness director at an assisted living community. Thereafter, Anna joined Oakmont as their health services director before taking the helm as executive director last July—at just 27 years old. “Assisted living is a rewarding and undervalued field,” she explains. “Working with seniors is a calling for me, and I’m grateful to make any impact I can on their lives.”

Anna oversees the directors within the community, handling daily operations and resolving concerns within the physical and overall plant of the community, while ensuring the senior residents are happy and well cared for. But for Anna, it’s much more than that. It’s about helping the residents and her team achieve their goals. “The interactions I have either with residents or team members, are about making a difference, by providing high-quality care and being authentic in who I am.” While she humbly attributes her success to the residents and team, it’s her authenticity and nurturing nature that serve to set the tone for the entire community. “I love what I do because of our mission and the expectations we live by,” she states. “Everyone is held to a higher standard, and we’re so passionate about the care we provide to our senior residents.”

Doing the right thing, even when others aren’t watching is a guiding principle for Oakmont of Orange’s executive director, Anna Victoria Ting Pastores. The California-based company says they are “excited that one of our executive directors is being recognized for this reward especially from a community that was honored with the 2022 *Best of Senior Living Award* by *A Place for Mom*. Every team member at any of the 63 communities under the Oakmont Management portfolio are held to a high standard of excellence not available at other senior communities and we are proud that Anna is being acknowledged for exemplifying those values.”

“Our community, residents and team members are amazing,” Anna shares. “Our team is full of great, hardworking individuals, and we take pride in work that we do.” Now an advocate for senior care for eight years, Anna’s career began as an LVN in



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TYLER Dooley



I want to provide a product that benefits people and allows them to live a healthy lifestyle, while still tasting amazing.



Founder & CEO

When Tyler Dooley needed a pick-me-up, he found himself at a loss. He wasn't a coffee drinker, and all the coffee alternatives he could find were loaded with sugar and artificial ingredients. "I wanted something that gave me an energy boost without the junk," he says. The obvious solution to someone with a lifelong entrepreneurial streak? Create your own! Tyler founded Wake Up Water – a healthy, alternative way for people to get their daily caffeine. As someone dedicated to a healthy lifestyle himself, Tyler wanted to share his "Better Fuel, Better You," vision with everyone. "When I see people consuming a lot of poor-quality food, I want to change that," he says. "I want to provide a product that benefits people and allows them to live a healthy lifestyle, while still tasting amazing."

Wake Up Water has roughly the same caffeine as a medium cup of coffee, electrolyte levels of the leading sports drink, and 100% of your daily value of vitamins B3, B5, B6, and B12, which provide extra, sustained energy throughout the day. The combination of energy and hydration make it the perfect pick-me-up. "We took the caffeine concept and blended it with the hydration element to create a truly unique product," Tyler says, "something that energizes you while also hydrating you. We don't claim to be healthy and then hide artificial ingredients from customers, we truly *are* a better option." Tyler encourages everyone to read the ingredient lists of the products they purchase.

Wake Up Water was formulated and bottled as a ready-to-drink item when it hit shelves. But just four months later, despite great initial success, they would have to rethink everything when COVID-19 swept through the world. Tyler realized that with people staying home and out of stores, he would need a better way to

get the product into people's hands. In just a few months, he realized that Wake Up Water could exist—without the water. In April 2021, he debuted a powdered version in stick packs, which were easy to ship team and convenient for customers, who could add their own water as needed. "We had to pivot and start from zero again, but I viewed it as a great opportunity," he says. That pivot was a challenge, requiring the reimagining of not only the product, but the packaging and marketing. But in a true testament of "fortunate favors the bold," Tyler came out the other side with an even more popular product and promising business model.

WAKE UP WATER

Creating Wake Up Water and keeping it going even through a global crisis has been an impressive accomplishment. Tyler, who, just like wanting to reinvent starting the day, also wanted to reinvent what a successful career looked like after deciding that "traditional" career paths weren't for him. He wanted to forge his own path and create something beneficial for others. And to that end, he wants to share even more. In addition to providing healthy products to consumers, he's excited to share his experience and expertise with those looking to build their own business and career, and help other people achieve their lifelong dreams through advisory and mentorship.

Co-Founder & CEO



Colin Lacy

Looking at economists' predictions, Colin Lacy and Dr. Stephanie Santoso were concerned: young people are predicted to be economically worse off than their parents, and inequality of opportunity, particularly in relation to parental wealth, still prevents so many youths from actualizing their dreams. "If people of color, women, and those from low-income communities became inventors and entrepreneurs at the same rate as men from high-income households, innovation in the U.S. would quadruple," Colin says.

In 2021, they co-founded MakerUSA, a nonprofit incubated in the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE). MakerUSA's mission is to build stronger pathways into careers in making and entrepreneurship, including advanced manufacturing, computer science, alternative energy, and the skilled trades. Colin serves as CEO and Stephanie as president. Six months later, over 52 institutions across 24 states applied to partner. Applications have come from community and technical colleges, HBCUs, tribal universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and community-based makerspaces, among others. MakerUSA embeds locally recruited program managers at partner sites to lead on projects that the community has defined. "Imagine if every community college had teams exclusively focused on



MakerUSA

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION & SOCIAL MOBILITY

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LI: MakerUSA / Colin Lacy / Dr. Stephanie Santoso

Co-Founder & President



Dr. Stephanie Santoso

empowering students on maker-related career pathways," Colin says. Stephanie and Colin each draw on extensive experience in the educational arena. Stephanie, with a PhD in information science from Cornell, served as Senior Advisor for Making at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy from 2014-16, helping develop the Nation of Makers initiative, broadening access to makerspaces and maker education across the country. Colin earned his master's in public policy from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and has served as an elected school board director and chamber of commerce president in rural Colorado. He was a founding leader and former executive director of Makers + Mentors Network, a community of STEM ecosystems serving over 200,000 students.

"We're excited about the diversity of communities eager to partner," Stephanie says. "We love bringing people and organizations together that might not have connected before, in ways that surface new ideas and solutions." Similarly, Colin is excited about building a new kind of workforce. "At scale, MakerUSA program managers would become a new national workforce, exclusively focused on growing pathways into maker careers and entrepreneurship within our most marginalized communities."

T O M Mavrou

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You have to keep on believing in what you're doing and in yourself to make it happen.

With over 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry, Tom Mavrou has mastered the art of making the perfect grilled cheese. His company, Meltwich Hospitality Group, Inc., is the fastest-growing grilled cheese concept in North America. It's not a fad, it's a *trend*. With 35 locations and another 40 scheduled to open before the end of the year, Meltwich is a quick-service restaurant dedicated to forever changing expectations in an unexpectedly exciting environment. Known for crafting the most modern, comforting, cheese-centric food around, Meltwich is concentrated on melting cheese—think Philly cheesesteaks, cheeseburgers, and, of course, their main star, the irresistible grilled cheese sandwich.

Together with his wife, Barb Kiss, Tom launched the company in 2015. It's since turned into a full-blown family affair. During the onset of the pandemic, it was just a husband-a-wife team chasing a dream. They drove across the country, sharing their passion for food with the world. They brought their son, Jordan on board to assist with the business, and now, he's the senior operations manager. As the company grows, their team continues to expand with their other son, Joshua, as national construction manager. But they'll tell you that their path to success hasn't been an easy one. "It's been a struggle to get where



Chief Operating Officer

we are," Tom explains. "But witnessing the resilience of this team through the pandemic, and how they put their heart and soul into it is our greatest accomplishment."

MELTWICH
food co.

Prior to launching Meltwich, Tom had an extensive career in the restaurant industry. He started working in his family's restaurant business at a young age, before going to college. Tom knew in his heart that school wasn't for him and eventually took over the family business and grew his portfolio. As he saw changes in the industry, he got into real estate with those ventures always funding his activity in the restaurant industry. Along the way, people told him that he would never make it, but Tom continued in relentless pursuit of his dreams, which have come to fruition because he had the courage to keep chasing them. "You have to keep on believing in what you're doing and in yourself to make it happen," he says.

Next? Meltwich America—Coming in 2022.

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RYAN LISSACK

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Realize Me brings all that health and performance data together in order to provide a comprehensive view of an individual and uses intelligent technology to help users understand their data, leading to deeper insight.



Ryan Lissack has played a *major* role in building multiple successful companies over the course of his storied career. In 2006, he started his first company, Koral, and moved to San Francisco. The following year, it was sold to Salesforce and he spent the next five years working there in various roles, including leading mobile engineering. In 2012, he moved to Los Angeles to join Maker Studios as CTO. In 2014, they sold to Disney, where Ryan spent a few years integrating the companies before co-founding Rival in 2016, which was acquired by Live Nation in 2020. After Rival, he joined MedMen as CTO and then interim CEO before taking a sabbatical. A health and fitness aficionado for more than three decades, Ryan’s approach to this field had become more data-driven, and while wearable devices provided a significant amount of data, the information lived in silos, making it difficult to gain meaningful insight. Determined to change this, Ryan founded Realize Me in 2021, a technology startup in the health and fitness space that offers advanced analytics for health enthusiasts.

“There are a number of companies in the space, and most focus on a very specific set of data,” Ryan explains, “Realize Me brings all that health and performance data together in order to provide a comprehensive view of an individual and uses intelligent technology to help users understand their data, leading to deeper insight. It is their command center for health and fitness.” The platform supports users’ progress towards their goals through the collection, analysis, and visualization of data, and members receive significantly discounted access to resources such as lab testing and supplements. Realize Me is currently running a beta program before launching next year.

As a serial entrepreneur with three prior successful exits, Ryan is passionate about building companies and creating technology. “I believe it’s important for founders of early-stage companies to be generalists who are willing and able to do anything the company needs to be successful. One of the most important skills is knowing how to bring together a team of exceptional specialists,” he states.

Ryan holds a B.S. in Computer Science from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa.



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TODD Gross

Todd Gross enjoyed an illustrious 20-year career in finance as a head trader for renowned firms like Morgan Stanley and Cooper, Neff & Associates, and as a fund manager earning the title of *Best Commodities Manager* by *Barclay's Hedge* and authoring a book in 2013. He also founded and helmed multiple successful companies of his own. After amassing considerable experience in real-time predictive analytics, Todd decided to apply his skills to saving people's lives.

In 2019, Todd co-founded Quantaira, Inc., with Noah Clay, who started the Nanotechnology Center at Harvard, Cornell, and UPenn. Quantaira uses real-time predictive analysis to make clinical care safer, effective, and more efficient for both patients and health care providers by providing a comprehensive view of biometrics. Today, Quantaira is enjoying growing interest from international hospital systems, and continues



Co-Founder & Chair

Quantaira uses real-time predictive analysis to make **clinical care safer, effective, and more efficient for both patients and health care providers by providing a comprehensive view of biometrics.**

to attract best-in-class talent. "The caliber of our people is truly remarkable," Todd says. His colleagues include the world's fourth-ranked cybersecurity expert and the former dean of George Washington University's Medical School. Their Patient C.A.R.E. (comprehensive access for remote evaluation) platform allows providers to observe patient biometrics from multiple medical devices and collect it into one place, all remotely, so they can easily monitor patients, all in real time.

The idea came when Todd learned about baby socks that record vital signs and prevent sudden infant death via data collection. "Data is becoming a growing part of medicine," Todd, who now serves as chair of Quantaira, explains. And there's a personal reason behind everything, too: both Todd and Noah watched their fathers pass away on ventilators. Based on these experiences,

they originally focused on pinpointing when patients should be taken off ventilators. With the rise of COVID, they expanded their scope to help even more people. Because their C.A.R.E. platform synchronizes biometrics with medications, the result is speedier care that saves money while alleviating the very real threat of burnout for providers—resulting in better patient care. Reflecting on his shift in focus, Todd is most happy that his work is directly helping people. "I spent over two decades trading commodities as a professional," he says. "Now, with my own company, I can benefit people directly with what I'm doing. It's very gratifying and drives me every day."



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Jenny Yang knows very well how retail has operated. With 10 years of experience in every aspect of retail—from buying and merchandising at both Best Buy and Target to sales and category management in distribution, and working on the brand and rep side. This gives her a unique 360-degree perspective on the retail market, and she also knows how the retail world can evolve. That’s why, in 2021, she took her multifaceted knowledge and founded Maevyn Retail. Based in Minneapolis, this woman- and minority-owned business is disrupting the retail status quo from the ground up.

Maevyn is unique in that while their partners include big-box stores like Walmart and Target, they also offer partnerships to clubs like Costco and Sam’s Club, department stores like Nordstrom, and drugstore chains like CVS, Walgreens, and Rite-Aid. “Most rep firms specialize in one retailer, but I know brands need to diversify their share to help with both revenue and profit,” Jenny explains. “There’s value-add in working with one point of contact—us—rather than many different reps, each of whom handle only one retailer and one category.



Maevyn’s highly curated client brands know they can trust Jenny, thanks to not only her experience in products ranging from beauty and sporting goods to toys and consumer electronics, but to her dedication to a strategic, tailored partnership. “We’re razor-focused in our belief that building revenue profitably is the most important thing for our clients,” she says. “As an extension of their business, we allow them to focus on product development and marketing.” With an emphasis on transparency, Jenny begins with having her clients define what success looks like to them, then helps them build towards that goal. “There’s a smart way, to do things profitably while staying authentic to your brand,” she says. Since Maevyn’s launch, they’ve worked helped dozens of brands launch new into mass retail markets and helping established brands capture market share.

“I love finding new brands and meeting new people,” Jenny says. “It’s where I get my energy from. And I’m very fortunate to be in an industry I’m passionate about, and I hope I can share that passion with the brands I work with.”

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STRUCTURED FINANCE ASSOCIATION

Jen Earyes has embarked on a self-directed tour of senior-level corporate finance within Fortune 500 companies and now brings 15 years of finance experience to the table as managing director and head of policy of the Structured Finance Association. She’s served in the capital

markets in sectors ranging from derivatives trading to liquidity management as well as in corporate development. She’s worked as a venture capitalist and handled international mergers and acquisitions. Today, she’s taking her considerable and multifaceted experience to help improve outcomes for the ecosystem of structured finance.

The Structured Finance Association is a member-based trade industry advocacy group focused on improving and strengthening the broader structured finance market. Members of the association represent all sectors of the securitization market, including issuers, investors, financial intermediaries, law firms, accounting firms, technology firms, rating agencies, servicers, and trustees—comprised of more than 370 member organizations.

As head of CFO strategic initiatives in 2018, she led the immediately successful effort to bring in \$2.2 million in savings in her first 18 months. She also renegotiated a library of hedging contracts resulting in a \$120 million increase in daily liquidity.

Jen credits her innate creativity and analytical mind to solving myriad challenges. “I see everything like a puzzle—it all comes with creative solutions,” she says. “I love being able to leverage my existing experiences and see the tangible impact of my work,” she says. “No matter my role, my eye is on continuous improvement – reduce the risks and find cost savings.”

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For 19 years, **Sergei Guk** has been on the front lines of the restoration industry providing services for buildings damaged by disaster and accident. He has crafted expertise through both on the job experience and a litany of professional certifications including IICRC, The Asbestos Institute, the EPA, and BioCleaning Services of America, Inc., among others. With features on *Channel 5 News* in Phoenix, *SHOPTALK360*, and the *Phoenix Business Journal*, Sergei is a leading voice in his field. He continues to educate the community by regularly serving as a guest speaker and panelist at industry events such as BOMA, IFMA (International Facility Managers Association) and MARC Community Resources, Inc.



In 2014, after an impressive career that includes growing a similar company from \$120,000 a year in sales to over \$4 million, Sergei turned the industry on its head with the launch of Phoenix-based, RestorationHQ, a commercial restoration firm that focuses on working on behalf of clients rather than insurance agencies. The company provides top-notch restoration, remediation, mitigation, and abatement services, with technical expertise and a commitment to proactive communication. Staff are friendly, understanding, and anticipatory of clients' needs, as they guide them through a stressful and difficult time. "We changed the experience of the customer as it relates to restoration work and we're disruptive to the normal industry, which aligns itself with insurance companies, not the clients they serve," Sergei explains. "RestorationHQ was born out of the pains and struggles I saw clients going through my entire career. I created this business to help eliminate those pain points. It is time to pioneer a better new way." For seven years, Sergei has done just that.

Now, with over 41 million square feet under contract and a sole focus on commercial and industrial properties, RestorationHQ prides itself for working seamlessly alongside property management companies, general contractors, mechanical trades, facility management teams and subcontractors -counting among its clients CBRE, Cushman & Wakefield, Transwestern and many others.

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Driven by his passion for finance, operations, and education, **Rob Jafek** is a serial entrepreneur who has founded a host of successful ventures over his career, including three flourishing investment firms—all while remaining committed to educating future financial leaders as an adjunct professor at both USD and UC Berkeley. Rob has a long history in the finance industry, working with companies such as Morgan Stanley, Tiger Management, Nicholas Applegate, and Torrey Pines. In 2016, he took all his years of experience and passion to found a company with the mission of helping to revitalize communities, Boomerang Capital Partners. Ranked among *Barron's Top 100 Hedge Funds*, the Mesa, Arizona-based real estate finance company works with commercial and residential real estate companies throughout the U.S. A thought leader in his field who cares as much about his clients as he does his industry, Rob shares his knowledge and expertise as a regular contributor to *Forbes.com* and other publications and as a member of the Forbes Real Estate Council.

Boomerang's focus is on lending and equity investment opportunities with strong growth potential and stable returns. Their borrowers are real estate companies looking for innovative financial solutions that they might not be able to find with banks. And Rob and his team are so good at providing these solutions that the majority of their clients come back time and again. Boomerang owns and manages a number of commercial properties for companies around the country, helping them add value to those properties, and also offer fix-and-flip and rehab services for residential properties, which helps residential real estate companies give dilapidated homes a new chance at life, which in turn injects new life into entire communities.



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Stacie Ten Eyck is an accomplished event expert with over 14 years in hospitality. This career demanded long hours in a high stress industry. “I was unable to sleep and was restless with anxiety due to working 70 hours a week, she states.” After a decade of executing weddings, corporate events, and opening several restaurants, a drastic change was needed for her overall health and wellness.

Determined to bring an all-natural product to assist with relaxation and sleep to the tired masses, she created eunoia naturals. Eunoia is a Greek term meaning a well mind and beautiful thinking. The collection offers all natural essential oil blends that provide therapeutic benefits. RELAX Lavender + Chamomile Aromatherapy Mist was the first product launched on Amazon, and with huge success. Her most recent creation, NIGHT NIGHT, is a kid-friendly sleep spray accompanied by a bedtime meditation. Be on the lookout this fall for the next product line from eunoia of essential oil perfumes. Ophelia will be launched in October, which is a blend of sandalwood and amber!

Today, eunoia naturals currently offers eight products and is sold in 24 countries around the world. Making local and national news, such as Today Show, she has brought her brand of wellness and conscious living to the community. Collaborating with a major nationwide retailer, Stacie’s motivation remains the same—it’s all about helping people. “I want to give back and help others who struggle with sleep and/or are looking for a holistic way to better their health.”

eunoia naturals

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Poonam Bhuchar, a Seton Hall Law graduate, had only worked as an attorney for eight months after passing the bar in 1999, when she knew she wanted to open her own practice. By the next year, she’d set up not only her own firm, but also helped other firms establish their immigration departments. In October 2010, she started Bhuchar Law with offices in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and New York City, and a virtual office in Austin, Texas. Her focus is corporate immigration and family law, and her clients include multinational and Fortune 500 companies who require executive and work visas and help setting up business in the U.S.

Poonam, along with her long-time associate, three paralegals, and one of-counsel have represented museums, recording artists, and startup companies of all kinds. Poonam is also well versed in corporate immigration compliance and I-9 compliance, and can astutely advise clients on these issues as well as other corporate immigration matters. She also advises people in her community on matters of family law. People trust Poonam.

Thanks to her genuine care for each and every client, be they a small startup or a billion-dollar corporation, Poonam has amassed a community of long-term clients.

Her care, expertise, and creative, outside-the-box solutions have earned her USCTRI’s 2015 *Excellence in Legal Services*, being named one of the *Top 10 Best Immigration Attorneys* from 2017 to 2019, and *VIP Woman of the Year* in 2014 and 2015. “Our mission is to take a genuine interest in our clients, understand their objectives, and exceed their expectations,” she says.

In addition to practicing law, Poonam is deeply involved in community work, advising on women’s issues. She’s a volunteer of the Pink Foundation, fighting femicide, and is on the board of the Indian Association of Women Entrepreneurs. She’s also been a guest on talk and radio shows, covering immigration topics, and is a certified life coach.



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Mike Boyle had an 18-year career in marketing behind him, with experience as an account executive that led him to partner. In 2004, he left the C-suite, took his wealth of expertise, and founded Unrestricted MKTG, a full-service marketing agency on a mission to transform the client-agency relationship through authentic, next-level leadership, creative excellence, and effective execution. Driven by digital platforms, technology, and a team of marketing experts, Unrestricted MKTG has the unique ability to take the process through to the final stage of delivery, handling the warehousing, shipping, and logistics, to make sure retailer products end up on store shelves and available. “From creation to promotion to fulfillment, there are no restrictions on what we can do for our clients,” Mike says.

After nearly two decades of delivering this kind of high-touch service, Unrestricted MKTG has amassed hundreds of clients across the country, with a focus on mid-sized businesses, as well as corporate enterprises like General Mills and Fortune 500 companies. For each of them, Unrestricted MKTG creates bespoke solutions to help their clients’ revenue grow. For Mike, this is what it’s all about—helping people thrive, in both his professional and personal life. He’s actively involved with Jared Allen’s Homes for Wounded Warriors, which helps injured military veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Shooting Star Foundation, helping to raise funds for children with special needs. “While we enjoy serving our clients, when we can make an awesome impact on someone’s life, that’s pretty cool,” Mike shares.

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He’s a prolific inventor with more than 30 patents, an engineering expert with more than 25 years’ experience, and the entrepreneurial powerhouse behind three companies. If anyone knows how to spot a good idea *and* bring it to market, it’s **Edwin De Angel**, and as founder and CEO of Invention Matters (formerly Essential Technologies), he’s been doing it for over a decade. Edwin and his group of subject matter experts, patent attorneys, and licensing experts provide specialized expertise in intellectual property, development, positioning, and patent filing. Their mission? To help usher inventions and IP from genesis through patent acquisition and into the future.

While their clients include Intel, Intellectual Ventures, and Praetorian, Edwin is a champion of smaller tech companies, and the firm’s unique model gives them an advantage. Invention Matters® works with companies during critical times: product launch, M&A transactions, patent infringement, penetrating a new market, and technology licensing. As Edwin helps inventors transform ideas into success stories, he also leads a pair of other thriving ventures—Angel Real Estate and Invention-AI.

Edwin holds a PhD in electrical and computer engineering and an MS and a BS in electrical engineering. He’s a licensed product management professional, certified licensing professional, IEEE senior member, and member of Business Network International.

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Teresa Friesen has been a champion for elevating women’s voices for over a decade. In support of this quest, she co-founded SheMate in 2021. Headquartered in Nebraska, SheMate is a virtual platform that connects women in sports with the young people who look up to them. With hundreds of subscribers—including high school girls, parents, coaches and school administrators—the company is increasing visibility and representation of women in athletics. “Status quo right now is about 95% of sports media coverage goes to males, which is a missed opportunity,” she explains. “We’re making a change in that space.” SheMate helps female college athletes meaningfully monetize their skills and experience while providing young people with customized, empowering content and parents and coaches with strategies for better athletic development—all from women who know the collegiate athletics realm best. Given the enormous response, it would seem SheMate is the change that female athletes have been waiting for.

Prior to starting SheMate, Teresa was a social worker and most recently a college professor. As someone who’s dedicated her career to helping others, her goal is to increase access to wellness through tech. SheMate was developed in pursuit of this mission. “We’re focused on increasing on-screen, positive female representation and creating safe and empowering experiences in young peoples’ digital world,” she states. “We are a community where women *thrive*.”



SheMate

Teresa holds a BSW from Creighton University and an A.M. from University of Chicago.

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Convenience, connectivity, collaboration, and coaching are the four C’s that form the core principles for which Castle Connolly Private Health Partners was built on. Founded by **Dean McElwain** and John Connolly in 2014, the company is a leading concierge medicine and wellness support company with a passion for changing the lives of both physicians and patient members. As innovators in the concierge medicine space, the New York-based firm has led the way in developing and implementing concierge medicine programs with a fully integrated wellness offering, navigation services and world class marketing. The company prides itself on their selective partnerships with leading physicians and a continued focus on supporting the special relationship that exists between each doctor and their patients.

With a career in health care that spans over 35 years, Dean is a problem-solver who’s driven by the ability to collaboratively create success with his team. Prior to launching Castle Connolly Private Health Partners, Dean was the CEO of Peak Health Consultants, a nationally respected and sought-after consultancy in the healthcare development space. Dean led the way for many physicians and organizations who transitioned to the membership model of practice as well as numerous deployments in the orthopedic and revenue cycle/compliance arenas. A serial entrepreneur, Dean started his own chain of sports medicine and physical therapy clinics at just 25 years old. Located throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts, he owned and operated the clinics while finishing his master’s degree and doctorate in physical therapy and health care administration. “I enjoy complex problem solving, creating value, and focusing on reproducible positive health outcomes”, Dean shares.

Dean holds a PhD in physical therapy with a concentration in healthcare administration.



Castle Connolly
PRIVATE HEALTH PARTNERS, LLC

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Prior to launching his clothing business, **Dylan Rheault** spent nearly a decade as a professional baseball player for 5 MLB organizations and was also a member of Team Canada. Now, he's at the helm of Unaltered, a clothing brand that tall, athletic guys can relate to.

As a professional athlete-turned-entrepreneur, Dylan is taking tall men's clothing to new heights—literally and figuratively. “Building something that people want to be part of and being able to provide clothing that gives these tall guys confidence is what really drives me,” he says. And he should know—at 6'9”, Dylan always struggled to find clothes that fit.

In November 2020, after an injury put his professional baseball career in question, Dylan set his focus on this unmet need. He bought a sewing machine and taught himself to tailor. Before long, he had customized his entire wardrobe. Impressed by his newly redesigned and perfectly fitted clothing, friends and teammates began asking him to design for them. This sparked the idea for a retail clothing line and just one year later, Dylan was open for business.

Originally named Tall & Tapered, the first line was produced in collaboration with a clothing designer, who helped Dylan create the clothes he'd envisioned. After launching with bespoke pants, followed by t-shirts, which immediately sold out, Dylan took it across the finish line with a new name—Unaltered—and a brand that delivers a tailored fit right out of the box for men over 6-feet tall. Unaltered is unquestionably a *homerun*. Sold online, as well as in pop-up shops, gyms that train professional athletes, major league clubhouses, and across Instagram, tall men everywhere are looking sharper than ever before, and they have Dylan Rheault to thank.

unaltered

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With a dedicated focus on “data-based approach for developing business strategy,” **Martha Razo** helps take businesses to the next level. She serves as CEO of Guero Pallets, Inc., and co-founder of SOLiX Services, where she creates holistic strategies that include marketing, operations, and finance. “Unfortunately, it is often that companies only look at each part individually, but successful businesses have these three pillars aligned in their strategy and execution,” she explains. With a master's degree in applied mathematics and over 10 years of experience, Martha is a business multiplier who's like a golden unicorn in her own right.

As the strategist-in-chief for the clients she serves, Martha makes data-driven decisions that help businesses grow. She also works to understand the unique skill sets of employees and helps implement incentive-based models while helping companies effectively expand their marketing efforts. Her strategies involve teaching them how to better understand clients and their needs. In the financial arena, she analyzes spending and helps companies reduce expenses and costs over time, introducing programs such as QuickBooks and Oracle. For many, Martha is the “hidden figure” launching rockets into the stars. She helped one company expand profit margins from 5% to 35%, even during the midst of a global pandemic. As part of her own master plan, Martha is currently in pursuit of a PhD in industrial engineering with a focus in process mining. “Hard work is not enough, passion is not enough—strategy based on data is the key to success,” she states.



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Solix
DATA DRIVEN BUSINESS SOLUTIONS



Arun Prasad has business in his veins. It's how he managed to get Priyaa Groups, his family's apparel business in India, where he's worked from the age of 16, a \$2 million annual income and two new locations as their director. Now 24—and a firmly planted New Yorker with a master's in industrial engineering from NYU—Arun has his eyes set on helping enterprise grow their businesses with blockchain, and founded Money Convey, LLC, in January 2022, to do it. "Blockchain technology is an emerging digital resource with growing applications in various industries such as BFSI, government, healthcare, and others," he explains. "We're a combination of Deloitte and AWS in providing consulting and technology services, respectively."

With a focus on health care, IoT, and energy sectors, and a growing number of clients, Arun is already being consulted by companies for his expertise in Blockchain, Crypto, and NFT applications. Meanwhile, Arun continues to build the technology that allows businesses to grow and thrive without the constraints of redundancy, long waiting times, and defects while ensuring and improving security, traceability, interoperability, and accessibility. "What drives me is the ecosystem, the community of startups, entrepreneurs, and visionaries we're building to serve people in every corner, every neighborhood, everywhere," Arun says. "The vision to be the next big thing is what drives me every day."

Arun also holds a bachelor's in mechanical engineering, master's in industrial engineering and published a research paper in IAEME.



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MONEYCONVEY



As a leader in data intelligence, **Megan Ingram** combines the human touch of storytelling and the hard science of data to craft marketing campaigns that showcase businesses and brands the way that they deserve. After a 10-year digital marketing career with agencies like FleishmanHillard, Finn Partners, and Edelman, and winning a *YouTube Shorty Award* in 2016, Megan founded Ingram Digital Consulting in 2020. The full-service digital agency creates digital campaigns by combining design with research-based data strategy. "A lot of agencies talk about data, but don't lead with data," Megan explains. That's why she leverages keyword research, audience and market insights, conversation analysis, competitive review, and influencer identification to craft a truly authentic story. "I believe we've created a methodology that helps brands identify the right story to resonate with audiences," she says. "It's a balance of both data and human intelligence."

Megan and her Digital Outlaw team of vetted flexible talent have worked across many brands and verticals with non-profits, startups, and Fortune 500 companies, including the American Veterans Center, Blue Bird, and the National Policing Institute. Using data mining to craft a video strategy, Megan helped the American Veterans Center increase their views and subscriptions by 400%. "My passion is helping clients tell awesome stories using data and social intelligence," Megan says. "For me, it's about connecting the data to the people, and I really enjoy helping clients tell better stories and reach more people."

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 **INGRAM DIGITAL**
consulting

Chad Addie knows it's difficult to build a creative career from the ground up because he's done it himself. Today, as the CEO of Karben Studios, he's helping imaginative minds in myriad fields establish their own dreams via coaching, SEO, graphic design, and marketing. Founded in 2016, Karben Studios encompasses Karben Marketing and Karben MGMT. The marketing branch serves multiple companies with graphic design and marketing services, while the management side represents artists like the Milwaukee Bucks' official DJ, DJ Shawna, and LA-based pop singer, Tanner Howe. Chad's multifaceted background gives him insight into what his diverse client base needs. While studying graphic design and marketing in college, he founded his first company, a clothing brand, where he worked with musicians, UFC fighters, models, and even Miss Teen Chicago. The brand gained national and international acclaim and helped to catapult his entrepreneurial career. He's worked across a wide range of industries over the years from startups to Fortune 500 brands. Along the way, his skill and expertise have earned his agency numerous awards for web development, digital and social media marketing, graphic design, and more from Expertise.com, DesignRush, and VVerge. Driving it all is his passion for seeing businesses and artists flourish and achieve their goals, and he's driven to help make that happen for every client that comes along. "I wanted to be more than just a graphic designer or marketer. Now I help people grow their passions and dreams. As an entrepreneur, I take great pride in that."



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Valdet Zuteja is the founder and CEO of Relia Insurance Group in Illinois. With an emphasis on insurance risk, the brokerage partners with carriers such as Nationwide Insurance, Travelers, MetLife, Safeco, Chubb and Berkshire Hathaway to provide coverage in the areas of auto, home, small commercial business, workers compensation and trucking insurance. "When people work with us, they get treated like VIPs," he shares. It's this level of truly personalized service that Relia is known for. But what many people *don't* know is that Valdet's unwavering commitment to help others flourish comes from a deeply personal place. In 1998, he traveled to the United States from Macedonia when he was just 18 years old. He was fluent in five languages—Albanian, Turkish, Croatian, Macedonian, and Serbian—but didn't speak a word of English, yet he was determined to create a better life for himself and his family. Today, Valdet leads a thriving insurance enterprise heralded for providing not only the fastest service possible, but the best value. "People often need immediate quotes. They don't want to wait three days. Our clients can text us, call, or email, and we're always here when they need us," he says.



Valdet began his professional career as a mortgage consultant, but as he gained increasing insight into insurance side of his work over a decade, his desire to own his own agency grew. In 2014, he left the mortgage world and joined Nationwide Insurance as an agent in their Glen Ellyn, Illinois, office. "My goal was to master every aspect of the industry," he shares. In spring of 2016, his entrepreneurial dream came true when the company announced they were shuttering their office. Valdet pivoted and launched Relia Insurance Group, and the rest, as they say, is history. "I believe things happen for a reason," he says. "I thank Nationwide Insurance every day for their decision to close our office."

Valdet holds an associate's degree in computer programming from MATC.

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A global advocate and relentless crusader of promoting mental health, **Nabhit Kapur**, from India, envisages a world that is free of mental health stigmas and taboos. Through his exemplary work, indefatigable spirit, and passionate endeavours, he has brought impactful, transformative changes in several parts of the world including the African continent and Micronesia.

Nabhit is a psychopreneur, author, TEDx speaker, and globally decorated ambassador of mental health and peace with numerous recognitions globally. He is perhaps the youngest psychologist in the contemporary world and the only one from India, leading this remarkable movement to make mental health a household name.

Although they are based in New Delhi, India, Peacfulmind Foundation is present globally. Their vision is to make psychology a household term by teaching others about peace, culture, and well-being. Accordingly, PMF offers training and workshops, a global mental health forum for youth, and mental health karaoke, etc., in the mental health domain.

Through Nabhit's work toward freeing the world of mental health stigmas and taboos, he was able to develop a strong connection globally. For his exceptional work, he has been featured by various online news panels and print magazines like *Cooperate Investment Times*, *Exelon Magazine*, *Forbes*, *The Week*, *Statesman*, and *Daily Hunt*. His recent video highlighting the idea that mental health can become a global pandemic in the near future has gained significant viewership on social media and is being published as an article by various media platforms.



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David Arena is the CEO and founder of Alcove Media Company, a Philadelphia-based real estate media and photography company that provides high-quality digital photography, video, virtual tours, virtual staging, and other digital media for agents, realtors, and home owners in the area, helping them sell their properties faster by helping them look their absolute best. After working in the trenches as a real estate agent, six years ago, David used this insight to launch a company that gives people the most critical tool with which to sell their homes—gorgeous visual depictions that capture not only the amenities of a property, but the lifestyle that it invites. Today, David and his team photograph about 1,000 homes every month, with much of their work splashed across popular sites like Zillow. With astounding growth of 40% each year since its founding—without marketing—Alcove has been named the best Philadelphia real estate photography company five years in a row, and David himself has been named best real estate photographer in Philadelphia, as well.

David, a military veteran, founded Alcove in 2015 after first wading into the photography field the year prior, when he was working as a real estate agent. He saw that digital media like photography and virtual tours, then a new marketing angle, was a real need in the Philadelphia market. Without any experience behind the camera, David set out to teach himself photography. He borrowed a friend's camera and discovered that he not only enjoyed photography, but had a knack for it, and noticed that by simply taking photos of every property, he started selling homes faster. Soon, photography became the full focus of his business. He pivoted to a purely photographic role, began hiring team members, and launched what is now a thriving, award-winning company. David attributes the success of Alcove to the talent and dedication of his team of photographers and editors and their tight focus on real estate. "We're a photography company at heart that focuses on real estate," he says. "We hire great people who stay with us, and we create a place where people want to work and just have a lot of fun."

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With close to 20 years of global business expertise garnered through both public and private industries, **Philipp Binder** brings a wealth of analytical and technical qualifications to his role as president and chief operations officer at I-MED Pharma, a Canadian company specializing in dry eye diagnosis, management, and treatment solutions. After a 15-year career in aeronautical engineering, Philipp changed course and entered the medical device industry. “It was a big change, but one that I was happy to make. I had always been in a very corporate environment and wanted a more entrepreneurial type of role that would allow me to build something and be something different,” he says. “At I-MED, I realized there are unlimited possibilities.” While finance is his primary focus, Philipp can also be found helping in the company’s warehouse, engaging in philosophical discussions with the R&D team, and lending a passionate and insightful viewpoint in the sales and marketing department.

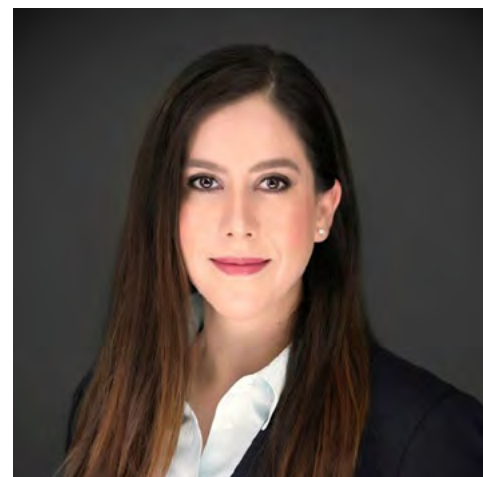


Under Philipp’s leadership, I-MED Pharma has expanded its global footprint into 30 countries and is now considered the number one Dry Eye company in Canada. I-MED Pharma is committed to advancing the science of dry eye. They are an innovation company who does all their own research and development, as well as manufacturing, which gives them complete control of their products and allows them to maintain the highest level of standards. A key value proposition of the company is that it sells directly to eye care professionals as opposed to selling on-line or to pharmacies, which makes I-MED Pharma very appealing to their target audience.

Philipp began his career at I-MED Pharma in 2016 as director of operations and quickly advanced to vice-president, and subsequently to president and COO. Today, he oversees the company’s operations with a focus on finance and business development, while also being responsible for implementing corporate strategy. With master’s degrees in both engineering and finance, Philipp has extensive experience in risk management, quality control, and product management. Born and raised in Austria, he speaks German, French, and English. Philipp’s multicultural and multifaceted background makes him the perfect fit to guide the company’s international expansion going forward to achieve their vision of becoming the most important ocular surface disease company in the world.

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Hailing from a long line of public servants, **Yolanda Apalategui Lugo** grew up learning about positions ranging from public safety to the legal industry. Inspired by this, Yolanda pursued her own career in the field. Earning a bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree in public administration, both from San Diego State University, Yolanda became the first female college graduate in her family. Since then, Yolanda’s career has grown into 20 successful years of government public service.



After getting her start at the San Diego Superior Court, Yolanda made it her mission to pursue excellence. She went on to gain a vast amount of experience in both the local and state governments, including policy and leadership roles at the City of San Diego and the California State Legislature. While serving the legislature as deputy chief of staff, Yolanda oversaw the management of two offices that provided nearly one million residents with government access. Today, Yolanda serves as the director of government and community affairs for the San Diego District Attorney’s Office, a newly created position where she has the unique opportunity to provide policy advice and strategic direction on issues that impact public safety and the impact public safety policies have on the community. Yolanda also serves as the bridge between DA’s office, the 18 cities and San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

In pursuit of this mission, Yolanda has been instrumental in elevating the DA’s message to underserved and hard-to-reach communities while building trust and meaningful partnerships. She works on policy and projects focused on crime prevention and victim protection in the areas of workplace justice, human trafficking, and the opioid epidemic. She also leads an effort to empower justice involved individuals with information in support of criminal record relief. With a myriad of responsibilities stretching from internal coordination to community collaboration, Yolanda’s work makes an immense difference in providing access to justice to all.

Yolanda sits on San Diego State University’s Alumni Advisory Board and participates in the university’s mentorship program. She is also a member of Women Give San Diego and MANA DE San Diego.

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When **Sarah Evans** found herself creating an international nonprofit, she was the first to admit she had no idea what she was doing. But as a self-described “overachiever,” she pushed forward anyway, because the goal of getting clean water infrastructure to rural, developing areas was too important to give up. “My family thought I was crazy for dropping a career to work on the other side of the planet, but I had a feeling my skillset could make a difference if I persisted.” And so she did, founding Well Aware 12 years ago—to great success. Since inception, the nonprofit continues to thrive, providing clean water and infrastructure to over 100 communities in East Africa. But she didn’t stop there. Once she realized how often clean water infrastructure breaks down in these regions, Sarah set her sights on changing the industry and founded a for-profit branch, Well Beyond, garnering sector-wide traction. “So many well-meaning organizations are working toward clean water for all, but most of these water systems fail. I didn’t see many people being proactive about this ‘Hidden Crisis’ and was compelled to take action, so we launched Well Beyond.” The Well Beyond App offers remote diagnostics and maintenance for off-grid water systems and is accessed directly by community members using the well. Getting real-time technical expertise, they can maintain the infrastructure via cell phone, reducing the need for outside technicians and getting ahead of issues to avoid costly repairs later. This patent-pending tool is the first of its kind and is already getting water systems back up and running within hours (as opposed to weeks), preventing long delays without water in places where it’s the only source. Today, the Well Beyond App is available worldwide and her background in law and securities has been extremely helpful in getting the businesses globally recognized. *Fast Company* recently recognized them in their *Ideas That Change the World* issue, the latest in a long line of international awards.



Sarah maintains positions on multiple prestigious boards like the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, and has been featured in Forbes, The New York Times, and many other publications.

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“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” - Chief Seattle. This is the guiding principle for SmartSort Technologies, Inc., co-founder and COO, **Cris Luce**. With the goal of becoming better stewards of the planet and its resources, the company is on a mission to solve sustainable materials management for a circular economy. By harnessing the power of patented AI software and hardware, SmartSort is revolutionizing the waste management space to address the problem of contamination and cost head-on. “We significantly reduce contamination, which permits the material to be reused in the manufacturing of goods or composting and, in turn, reduces cost,” he explains. SmartSort’s patented system for digital out-of-home post-consumer waste diversion directs and educates people on where to dispose of their trash—and in the simplest way. The display resides on the back of a trash can which has three options —recycle, compost, and landfill—essentially eliminating the guesswork of where to deposit your trash. It even features a data analytics and reporting component for the facilities.



The company is putting these innovative systems out for free, with an option to purchase and take part in the new revenue inflows the system introduces with advertisers. When it comes to developing efficiencies in material waste management, SmartSort Technologies is on the cutting edge as a leader in zero-waste to landfill solutions. «The problem with sustainability is that it has not been economically sustainable—until now,” Cris says.

Cris is on the board of both the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling and Keep the Colony Beautiful.

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Dirk Downing has focused his entire career on mental performance. In 2017, he obtained a PhD in health education and promotion specializing in sports psychology. The same year, he founded Zoning In: Peak Performance Coaching, which offers individualized approaches to mental mastery through performance psychology consultation. Dirk coaches people on how to be more consistent, deliver under pressure, overcome setbacks, and avoid burnout. "These individually tailored workouts are carefully crafted to boost performance in creative and highly effective ways," he explains. From athletes to coaches and business entrepreneurs to a variety of performers, Dirk has already helped hundreds of people nationwide to raise their game. And as a former competitive golfer and the author of "Train Your Brain: Your Path to Peak Performance," *Winning Mindset: Elite Strategies for Peak Performance*, he knows of what he speaks.

Prior to starting his own business, Dirk served as a mental performance coach for D1 athletes at the University of Missouri, and for high school athletes. He's since worked with collegiate golfers who have gone on to join the PGA, and high school athletes who have gone on to successful collegiate careers. Dirk also developed the mental training seminar "Building a Mental Golf Bag" for amateur golfers nationwide. As someone who helps others overcome mental obstacles, Dirk finds fulfillment in helping people maximize their performance. Game up.

Dirk holds a PhD in health education and promotion and an M.Ed. in sport and career counseling psychology from University of Missouri.

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Hadarou Sare is an award-winning research scientist and the founder and CEO of SpaceTIS. Named a *Top 10 Aerospace Company* by *Aerospace and Defense Review Magazine*, the company develops cutting-edge space technologies, including novel reusable and affordable rocket launch systems using water as the propellant, innovative thruster technologies, robotic spacecraft for in-space asteroid mining, rover for mining water on Mars and on the Moon, small satellites for earth and space exploration, space telescopes for exploring planets and small bodies in the solar system. With teams in the U.S., Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, Hadarou and his group of passionate innovators are leading the world into the future. In tandem with his own venture, for the past six years he's worked with NASA, where he developed algorithms that were applied to satellite images and used to find water on Mars. He worked with the Mars exploration group at NASA and helped NASA to select the best landing site for the 2020 Mars Rover Mission. He later joined the small bodies group at NASA and work on identifying scientific priorities and opportunities for the exploration of asteroids, comets, interplanetary dust, small satellites, and trans-Neptunian objects.

Driven to make the world a better place, Hadarou has also worked alongside other scientists and engineers on NASA's planetary defense goal, helping to protect our blue planet from dangerous asteroids that could cause catastrophic damage to the Earth. He is currently a research scientist at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center developing a robotic spacecraft for asteroid mining. As he continues his ongoing endeavor to invent and develop innovative technologies that have never been built before, Hadarou is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland College Park.

Hadarou started his PhD in aerospace engineering at SUNY University of New York before transferring to mechanical engineering at the University of Maryland College Park. He holds both master's and bachelor's degrees in planetary sciences from SUNY University, as well as a bachelor's in science and technologies and a master's in geomatics from the Higher Institute for Space Studies and Telecommunications.



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Victor Guadarrama is the co-founder of Versa Consulting Firm, which helps small businesses stay competitive in the ever-changing marketplace. The Las Vegas-based company specializes in the areas of organizational change, marketing, and transformational leadership for a growing number of clients nationwide. But he and co-founder Kerry Toribio are much more than the leaders of a thriving enterprise. They are passionate champions of small businesses and agents of positive change keenly focused on strategic planning and growth. “We go down deep into the organization to identify where they are now, where they want to be, and what needs to change to get them there,” he states. “Then, we put systems and processes in place and develop the marketing and advertising plan to help them achieve their goals.”

As someone who has been in the hospitality industry for over a decade, Victor comes from an entrepreneurial family who owned a restaurant for over 25 years. He’s traveled the country putting on real estate events for future investors, garnered experience leading cross functional teams, and also worked in the sales department at two resorts on the Las Vegas Strip. Now he’s bringing it all together to help promising enterprises flourish. “I’ve seen firsthand what small businesses go through. Helping them to succeed and thrive, that’s our hearts, our passion lies.”

Victor holds a bachelor’s from the University of San Diego and a master’s from Pepperdine University. He’s also a certified NLP practitioner.

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For 15 years, **Jereis Khawaja** worked up the ladder at a billion-dollar company in the oil and gas industry, from entry-level to vice president of global sales, until he decided to follow his passion of smoking meat. In the digital age, he realized a huge opportunity to disrupt the BBQ industry. Access to Texas BBQ was very limited to consumers across the USA, and his calling was to close the gap.

In 2020, Jereis took a leap of faith and started Truboy BBQ to provide an authentic Texas barbecue experience for everyone to enjoy in the comfort of their home. This fully e-commerce company draws its delicious products from Jereis’ own expertise in smoking meat over the years. Growing ~400% in 2021 and projected ~500% growth this year, Truboy now ships high-quality smoked meat, including halal options, delivered right to the doorsteps of people across the U.S. and Canada in just two days. This is made possible through a carefully designed chilling and packaging process that keeps the meat fresh and flavorful, all delivered in reusable materials. And it’s clear that consumers across North America are gobbling it up and asking for more.

Besides the explosive growth, Truboy BBQ was named one of FedEx’s *Top 100 Small Businesses* in 2022. They also partner with charitable organizations benefiting children’s education and cancer research. Jereis’ love for food shines through every bite. “Eating has always been social for me, so sharing my BBQ with people has been truly rewarding,” he says.



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David Craig is a decorated war veteran who served almost two decades in the United States Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. For 15 of those years, he worked for Mercedes, where he played a role in planning the delivery of the engine and transmissions for the BR167 projects, which is now their fourth-generation SUV, and did the assembly planning for the EVA2, which was the company’s first electric vehicle in the United States. He’s a skilled strategist, management consultant, planner, and implementer who is committed to the service of others. In 2019, David retired to a quiet life. Or so he thought. As he watched companies struggle with a skilled workforce shortage during the pandemic, he could not stand idly by. In August 2020, he launched Eminence Consulting & Business Solutions to help them—and it took off. The company develops advanced administrative, operational, and technical processes designed to assist clients with achieving their business vision. Founded on the premise of providing transformative client solutions, the firm leverages a unique combination of data analytics, critical thinking, strategic planning, and agile project management methodologies. Their growing number of clients is a testament to the company’s success working with automotive suppliers and distribution centers nationwide, including Volkswagen, ThyssenKrupp Automotive Systems of America, Weidmüller Interface, and International Automotive Components.



Eminence’s unique problem-solving approach serves as an anchor for a business that garnered a reputation for turning problems into working solutions. It’s one that combines David’s breadth of experience as a former operation and project manager, SAP consultant, and senior project engineer with the ability to identify issues that might be holding a company back. “By applying present and future trends, I can give clients a competitive advantage and provide sustainability,” David explains. “I treat the problem, not just the symptoms because if you solve the problem, you also cure the symptoms,” he says.



David is a project management professional with bachelor’s degrees in industrial engineering and project management. He also holds a master’s in information technology management.

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Aaron Sakaria started trading company, Fresh Industries, in 2009 in Shanghai, selling furniture to major retailers like West Elm, Anthropologie, and Urban Outfitters. When he and his wife, Kristina, moved to Minnesota, their plans to start a family inspired Aaron on the business front, too. They saw firsthand how tough it was for new moms to find a comfortable, functional recliner at a fair price, so Nurture& was born in 2020, focusing on the baby and kids’ market. Finally, in 2021, Aaron founded his third company, Northern Furniture Manufacturing, in the very town his wife’s family hails from in Wisconsin. The factory is in the industrial park that her grandfather helped develop in the 1950’s. “We wanted to have more control of our supply chain and were excited about creating jobs in the local community,” Aaron explains. Today, Fresh Industries has expanded to work directly with consumers for an easy, affordable experience, with the benefit of manufacturing furniture in the U.S. Nurture& is now run under the management of Aaron’s partners, while Fresh still retains a percentage of the company.



While juggling multiple thriving enterprises might seem a daunting task, Aaron does so seamlessly as they continue their upward trajectory. Aaron credits the great team he has built around him for the success. The companies grew 45% last year and this year, they’ve already seen a 360% increase from that. They stayed afloat through the COVID-19 pandemic, and Aaron is proud to have kept on all of his employees through that time. For Aaron, it’s all about the people, his customers, vendors, business partners, and employees. “Our employees are our best investment,” Aaron says. Their 99% staff retention rate is proof of that. With everyone taken care of so well, Aaron can focus on what he appreciates most: the creative aspect of developing new business plans to keep up with the evolving market.

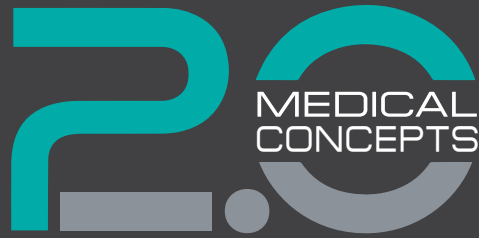


When not leading Fresh Industries, Aaron and his family enjoy traveling and sports, and he coaches his son’s hockey team. He also donates to Malawi-based Jacaranda Foundation, providing schooling for orphans; and Minneapolis-based Camp Odayn, providing camp programs for children with heart conditions.

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