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BUSINESS
Women
2020 AWARDS

CAREER ACHIEVER
PEG LANGHAMMER

A believer
in change
PAGE 4

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When it comes to leadership, *she* *means business.*

*Congratulations to Rogean Makowski and every
honoree of this year's Business Women Awards.*



Rogean has built a remarkable career helping individuals, families and institutions meet their financial needs – and serving as a role model for countless women in business. We congratulate her and all the honorees of this important event, and thank them for all they do to help the Providence region and its communities.

ROGEAN B. MAKOWSKI
SVP, Senior Fiduciary Services Officer



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PRESENTING SPONSOR



Webster Bank congratulates this year's Business Women honorees. You are helping so many women make this time their time, and serving as role models for so many — in Rhode Island, New England and across the country. We're proud to be part of such an important event, and we thank you for everything you're doing to help our industry and communities move forward.

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CCK is proud to partner with PBN in sponsoring the 2020 Business Women Awards. We celebrate the hard work, dedication, and invaluable contributions of this year's honorees to their companies, industries, and the Rhode Island business community. Congratulations to the 2020 Business Women Award winners!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

These women accustomed to leading change

AMID NATIONWIDE PROTESTS over racial injustice and police brutality, it's hard to imagine two community leaders whose experience with systemic change better match the times than Day One Executive Director Peg Langhammer and Ann M. Kashmanian, Brown Medicine's CEO.



Langhammer, the 2020 Career Achiever, grew up in the 1960s strongly influenced by that decade's civil rights movement.

"I developed, at a young age, a core belief that I need to be involved in social change," she told PBN.

When the Rhode Island Rape Crisis Center needed an executive director in 1980, it was a natural fit for Langhammer.

She's led the nonprofit through a host of changes in the four decades since, including its renaming to Day One in 2005. The fight against sexual violence is never-ending and Langhammer has been at the forefront of community efforts to improve the state's understanding of and response to it.

And like all career achievers, there's no time to rest on her laurels. Along with her annual work on legislative changes, she's eager to grow Day One's volunteer and mentoring programs.

Just as passion and commitment fuel Langhammer, so too do they drive Kashmanian.

She's been at the center of systemic changes in health care delivery and accountability since arriving at Brown Medicine in 2016.

Rebalancing an organizational system so it's more supportive of physicians, improves patient care and reins in costs is a monumental task she's excelled at. Kashmanian has managed to bring those sometimes-competing health care interests together to introduce a new patient portal and expand telemedicine options. Her willingness to mentor others has also fostered a shared commitment that's been crucial to the nonprofit's success.

The presenting sponsor for the 2020 Business Women program is Webster Bank. The partner sponsor is Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick Ltd.

Michael Mello

Michael Mello
Editor

Langhammer making a difference in society since day one

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

PEG LANGHAMMER was always driven to make a difference.

She grew up in the 1960s influenced by the civil rights movement, and later the Vietnam War. That passion drove her to get involved in marches and demonstrations, both locally and nationally, she said.

"I believe that I developed, at a young age, a core belief that I needed to be involved in social change in whatever work I did," Langhammer said.

Langhammer once spent time helping to manage an inner-city social-service, meals and shelter program, even serving briefly as a prison chaplain. During that time, she became involved in women's issues and worked as a volunteer in one of the first domestic violence shelters in the state, Langhammer said.

When the position of executive director at the Rhode Island Rape Crisis Center became available in 1980, Langhammer saw it as a natural fit for her.

The Providence-based organization changed its name to **Day One** in 2005 so it can continue to grow and expand upon its programming to include more at-risk groups, including children and adolescents. Today, Langhammer continues to promote the work done through Day One – the only agency in the state specifically organized to deal with the issue of sexual violence as a community concern.

Day One offers clinical treatment, crisis intervention, court, law enforcement and legal advocacy, and prevention education services. As the state's sexual assault coalition, Day One advocates for public policy, legislative and systemic changes to improve the state's response to cases of sexual assault and abuse. Additionally, the agency educates the public about sexual violence, human trafficking and child exploitation.

A major program development that has taken place within the past 25 years is the establishment of the Children's Advocacy Center. The center utilizes a multidisciplinary approach to cases of child sexual abuse by working with the R.I. Office of the Attorney General; law enforcement; the R.I. Department of Children, Youth and Families; and mental health and medical representatives.

"Currently, the [center] is available to



BELIEVING IN CHANGE: Day One Executive Director Peg Langhammer continues to advocate for systematic changes as to how Rhode Island addresses sexual assault and abuse. COURTESY PEG LANGHAMMER

children under the age of 14, consistent with Rhode Island statute," Langhammer said. "We have been working this year with our partners and the R.I. General Assembly to increase the [maximum] age to 18. The legislation was successfully heard in the House just prior to business closings due to [the] COVID-19 [pandemic]. We believe it would have fared equally well in the Senate. If the legislation isn't considered this session, we're confident of its passage next year."

Another project in the works is a major expansion of Day One's volunteer opportunities, including the launch of a statewide mentor program. Currently consisting of a 24-hour victim advocacy program and a mentor program serving only sex-trafficking survivors,

Langhammer believes it's time for Day One to create an extensive volunteer and mentoring program.

"We constantly hear from people in both private and public sectors who want to be involved in the organization," she said. "Day One cannot end sexual violence alone and we are excited to develop new partnerships."

Cara LaBella, Day One's grants officer responsible for raising funds to support the agency's work, said she gets to see firsthand Langhammer's dedication and drive to help others.

"I have known Peg since she hired me to oversee Day One's fundraising efforts in 2016," LaBella said. "The work Peg does in fulfillment of the agency's mission is incredibly important. She's thoughtful about and intentional in her work, is inclusive, seeks counsel and listens. She is also a relationship-builder and problem-solver. She believes in a good world and doing her part to make it a better one."

In the end for Langhammer, it all comes back to doing her part to make a difference.

"I think my passion about my work, and life, is about not just as an individual but as a partner with friends and colleagues just trying to make our community, our country, our world a better place," she said. "I am just fortunate that I have been able to work and make a living doing something I so passionately believe in." ■

'I believe that I developed, at a young age, a core belief that **I needed to be involved** in social change in whatever work I did.'

PEG LANGHAMMER, Day One executive director

*"Define success on your own terms,
achieve it by your own rules, and
build a life you're proud to live."*

-Anne Sweeney, Former Co-Chair,
Disney Media Networks



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PAYING IT FORWARD: Brown Medicine CEO Ann M. Kashmanian had multiple mentors help guide her throughout her career. Now, she's helping fellow women grow within the workplace. PBN FILE PHOTO/MIKE SKORSKI

A guiding light through complex health care

BY ALEXANDER CASTRO | Contributing Writer

ANN M. KASHMANIAN, CEO of **Brown Medicine**, has played a vital role in professional lives of the people that she's mentored, helping them to navigate the maze-like structure of modern health care.

Maintaining organizational order and flow among the numerous physicians and offices that comprise Brown Medicine has been one of Kashmanian's chief concerns since she arrived in 2016, originally as the East Providence-based nonprofit's chief financial officer. Her improvements include hiring a new chief information officer, retooling senior management for better synergy with division directors and helping those directors up their revenue.

"You have to continually look to where you're moving as an organization," Kashmanian said in regard to her approach.

Now as CEO, Kashmanian has crafted a strategic plan for Brown Medicine. The organization is focusing on two points: Supporting physicians and expanding patient services.

"We really looked at streamlining operations and making sure they were supportive of the physicians," she said. The aim, Kashmanian said, is to ensure "physicians give everyone the support they need but at a reasonable cost to physician groups."

"She's probably the most diplomatic person I've ever met, and she truly leads by example," said Felicia Catallozzi, administrator at Brown Neurology, one of Brown Medicine's partner organizations.

At the same time, Kashmanian said Brown Medicine has been "very cognizant of improving [the] patient experience." One means of doing this is "[pivoting] the organization to a new way of delivering care," she said, such as introducing a robust patient portal and telemedicine options.

Rolling out sweeping systematic changes such as these requires not only vision but an understanding of specificity. The detail-heavy complexity of health care finance was appealing to Kashmanian when she was obtaining her master's degree at Northeastern University.

"There's a lot of intricacies in the finance itself," she said. "There's a lot of strategy [involved]."

An inclination toward nonprofits further honed her talents for intellectually demanding accounting. Brown Medicine, as a nonprofit multispecialty medical group, is a fusion of both fields.

Kashmanian's strategic acumen was forged in the decades prior to Brown. She spent 16 years with Lifespan Corp., where she held executive finance positions at three different hospitals. Her final role was senior vice president of financial operations and care management

for all of Lifespan.

As that job history might suggest, Kashmanian is sagacious when it comes to the financial and managerial scaffolding of Rhode Island health care. Or, as Catallozzi said: "She truly embodies every kind of qualification for a mentor. She comes with a lot of knowledge and she's willing to share."

Catallozzi worked in skilled nursing care before her move to Brown Neurology – a "much different background," she said. Kashmanian's expertise and guidance were invaluable as Catallozzi learned the ropes of contracting and operations.

Kashmanian entered the health care industry in an era when even fewer women occupied leadership positions. She's since seen the growth of woman-to-woman support in the workplace, and she believes opportunities such as the Women's Summit at Bryant University and The United Way's Women United group are valuable for young professional women.

Kashmanian said her early career lacked women role models, but this hardly means she was without direction. "I was fortunate to have a number of mentors who helped guide me in my career, both male and female," she said. Arthur Sampson, president of The Miriam Hospital, was one of those mentors and a major influence, Kashmanian said.

For Kashmanian, mentoring is a form of "giving back," and it involves actively promoting and recognizing people's contributions.

"When people know you're interested in their career, they work harder for your organization," she said. "To be able to identify talent and nurture talent ... strengthens your organization. In the long term, it's good for everybody."

As Catallozzi sees it, Kashmanian has a vastness of knowledge to share. "I would say she's like the sphinx. She knows all. I can't think of one thing that she doesn't know," Catallozzi said. ■

'I would say ...
[Ann Kashmanian is]
like the sphinx.
She knows all.'

FELICIA CATALLOZZI,
Brown Neurology administrator



Tara DeMoura
Vice President, Employer Business Segment
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A-LISTER: OPTX Rhode Island CEO Lynne Diamante has networked with the socially elite, including past Miss USA winner Olivia Culpo, and gave custom Cartier and Gucci glasses to Tony Bennett as an invited guest for his early 90th birthday celebration.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Bringing Rodeo Drive to Hartford Avenue

BY KIMBERLEY EDGAR | Contributing Writer

IF ANYONE COULD represent three blocks of 100 world-class stores clustered in the heart of Beverly Hills within a three-story, red-brick building in Johnston, it is **OPTX Rhode Island's** CEO.

Having been around the glitz of red carpets and runways all her life, Lynne Diamante wanted to serve up celebrity-style shopping in Rhode Island. A 24,000-square-foot building on Hartford Avenue focused on premiere eye care, including Rhode Island's only custom bladeless laser cataract surgery and a first-floor gallery of seemingly endless luxury specs and shades, accomplishes that.

Tiffany, Chanel, Dior, Burberry, Dolce & Gabanna and the exclusive blueLOVE label Diamante created and launched in 2013 are among the more than 1,000 frames that OPTX carries.

"We were always aiming for that quintessential, world-famous Rodeo Drive experience," Diamante said.

A past beauty queen, U.S. Supreme Court-credentialed barrister, Bravo Network "Game of Crowns" reality TV star and more, Diamante calls OPTX Rhode Island, which employs 20-30 people, her crowning professional achievement. Giving birth to and raising her daughter, Giulia, takes top honors, she said.

Instead of building the business from the ground up, she reached for the stars to establish a national presence for OPTX Rhode Island, then brought it home.

"For us, the pyramid was upside down," Diamante said.

It all began as what her husband and OPTX co-founder and president, Giulio Diamante, described as a fixer-upper – a dinner date arranged by their fathers.

Within a minute, Giulio Diamante knew he wanted to marry her; he did in 1998. That same year, they launched their advanced high-tech ophthalmology practice in an

800-square-foot office on Rhode Island Hospital's campus.

By 2002, the two were eyeing a 1,700-square-foot site, more than double the size of their original office. Moving into their new home in an Atwood Avenue medical building allowed them to carry prescription and nonprescription frames and fill patients' orders there.

Wanting to represent celebrity clients but with few prospects in Rhode Island, Diamante stepped back from practicing general law to raise Giulia and research OPTX's next steps.

They included an even larger boutique, built from scratch, with crisp navy blue awnings and a manicured lawn outside and luxurious carpets, glittering mirrors, sleek glass shelves

and comfortable sofas inside.

In 2010, years of research in stores and cities worldwide culminated in the opening of OPTX Rhode Island, at 1277 Hartford Ave., occupying two floors of the three-floor building.

Coronated Mrs. Rhode Island United States that year, Diamante tapped into her Rolodex of contacts dating to her 1991 reign as Miss Rhode Island USA and secured exclusive sunglasses sponsorships for OPTX at the Miss USA and Miss Universe pageants, from 2011 to 2015.

She rubbed shoulders, snapped photos and networked with the glitterati – including Donald Trump, then-part pageant owner. She was there when hometown Miss Rhode Island USA Olivia Culpo won Miss USA, then Miss Universe, in 2012. When pageant hosts announced the OPTX semifinalist before a live television audience of 17 million in 2013, Diamante was thrilled.

Rock stars. Super models. Sports stars. Celebrity icons. Diamante has styled many A-list clients and will hop on a plane to hand-deliver glasses in time for red-carpet appearances and other occasions.

In June 2016, the Diamantes gave custom Cartier and Gucci glasses to Tony Bennett as invited guests for his early 90th birthday celebration when he received the Entertainment Icon Award at the Friars Club in New York.

Diamante continues to oversee website development, marketing campaigns, photo shoots, in-house design for OPTX-only eyeglasses and sunglasses, and event-planning and fund-raising for causes she loves – including St. Jude's Children's Hospital and the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"[Lynne's] creativity is second to none," Giulio Diamante said. "I see people trying to emulate her all the time." ■

'[Lynne's] creativity is
second to none.'

**GIULIO DIAMANTE,
OPTX Rhode Island
co-founder and president**

Murphy a cut above the rest

BY ALEXANDER CASTRO | Contributing Writer

BEAUTY IS HARD WORK. Just ask hairstylist Michelle Murphy, who remembers her nascent years working “as many hours as they needed me to work” at Blue Sky Spaworks in Warwick.

The days were long, but so were the bonds she formed there. Murphy has cultivated a faithful client base in her nearly two decades of experience. Some of her return customers are practically family.

“I have people who have been with me since my son was born [18 years ago],” Murphy said.

At 17, Murphy began attending Warwick Beauty Academy. After a few years apprenticing, she began her hairstyling career proper, renting a chair for almost 15 years.

Murphy’s warm feelings for her craft are visible in her business, **Roots Hair Salon** in Cranston, which had its grand opening in December 2019, revitalizing the spot Salon O previously occupied before it shuttered last summer.

Murphy had been with Salon O for seven years – just one of the

salon’s 20-plus staff that counted stylists, colorists and nail techs among its ranks. In addition to threatening livelihoods, Salon O’s closure would have broken up a seasoned team of beauticians.

“For people to be displaced, and try and find a place to work, I think that would have been traumatizing,” Murphy said. “I jumped in and said, ‘Hey, we have people that have all been together, and we want to stay together.’”

The future seemed grim, but there was a possible solution. Owning a salon was a “forever dream,” Murphy said. She admits the massive Oaklawn Avenue building was not the space she dreamt of buying all those years. But things “happened quickly,” Murphy said, and she soon found herself leading Roots Hair Salon.



STAYING TOGETHER: Roots Hair Salon owner Michelle Murphy retained 17 hairstylists from when Salon O closed at the location that Roots currently occupies. Murphy wanted to maintain camaraderie among the stylists.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Seventeen of Salon O’s stylists returned to work at Roots, and Murphy added six new hires. The celebratory mood, though, was halted when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived a few months later, temporarily closing Roots’ doors through the spring.

“I feel like I’ve been so lost over the past month and [a] half,” Murphy said. “[My customers] are so special to me. They’re kind of like extended family. You really form a

special bond with people.”

Those “special bonds” include the camaraderie among stylists. Though Murphy is proud to realize a lifelong wish, Roots is not about her own ego.

“It’s about all of us as a group,” Murphy said. ■

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Shannon Sullivan, MSW, LICSW, CCM, interim COO at Women & Infants Hospital and former Vice President of Operations at Kent Hospital and Care New England, for being honored as part of the 2020 PBN Business Women Awards.

During her tenure at Kent, Shannon has led several operational initiatives that have resulted in reduced readmissions, decreased length of stay and increased operational efficiencies. Her passion for improving systems to affect the patient experience of care continues to help Kent and Care New England in its mission to provide exceptional patient care.

Her work more recently during the coronavirus pandemic included opening a field hospital in Cranston. She worked tirelessly to ensure that the hospital was set up in the event we encountered a surge.

Shannon is a valued colleague, one who takes great pride in her work and is never without a smile. Shannon is always willing to take on additional work and never complains. She serves as a great mentor to other up and coming leaders within the organization and we are lucky to have be part of our team.

Shannon has been working Care New England since 2002 where she started as a clinical social worker at Women & Infants. She has been in various roles at Care New England including the Executive Director of Care Coordination and Chief Access Officer.



Care New England

Butler Hospital | Kent Hospital | Women & Infants Hospital
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LEAN ON ME: Webster Bank N.A. Senior Vice President and Senior Fiduciary Officer Rogean Makowski relies on a philosophy called “lean into change,” focusing efforts on how best to infuse innovation, process and risk management, and problem resolution into each client relationship. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Early change in direction leads to wealth of success

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

ROGEAN MAKOWSKI wasn’t always certain what career path she would follow.

The Rhode Island native knew she wanted to work in an environment that afforded her the opportunity for continuous growth and the ability to be a contributing partner in the business’s success.

Since she enjoys working with people and problem-solving, Makowski said wealth management ended up being a perfect career choice for her.

Today, as **Webster Bank N.A.’s** senior vice president and senior fiduciary officer, Makowski utilizes her more than 40 years of experience assisting individuals, families and institutions in meeting and exceeding their financial needs. Had it not been for a nudge from a neighbor years ago, Makowski’s path might have been quite different.

“My career progression was a little bit of a fluke,” she said. “I was actually interviewing with the [Central Intelligence Agency] when our neighbor, who sat on the board of a local bank, set up an interview in the wealth-management department. The rest is history.”

Once Makowski got a taste of the business, she was hooked, she said.

Makowski said the clients she works with are all “unique,” so the solutions she provides are customized to their needs and because the clients’ needs and lives are “constantly changing.”

“You have the ability to work closely with clients throughout their lifetime,” Makowski said.

At Webster Bank, Makowski likes to rely on what she calls “lean into change,” the idea of focusing efforts on how best to infuse innovation, process and risk management, and problem resolution into each client relationship with the goal to reinforce the value she and her colleagues provide.

Also, Makowski has introduced a larger focus on goals-based planning by offering advice for all forms of financial decision-making, including budgeting, next-generation education, emotional-investment guidance, financial planning and lending.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly impacted how Makowski conducts business, she said one thing hasn’t changed.

“My primary focus is staying in contact with clients,” she said. “These are unprecedented times. While most of my colleagues and I are working remotely, we continue to address clients’ immediate needs timely and accurately.”

Makowski also said candid conversations are being had with clients about how the virus may affect them, their family, the community and their financial resources.

Now more than ever, Makowski’s ability to lead enables her to keep her team not only motivated and focused on the task at hand but safe

at the same time.

“Leadership, to me, means identifying the key strengths of the people you work with and supporting their independence to apply those strengths to advance their career and become more engaged in the success of the business,” Makowski said. “It means offering guidance, support and encouragement to try new things and to take on more responsibility, and accepting that everyone, including yourself, makes mistakes. We learn from our mistakes and we move on.”

Webster Bank Senior Vice President and Senior Credit Executive Virginia Roberts, who was part of the team that recruited Makowski to the bank, said Makowski’s integrity, desire to assist clients and ability to lead a team of colleagues to accomplish goals makes her a strong leader.

“Rogean helps families and organizations achieve their financial goals,” Roberts said. “The path to success is many times complicated and subject to various laws and regulations, as well as wishes of the families and organizations. Rogean’s desire to help, as well as her expert knowledge in managing through a complex set of rules, is a combination that is essential for the success of her clients. Rogean puts clients first. It is what comes to her naturally.”

Makowski said she plans to continue building upon existing relationships while working with new clients in need of the bank’s services.

“I love the interaction with clients,” Makowski said. “I know how hard it is to identify, manage and measure the success of your top priorities in this ever-changing world. So, if I can be a partner in helping clients to prioritize, accomplish and rethink their plans when necessary, I am truly fulfilled.” ■

‘Leadership, to me, means **identifying the key strengths** of the people you work with.’

ROGEAN MAKOWSKI, Webster Bank N.A.
senior vice president and senior fiduciary officer

Understanding risk, seeing reward

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL | Contributing Writer

FOR AMY WALSH, senior vice president and relationship manager at **Bank of America Corp.**, serving customers as a resource for success is a natural extension of the business. Whether it's providing support services, offering resources for growth and management or connecting clients to each other, it's all part of a larger goal.

"I love hearing the stories of people and why they do what they do," Walsh said. "As time goes on, it's my job to be in a relationship with clients and be invested in their success."

Walsh, noting she is willing to take risks, said she would advise younger people to not shy away from things that they don't necessarily like, and be "willing to take it on."

When her son, Nicholas, was born with autism in 2007, she took four years off to care for him, and ended up a part-owner in a small pet merchandise company. Selling off her stake to work at Bank of America taught her some new lessons in just how personal business

banking can be.

"After leveraging your personal finances, you understand the risk a lot more. A financial loan isn't just an immediate need; it does have long-term consequences," she said.

One of Walsh's biggest client programs is promoting the benefits of following environmental, social and governance factors in investing and in business decisions, and also promoting diversity and inclusion. Businesses using these fundamentals can avoid bankruptcy and see better returns, Walsh said.

After attending a governor's town hall addressing access to special-needs services, Walsh



TAKING CHANCES: Bank of America Corp. Senior Vice President and Relationship Manager Amy Walsh says young people should not shy away from things they don't like, and should be willing to take those challenges on.
PBN PHOTO/KATE WHITNEY LUCEY

realized that she could bring that awareness to clients and the industry, as well as make introductions between advocates and businesses.

Walsh said it was "eye-opening" to learn about the number of autistic people with advanced degrees who are unemployed, but also kept hearing businesses say how hard it is to find workers.

Walsh connected with other

autism advocates at the state and local level and together they are forming a new team of experts to offer companies awareness information, hiring assistance, accessibility and assistive-technology consultation. ■

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to Ann Kashmanian on being named
"Outstanding Mentor"
and to all the winners of PBN's
Business Women Awards



Ann Kashmanian
Chief Executive Officer

Ann, we're proud of your achievements, success and strong leadership as our Chief Executive Officer and valued member of the Senior Management Team at Brown Medicine.

Brown Medicine, Inc. is a nonprofit primary care, specialty outpatient and subspecialty medical group practice with over 200 physicians and multiple patient care locations across Rhode Island. Brown Medicine is part of Brown Physicians, Inc., a clinical, research and teaching affiliate of the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.



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No problem too tough for Sullivan to take on

BY WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL | Contributing Writer

SHANNON SULLIVAN, interim chief operating officer at **Women & Infants Hospital**, is the go-to person when there is no time to waste.

Sullivan, in a month's time, assembled a team and transformed the former Citizens Financial Group Inc. office in Cranston into a field hospital, with a total of 335 beds to handle a potential surge of COVID-19 patients during the ongoing pandemic.

"I hope we never have to open it," Sullivan said. "But I know it's there for the community and it's something I'm proud of."

Having worked with Sullivan for more than five years, Care New England Health System CEO and President Dr. James E. Fanale said she was a "collegial leader in the making. She has the ability to bring smart people together and they follow her. And I saw she always accomplished the goals she set out to achieve."

Sullivan started her career 20 years ago as a social worker in the neonatal intensive care unit at Women & Infants Hospital. It isn't often that a clinical social worker moves into an operational role, but her training and time spent getting to know patients and staff were great experiences for a leadership role.

"I like to be a problem-solver," Sullivan said. "I want to work with the community, take care of them. And when I made the jump to operations, those [traits crossed] over: The active listening, the short-term and long-term goal-planning used to strategically figure out how to get families where they need to be."

A career-defining moment happened when Sullivan was about 30 years old. She recalled a chief nurse bringing her into her office inquiring why Sullivan's name kept being mentioned

during meetings.

Soon, Sullivan was recommended for a director of patient and family support services position. Sullivan said she initially thought that position wasn't for her and she was going to be an NICU social worker "until the day I die."

"But, one of my greatest attributes is that I have a very supportive husband who pushes me to be better every day and believes in me," Sullivan said.

In April 2016, Sullivan became system director for care management and worked to establish Care New England's accountable health organization, Integra. Two years ago, she was promoted to vice president of operations at Kent County Memorial Hospital and Care New England.

'I want to work with the community, take care of them.'

SHANNON SULLIVAN,
Women & Infants Hospital
interim chief operating officer

COMBATING COVID-19: Shannon Sullivan, interim chief operating officer at Women & Infants Hospital, was at the forefront of helping set up a field hospital at the former Citizens Bank building in Cranston to handle a possible influx of COVID-19 patients. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Sullivan gained notoriety when she was tasked with reorganizing the operating room at Kent Hospital, addressing quality issues and boosting morale, as well as improving on-time surgical starts, staff engagement and successful outcomes.

"Jim Fanale gave me the opportunity," Sullivan said. "He said, 'I need you down there,' and it was a defining moment. I wasn't comfortable; I was swimming out of my lane, and yet I wanted to prove I could do it."

Sullivan is known for being funny and friendly, a helpful trait when it comes to leadership.

"Part of getting people to trust me is to let them see me. You can't be in business mode all the time. ... These jobs are too hard not to have fun and celebrate," she said.

Because so many people helped her career grow, Sullivan eagerly pays it forward to her 10 colleagues, mentoring them to grow into new opportunities.

Sullivan is especially invested in working mothers, as she has three children of her own between the ages of 5 and 10, and understands the challenges of being a working mom.

"But I never tell people to make the same choices I did. It's not easy, it's not for everybody; my choices are not yours," she said. "I almost have the perfect formula, including a very dependable nanny, so that my husband's career [as a high school administrator] can flourish, too."

"My kids are my reason. I need to model for them. I want my daughters to know they can be a working mom and get it done and advance their career." ■

Putting patients first is Chang's mantra

BY JENNIFER L. GRYBOWSKI | Contributing Writer

IN JUST TWO YEARS, Dr. Caroline Chang has gone from practicing in an insurance-based office to founding the **Rhode Island Dermatology Institute** in East Greenwich, the first direct-care dermatology practice in Rhode Island, treating more than 500 patients currently.

While part of an insurance-based practice, Chang said increasing rules and regulations have created massive amounts of administrators for patients, physicians and office staff. She said she felt “powerless” and was becoming “part of the system,” and not a physician making medical choices.

“I wanted to be able to spend more time with my patients and treat them, regardless of what issues they have, regardless of what is covered or not covered,” Chang said.

Chang began exploring other options and learned about direct-care medicine, which allows patients access to a board-certified physician without the usual restrictions that insurance companies might impose. Because of this, Chang

sees fewer patients but it allows for more-personalized care, she said.

No referrals are needed, and Chang said patients can often get into the office sooner than planned. She said she expects lots of doctors, including primary care physicians, will follow this model more and more in the future.

As a business owner, part of the direct-care model means Chang not only sees patients but is responsible for all aspects of the micro-practice.

“She wears every hat in her office, from bookkeeper to janitor to receptionist to doctor,” said Mark C. Doorley of Doorley Insurance Agency in East Greenwich. “She does it all. It’s a lot to juggle.”

Chang said what she enjoys most in her business is working



FAST TRACK: Dr. Caroline Chang has seen her direct-care dermatology practice grow to treating more than 500 patients. COURTESY DR. CAROLINE CHANG

with patients, particularly diagnosing, and removing, cancer and seeing patients through the entire treatment. In fact, Chang spent two years conducting melanoma research at New York University Medical Center during her training.

“I’m passionate about helping my patients look good and feel their best and feel comfortable. Sometimes people come in for non-medical concerns and I find skin cancer,” Chang said. “That’s a skill

that I have honed over the years and is something I’m proud of.”

Outside of the office, Chang serves on the advisory board of MomDocFamily at Rhode Island Hospital, and is a member of the Rhode Island Dermatological Society and the Rhode Island Medical Women’s Association. ■



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Pranzi Catering and Events co-owner and CEO Lisa Marie Mattiello partners with local high schools to provide internships to challenged students and works with several nonprofit organizations on their events.

COURTESY PRANZI CATERING AND EVENTS

Making events special is all in the family

BY JENNIFER L. GRYBOWSKI | Contributing Writer

LISA MARIE MATTIELLO has always been drawn to hospitality.

She first cooked for her family at a young age and then started out as a dishwasher at a restaurant, working her way up in the industry.

Not one to sit still, the co-owner and CEO of Providence-based Pranzi Inc. – which operates **Pranzi Catering and Events** – said the thing she enjoys most about her job is that it's really fast-paced.

"I wear a lot of different hats," she said. "It's never the same day twice in this industry."

Mattiello said she also loves being a part of special events, calling them "always such a happy thing."

"It's always about family and friends, communities together, celebrations of life," Mattiello said. "We sell fun and happiness."

Mattiello founded Pranzi Catering in 1997 and due to overwhelming success, expanded in 2018, opening Pranzi Tents & Events. Pranzi handles over 6,000 events annually, and employs 75 full-time and 100 part-time employees.

Mattiello thinks what makes her a great leader is her ability to surround herself with great staff.

"When we pick our team, the people are really vested," she said. "This is a family-owned company and we have a lot of family members that work together. My team does [its] best when it's super crazy and they really jump on board and everyone is drinking the 'Pranzi juice.'"

In fact, she said, the whole team is right there for her when operations are at their busiest.

"If we work 90 hours, we work 90 hours; if we work 40, we work 40," she said. "Everyone is on board for success. We work smarter, not harder, so whatever resources they need

to do their work, we bring in what we need to get it done."

Pranzi sales consultant Steve Macchioni sees Mattiello in action firsthand.

"She oversees everything," Macchioni said. "Nothing gets done without her approval but at the same time, it's a great balance in which she gives the staff the leeway to do what they need to do. It's a great workplace environment where everyone's ego is checked at the door. People stay for a long time under her leadership, and I think the company is just going to blossom in spite of hard times."

Mattiello credits the support of her family for her success. Her husband, Nick, joined her in the family business, taking on the finances and administrative tasks, and her children are

always willing to help. Macchioni said once Mattiello's husband came on board, it really allowed her to build the front-house business.

"Once she was able to do that, there was no stopping her," Macchioni said. "She's always trying to reinvent the business. She's always innovating."

Mattiello said innovation is something she thrives on, noting that there is always a "new vision" to put out to the public.

"You have to create a masterpiece, designing the look of the flowers, food, everything to make sure the event has a cohesiveness," Mattiello said. "Half of the time when my clients come in, they don't know what they want or what to expect, but we build a beautiful experience."

Macchioni agreed. He said Mattiello is a "calming influence" for clients, who are often nervous and apprehensive when they first arrive.

"She assesses their needs, brings them from A to Z and makes them feel very comfortable, and she has trained all her sales reps to do the same things," Macchioni said. "She always tries to put the needs of the clients first and she goes above and beyond because she wants to make the event memorable. She takes every event we do and puts her own personal stamp on it."

But it's not only the business that is important to Mattiello; it's the community as well. Pranzi has partnered with local high schools to provide internships to challenged students and works with several nonprofit organizations on their events.

"We love to give back to the community," she said. "If you do good, good comes back. You have to pay it forward." ■

'It's always about family and friends, communities together, celebrations of life. **We sell fun and happiness.**'

LISA MARIE MATTIELLO,
Pranzi Catering and Events co-owner and CEO



LABOR INTENSIVE:

Among the many roles that Stacie Collier, professional personnel partner at Nixon Peabody LLP, has held with the firm is co-chair of the labor and employment practice group.

PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Practice makes perfect for Collier

BY KIMBERLEY EDGAR | Contributing Writer

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE one of America's top lawyers feeling less-than.

But that's how Stacie Collier described a recent moment when she learned an acquaintance organized the seemingly perfect scavenger hunt for her kids during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The professional personnel partner at law firm **Nixon Peabody LLP** worried she failed her biggest clients – her two sons – because she hadn't coordinated similar quarantine activities for them.

"As women, we take a lot on and think we have lots to prove," Collier said. "We suffer from perfectionism."

But colleagues and clients agree. Collier is not suffering; she is succeeding.

Consider the fact that Collier was Nixon Peabody's first associate in its labor-employment group when she joined in 2000 and, after making partner in 2005, went on to lead more than 70 lawyers nationwide as co-chair of Nixon Peabody's Labor and Employment Practice group.

Collier also helped Nixon Peabody win acclaim for diversity and inclusion initiatives – including retaining women lawyers who opt out mid-career – to count among five firms tapped worldwide to redefine their profession's approach to diversity and inclusion through the Move the Needle Fund.

A 1997 graduate of the University of Connecticut School of Law, Collier has spent most of her career with Nixon Peabody working out of its Providence office.

Experience working for the R.I. Department of Labor and Training during school breaks from Syracuse University – she graduated magna cum laude a semester early in December 1993 – has informed her work.

She teaches clients to avoid liability and lawsuits by creating better work environments. Seminars include

harassment avoidance and other subjects related to the National Labor Relations Act.

"Stacie can see the complexities in the situation, but she also can boil it down to the core components that really matter," said David G. Himsey, AAA Northeast's senior vice president of human resources.

He and others agree that Collier's sense of humor is winsome.

Andrew Prescott, managing partner at the Providence office, said she drew laughs while making her point during training sessions on appropriate and inappropriate ways of looking at someone in the workplace.

"She used her elevator eyes in our demonstration, looking me over from head to toe – depicting an inappropriate interaction," he said. "People found it instructive and funny."

Collier also is known for paying it forward – taking the investment others made in her and returning dividends by mentoring others.

"I've gotten to be a very good delegator as a

necessity," Collier said. "I've learned you need to leverage your team. Being out in front on everything might make me look good – or bad. But it doesn't help the rest of the team to grow, and it doesn't give them opportunities. I can't do everything – I just can't."

Following the November 2016 announcement of one partner's retirement, Collier received the professional personnel partner reins to drive the firm's recruitment, development and retention of top lawyers.

Nixon Peabody directors and partners from Boston to Los Angeles – and around the globe – turn to Collier for wisdom, making important, yet often difficult, decisions impacting careers of the firm's lawyers.

To develop cutting-edge policies around key strategic initiatives ranging from management to policy to compensation, Collier travels to confer with other firm leaders – all while counseling and training her clients and representing them at depositions, administrative and judicial hearings, mediations and in other matters.

"Stacie has achieved what no Nixon Peabody firm partner has done in the [professional personnel partner] – or similar – role previously," said Prescott, who helped hire and mentor Collier. "While holding this key and

demanding leadership position, Stacie has maintained a robust and successful legal practice. Stacie could have given up most of her day-to-day legal practice and focused solely on her PPP role. That role is, by itself, a full-time job.

"But Stacie's dedication to her clients led her to conclude that she would continue on a daily basis to counsel clients, conduct training sessions for employers, and represent clients at depositions ... mediations and hearings." ■

**'I've gotten to be a
very good delegator
as a necessity.'**

**STACIE COLLIER, Nixon Peabody LLP
professional personnel partner**

Fast thinking leads to greater outcomes

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

TARA DEMOURA HAS GAINED broad and deep experience in her two decades at **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island** in order to get significant deals done.

DeMoura, recently promoted to vice president of employer segment, is particularly proud that she led the team that brought in two major clients, the state of Rhode Island and Lifespan Corp. Together, the two entities represent more than 50,000 newly insured individuals.

"I led the team responsible for the implementation," DeMoura said. "The state of Rhode Island [account] was probably more of an accomplishment since we ... had less than five months to implement; typically, we get at least nine months to onboard a client the size of the state of Rhode Island."

DeMoura said her role as leader was to help drive the team to meet "incremental milestone dates." The team also worked to remove barriers and ensure resources were available and aligned to the work, given the short time frame

the group had to work with to bring in the new clientele, she said.

Calling those accomplishments "truly historical and monumental," Blue Cross Executive Vice President and Chief Customer Officer Melissa Cummings said DeMoura's contributions were extremely important to the outcome.

"She was the architect of building a unique customer service model that combines dedicated customer service with dedicated clinical resources for each of those [new] accounts," Cummings said.

In 2016, after being promoted into her role as vice president of operations, DeMoura assessed operations and discovered Blue Cross was not meeting the diverse needs of its commercial and Medicare customers, given its divergent regulatory guidelines.

She subsequently restructured the team, which impacted more



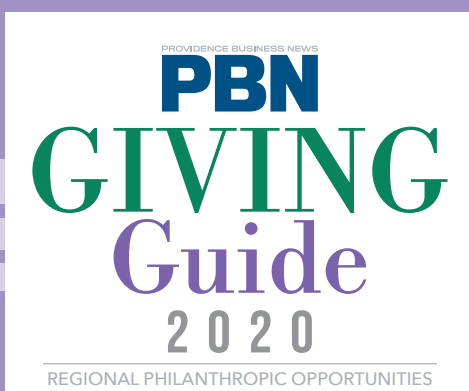
DEAL-MAKER: Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island Employer Segment Vice President Tara DeMoura led a team to bring in significant clientele, including the state and Lifespan Corp. COURTESY BLUE CROSS & BLUE SHIELD OF RHODE ISLAND

than 150 Blue Cross associates by creating new leadership positions – one for Medicare operations and one for commercial operations. DeMoura also realigned all teams and resources by market segment and modified job descriptions for many roles, and developed specific market-segment operational reports allowing Blue Cross to consistently measure performance.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, DeMoura described her greatest challenge as "managing the

fast-paced day-to-day needs." DeMoura said that she must "be agile and pivot" from one conversation around call-center servicing to sales to marketing tactics to what's driving claims expense.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant challenge not only for [Blue Cross but], for all businesses across Rhode Island," DeMoura said, noting that Blue Cross is working hard to balance supporting the needs of all its stakeholders. ■



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TAKING ACTION: Women's Fund of Rhode Island Executive Director Kelly Nevins frequently advocates for women's reproductive rights and economic concerns, such as pushing for the passage of the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplace Act and the Reproductive Privacy Act.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Pushing for equality in Rhode Island

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

KELLY NEVINS COLORFULLY summarizes Women's Fund of Rhode Island's focus: "If we're not at the table, we're likely on the menu."

The Providence-based organization's mission is to invest in women and girls through research, advocacy, grant-making and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change.

"It's really important to ensure women's voices ... are being consulted," said Nevins, Women's Fund executive director. Although new to advocacy when she joined the organization in 2016, Nevins became a key player in focusing on reproductive rights and economic issues.

Those efforts bore fruit. The organization pushed for the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplace Act, which excludes government and other public-entity employees and per diem nurses, mandates paid sick time off for employees in workplaces of 18 employees or more and unpaid sick time for those in smaller workplaces.

The act covers full-time, part-time, temporary and seasonal workers, which is particularly vital as the state mires in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"It gave over 67,000 Rhode Islanders access to earn paid sick time off per year who previously didn't have that," Nevins said.

Getting the Reproductive Privacy Act, which codified the legal right to abortion in Rhode Island, through the R.I. General Assembly "was a high point ... such a challenge and uphill battle to achieve," Nevins said. According to Nevins and based on R.I. Department of Health data, there were 497,626 Rhode Island women of childbearing age in 2019. The Reproductive Privacy Act guarantees women the freedom to make their own reproductive decisions.

Nevins' fundraising finesse has allowed Women's Fund to re-launch the Women's Policy Institute, a free nine-month program

that trains a diverse cohort of women to make positive legislative changes.

"We put real effort into fundraising to hire a facilitator and get the program revamped. It creates a pipeline of advocates in Rhode Island," said Ellie Brown, Women's Fund development director. Recruitment is currently underway for the next cohort, which begins in September.

Not only has Nevins raised the organization's statewide visibility through quarterly networking events such as "Cocktails and Conversations," she increased Women's Fund's funding by 61% from 2017 to 2019 – bringing the annual budget to over \$360,000. Dozens of fundraising and development professionals share their COVID-19-related concerns and ideas in the weekly "peer-support calls" that Nevins spearheads.

Nevins believes the pandemic offers the community an opportunity to reimagine the economic community.

"Avoiding a return to business as usual will

be a challenge; we should rethink things. ... We, as a society, need to step up and say: 'We need to pay people a living wage and make sure they are safe, providing them with health benefits, sick days.' Society should make these issues a priority now and in the future," Nevins said.

With 60% of women in the state workforce occupying the 40 lowest-paying jobs, there's a huge population of women working jobs that pay neither a living wage nor offer benefits.

"These are people on the front lines. We've been saying: 'You're not worth it.' This is what we want to change," said Nevins, who loves collaborating with Women's Fund allies and bringing new financial resources to bear to improve women's lives. "It's all about moving the ball forward."

Under Nevins' leadership, Women's Fund will receive the 2020 National Association of Secretaries of State Medallion Award, thanks to a nomination from R.I. Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea.

Not only does Nevins serve as a New Leaders' Council mentor, she also values her "personal board of directors" for guidance. As chair of the Chapter Inclusion, Diversity & Access Committee at the Association of Fundraising Professionals Rhode Island chapter, vice chair for the Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom and a member of Providence's Equal Pay Task Force, among other affiliations, Nevins has opportunities to demonstrate her leadership style.

"It's collaborative ... I believe I am a connector in the community, often looking to put people and ideas together. I still feel very challenged by the work that we need to do on behalf of women in Rhode Island," Nevins said. "We have a long way to go to achieve equality and I am confident that I will be actively engaged in that work for a long time." ■

'I still feel very challenged by the work that we need to do on behalf of women in Rhode Island.'

KELLY NEVINS, Women's Fund of Rhode Island executive director

Summoning the power of wind

BY MARY HOWE | Contributing Writer

WIND FARMERS FROM AROUND the nation and overseas have turned their attention to the coast of Rhode Island, and Kristin Urbach is doing everything in her power to get the region bulked up with wind-power industry workers, supplies and support services.

The **North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce** executive director has been working closely with Quonset Business Park, R.I. Commerce Corp., her board and Chamber members for the past five years to ramp up training and preparation for the wind-power industry.

Urbach does run many more-traditional activities for the Chamber's 400 members. Among them are greatly expanding the yearly Taste of NK Chamber party; creating of a new video promoting tourism in North Kingstown; co-hosting a televised business forum with Lt. Gov. Daniel J. McKee; and hosting the U.S. Small Business Administration's Shop Small Saturday and the Wickford Village Walking Tour.

But Rhode Island wants to

promote itself as an epicenter of the wind-power industry on the East Coast, and Quonset Business Park and the waters of nearby Block Island could be centerpieces.

"We have a very forward-thinking board," Urbach said of the Chamber and its development of a multiyear training program and internships in wind technology for high school students and adult learners.

Amy Walsh, a senior vice president for Bank of America Corp., agrees that the Chamber board is progressive, but she emphasized Urbach's initiative and talent at coming up with ideas and connecting people who can bring ideas into reality.

"She is always willing to find innovative ways of doing things and



WIND SPEED: North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kristin Urbach has been working closely with Quonset Business Park, R.I. Commerce Corp. and Chamber board members to increase training and preparation for the wind-power industry.
PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

bringing unique ideas to market," Walsh said of Urbach. "She has a natural ability at drawing people together."

Urbach said handling the COVID-19 pandemic requires leaders to be proactive and to funnel information and resources between government and businesses. For instance, in preparing North Kingstown for the reopening of retail shops, she organized a small-business advocacy group to plan

group purchases of essential items, such as sanitizer and plexiglass for building germ barriers.

"Dozens of merchants are trying to figure this out on their own," Urbach said. "I want our Chamber to be a one-stop shop. Leaders need to do the homework and set the table." ■

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ESSENTIAL HELP: Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport Head of Submarine and Surveillance Systems Division Maria Diaz-Masterson credits her support system, which includes her family and teachers while growing up in Puerto Rico, in helping her achieve her career goals. COURTESY NAVAL UNDERSEA WARFARE CENTER

Leading the way for the next generation

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

IN SPANISH, THE WORD éxito means “success,” something Maria Diaz-Masterson could tell you a little something about.

While growing up in Puerto Rico, Diaz-Masterson enjoyed a support system that included her family, teachers and friends. She lived in the same house in Bayamon throughout her grade-school years before moving three hours away to attend the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez to pursue a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering. Her high school math teacher was essential in igniting her desire to continue studying mathematics and engineering, Diaz-Masterson said.

“Teachers are essential in assisting high school students with the development of goals,” Diaz-Masterson said. “At the time, the only option available to me was to leave home at the age of 17 and rent an apartment with two other roommates. My family has been always supportive of me following my aspirations and dreams.”

During college, Diaz-Masterson received a pivotal internship opportunity with the **Naval Undersea Warfare Center** in Newport. It’s there where, she said, she was fortunate to again find a solid support system of mentors who not only challenged her but also encouraged her to consider future roles with increasing responsibility at NUWC.

After finishing her degree, Diaz-Masterson spent the next 10 years mastering the basics of the technical field of integration, testing and evaluation for a variety of U.S. Naval combat systems. Then, a mentor and close friend advised her to take a look at leadership and supervisory roles.

After becoming a first-line supervisor in 2012, Diaz-Masterson was selected into her current role as the head of the submarine and surveillance systems division in 2018. She is now responsible for leading, managing and developing a diverse team of engineers, scientists, technicians and contractors who provide systems engineering and life cycle support for the submarine community.

NUWC Division Newport is the U.S. Navy’s full-spectrum research, development, test and evaluation, engineering, and fleet support center for submarine warfare systems, as well as other systems associated with the undersea battlespace. The bulk of NUWC Division Newport’s activities is in applied research and system development.

While providing leadership to 120 employees and about 20 contractors, Diaz-Masterson’s main role is ensuring the resources and staffing to multiple project teams under her supervision.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the everyday work Diaz-Masterson does. She said she and her co-workers constantly communicate with the team, providing clear guidance, goals and expectations.

“My role is to provide infrastructure for a healthy environment: physically and mentally,” Diaz-Masterson said. “I am not a health expert, but I can provide guidance on who to call and how to get help if the situation arises.”

With a majority of employees working remotely, onboarding new employees has also presented its share of challenges. She has five first-line supervisors under her supervision – three of which were selected within the last year, Diaz-Masterson said.

“It is my role to ensure they have all the tools and knowledge so they can lead their respective teams. Our main priority is to recruit, hire and grow the next generation of leaders for our organization,” she said.

Commanding Officer Capt. Michael Coughlin praised Diaz-Masterson for her effort and dedication, including her desire to give back to the mentorship program that she benefitted so greatly from.

“As a strong proponent of work-force development, she actively seeks opportunities for engineers to shadow test directors while underway on submarines,” Coughlin said. “The technical know-how and enthusiasm she brings to her job greatly benefit the department and Division Newport. She has achieved success as a team leader, a line manager, engineer and mentor.”

Diaz-Masterson said she remains excited and motivated by her work, particularly in using her experiences to help others achieve their goals.

“I love my job and see myself in this position for a long time,” she said. “There are so many ideas and so much I still want to get done. However, I know I have a responsibility to grow leaders and make room for them to have career opportunities.” ■

‘I know **I have a responsibility** to grow leaders and make room for them to have career opportunities.’

MARIA DIAZ-MASTERSON, Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport head of submarine and surveillance systems division

Building everyone from the ground up

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

IN HIGH SCHOOL, Jessica Spivey was bitten by the architecture bug after taking a computer-assisted design class.

After earning her architectural engineering degree from Boston's Wentworth Institute of Technology, Spivey realized being indoors wasn't for her.

"I started down the path of architecture and later realized I did not want to be limited to an office environment each day," Spivey said.

Spivey, after completing her construction degree from Roger Williams University, joined **Shawmut Design and Construction** in 2008 and was placed into the company's three-year construction-management skills training program. It enables trainees to gain firsthand knowledge through hands-on rotations in project management, site supervision and estimating while on the job.

Now a senior superintendent serving as a full-time site supervisor working alongside project managers and engineers, Spivey knows

she made the right choice.

"Our people deliver the most complex projects for the world's most elite brands and institutions," Spivey said. "Everyone here takes pride in being part of a talent-driven and leading-edge organization focused on delivering excellent client service."

Currently, Spivey is overseeing the construction of Brown University's new 96,000-square-foot wellness center and residence hall, which will bring physical health services, mental and emotional health services, and wellness education and programming under one roof.

Spivey, part of Shawmut's Diversity Leadership Council, trains both senior leadership and employees on various diversity and inclusion topics, as well as drives the firm's diversity and inclusion strategy and efforts nationwide.

Shawmut Senior Regional



BUILDING BLOCK: Shawmut Design and Construction Senior Superintendent Jessica Spivey is part of the company's Diversity Leadership Council, in which she trains both senior leadership and employees on diversity and inclusion topics. COURTESY SHAWMUT DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Director Chris Maury said while Spivey's capabilities on project sites are unmatched, it's what she does off-site that showcases her as an emerging leader in the industry, particularly through her work on the diversity council.

"Her commitment to mentoring women doesn't end at Shawmut's council though," Maury said. "In fact, Jessica has been part of Shawmut's Women in Construction Week committee – helping to

form a yearly program that brings together hundreds of women across the company for informational sessions, trainings and networking events."

Spivey's desire to give back also extends to the training program she benefitted from. As regional mentor leader of the Construction Management Skills Training program, she uses energy and passion to mentor Shawmut's future professionals, particularly women. ■

AMY ANTONE, Cuddles of Hope Foundation

ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE

Gifts meant for cuddling

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

WHEN YOU RUN A SUCCESSFUL nonprofit that provides gift bags for children who are in a hospital or in a shelter, you end up with a lot of stuffed animals.

Where does one keep them all?

"In my garage, any room I can find," North Providence resident Amy Antone said. "We love having them around because it reminds us of the gift bags," and the feelings of comfort and joy they bring to kids going through a scary situation.

With help from family, Antone and the **Cuddles of Hope Foundation** regularly deliver gift bags that include a stuffed animal, crayons and a coloring book to patients at Hasbro Children's Hospital. Each one also has a poem introducing their new stuffed friend.

Though she had no idea how to go about starting her own nonprofit, Antone was no stranger to volunteer work. Her desire to help others and give back was already present, having volunteered for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Make a Wish Foundation, Special

Olympics Massachusetts and serving as board member for a local parent-teacher organization.

A senior compliance consultant for CVS Health Corp., Antone established Cuddles of Hope in her off hours, Antone's husband, Nathan, said. Those off hours are already full, by the way – in addition to having a full-time career, being an MBA student and the mother of two small children but she made it work, he said.

Though Antone cannot see families at the hospital due to federal privacy and security rules, nurses at Hasbro tell Antone that the bags are received with great excitement by the children arriving there as patients.

"These bags bring a smile to the faces of both 3-year-olds and 15-year-olds," said Kerri Baker,



a child-life specialist at Hasbro. "[They] provide comfort and normalcy in an often-challenging moment in their lives."

Reaching out to shelters and hospitals is another task that helps make Cuddles of Hope run. Recently, the organization is expanding its work beyond the Ocean State.

Antone is in the initial stages of expanding foundation efforts into Fall River and Boston hospitals and shelters, with some help from relatives. She aims to eventually take the foundation nationwide,

DELIVERING SMILES: Kerri Baker, left, child-life specialist at Hasbro Children's Hospital, receives gift bags for sick children from Amy Antone of the Cuddles of Hope Foundation.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

enriching hospital and shelter experiences for families across the U.S.

"Almost everything has changed," since the early days of the foundation, Antone said. "We grew from just stuffed animals to gift bags. Now it's bigger than we thought it would be." ■

ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE GEREMIE CALLAGHAN, Fluke Newport

Winding road back home

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

GEREMIE CALLAGHAN and her husband, Jeff, were on their third date, at LeBistro, on Bannister's Wharf at Newport Harbor in 1993.

The cozy restaurant proved to be a pleasant surprise. Tucked away on the second and third floor in a building at the wharf, it was a quiet spot with nice views that felt worlds away from the crowds in Newport.

"What a fluke to know that we're in the heart of downtown Newport," Geremie Callaghan recalled Jeff saying on that date.

The memory stuck with her. The couple ended up buying that restaurant in 2007 and renamed it based on Jeff's remark – **Fluke Newport**. But before Fluke, neither of the Callaghans – both Rhode Island natives – had ever owned a restaurant. Jeff worked in the wine industry, in sales.

Geremie Callaghan's road to the restaurant industry was a winding one. Interested in travel, she earned a bachelor's degree in European studies, politics and

government from the University of Kent in Canterbury, England. She took a job with the German company Bertelsmann Music Group, which had a music-publishing division in New York City.

Callaghan worked in the finance department, doing some light translating when communication with the company's overseas offices was needed.

For 12 years, Callaghan worked as executive director of global marketing for cosmetics giant Estee Lauder. During this time, she met Tommy Hilfiger, Donna Karan and Michael Kors and led the launch of Karan's DKNY Be Delicious fragrances for men and women.

"It was very interesting to work on, to be in a position where I saw the whole product-development process," she said. "There was a lot of 11th-hour problem-solving – a lot like working in a restaurant."



CIRCUITOUS ROUTE: Geremie Callaghan worked in the music and cosmetics industries while living in New York City before returning to Rhode Island to open seafood restaurant Fluke in Newport with her husband, Jeff.

PBN FILE PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

After another career move to serve as marketing director of another cosmetics company, Callaghan said she and her husband were ready for a change.

Without a plan in place, both Callaghans gave notice at their jobs in New York and left their 450-square-foot apartment on the Upper West Side – home for 15 years – behind for Rhode Island.

Callaghan credits her staff and chef Eddie Montalvo as big factors in Fluke Newport's success. Seasonal workers come back year after year, up to 30 employees overall

in the high season. Fresh, local fish helps Fluke Newport provide something unique, along with a nice environment in which to dine for residents, tourists or sailors.

"People use the phrase 'hidden gem' for Fluke, and I love it," Callaghan said. ■

ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE STEPHANIE CHAMBERLIN, PINCH LLC

Easing clients' HR pain

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

STEPHANIE CHAMBERLIN'S STRENGTHS lie in recruiting and keeping talent, along with building cultures for companies via her Providence-based talent acquisition and human-resources consulting group, **PINCH LLC**.

Chamberlin, as chief talent officer, enjoys finding creative solutions and is not one to blindly follow rules or boxed-in mindsets. Looser structures can garner more opportunity for companies and their teams, she said. Chamberlin has also seen more-flexible attitudes breed success.

Chamberlin's resourceful thinking and corporate experience are part of her unique brand of skills, which often see her go beyond recruiting, that help bridge the gap between a company and its employees.

"I'm like a sports agent, helping employees be self-aware enough to know their strengths and know their path," she said.

For companies that hire PINCH to conduct employee workplace reviews, that is the wording used to

gather input. Employees are asked to complete sentences such as, "I like ..." and "I wish ...," Chamberlin said. That way, team members aren't just resorting to a check-the-box-type framework – or failing to fully engage in a way that offers the company information it needs to keep them on board.

"Performance reviews can't just be a rating system. They have to be set up for conversations, interactive conversations," she said.

Chamberlin looks at human-resources recruiting as a sales role, making a match not between a buyer and product, but a company and a prospect. She helps smaller- to medium-sized companies that don't have an HR department, or that do have one but are overwhelmed. She is especially of value to a company going through



CULTURE CONSULTANT: PINCH LLC Chief Talent Officer Stephanie Chamberlin specializes in talent recruitment, retention and workplace-culture issues for smaller- to medium-sized companies that don't have their own human resources department.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

growing pains, she said, able to conduct an HR audit and formalize systems where needed, offering companies space to grow on a firm foundation.

However, offering flexibility must come with what Chamberlin calls interconnectivity. That means if an employee is given flexible work time or time off and that is abused, there also needs to be accountability.

Chamberlin's mission is more than just working to boost employee morale. It's creating better workplaces overall, for all sides. She gives companies information

they need to be proactive, if they so choose.

"Part of what I'm doing with this cultural work is identifying where the risks are," Chamberlin said, in terms of improving employee retention and its associated costs, comparing salary levels within the market, for example.

"You need to know what your employees are talking about. Having me there, you'll know." ■

Fully invested in fintech

BY ANDY SMITH | Contributing Writer

MARGARET HARTIGAN found a lot to like about Providence.

The co-founder and CEO of financial-technology company **Marstone Inc.**, and New Hampshire native, spent lots of time in Providence while attending Brown University.

“It’s an unusual city, given its size,” Hartigan said of Providence in choosing it as a locale for her office. “There’s an incredible level of creativity and diversity here.”

Founded in 2013, Marstone’s first Rhode Island home was at Hope Artiste Village in Pawtucket, and it eventually moved to its current quarters at 171 Chestnut St., above the Art Bar in the Jewelry District.

Hartigan wanted to take advantage of the emerging tech sector centered around Brown’s Warren Alpert Medical School in Providence. She’s led workshops at Brown’s Entrepreneurship Program, which has introduced Marstone to potential employees.

Her company has created a digital platform that allows users to custom design financial portfolios

based on factors such as age, goals and appetite for risk. Hartigan said one of Marstone’s goals is to “demystify and humanize” finance.

The platform is available through financial institutions, such as investment companies and banks, who can brand the platform as their own (called “white labeling”) while Marstone powers things behind the scenes.

Hartigan said it was easier, and less expensive, to use a business-to-business model to market Marstone’s platform, rather than go directly to consumers.

“To make the biggest impact, we wanted to work where the clients already are. Transformation comes from partnership, not disruption,” she said.

The “stone” in Marstone is designer and strategist Robert Stone,



CREATIVE CAPITAL: Margaret Hartigan, co-founder and CEO of Marstone Inc., a digital financial platform with offices in Providence, says she chose to base her company in Providence because of the “incredible level of creativity and diversity here.”

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

who Hartigan knew from her days in San Francisco. She said she originally spoke to him about designing logos, but his role grew to become co-founder and chief creative officer.

Marstone’s Chestnut Street office mixes simplicity with technology. The conference room’s digital platform helps users customize the platform by importing a background picture of themselves, their family, or whatever else they want.

The computer also asks what kind of investments are desired, among them biotech, gold, internet, clean water and more. Then it

comes up with a suggested portfolio, with investments represented by colored boxes on a chart.

“We are a financial-tech company, but we’re also a very creative company,” Hartigan said. “To communicate that, you need a strong premise, the ability to flesh out an idea. So, it’s served me well in expressing complex ideas to a lot of different kinds of people, including our own team members.” ■

A caregiver at her core

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

MICHELE KRATZ is a registered nurse at heart, but she’s done many things in her career that position her for success as vice president of clinical services at Providence-based **Upward Health National LLC**.

Upward Health serves high-risk, high-need patients in their homes, working with health insurance plans and health care providers to achieve better outcomes that save money.

With a care specialist assigned to each patient, Upward Health coordinates with their physicians, filling in the gaps by delivering medication, connecting them with organizations such as Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island, or other housing resources.

Having worked most of her career with patients in government programs such as Medicaid and Medicare, Kratz said Upward Health’s whatever-it-takes care model is one she believes in and can help grow.

“They do whatever the patient needs,” with patients’ trust in

their care specialist building and strengthening over time, Kratz said. “It can be the healthiest relationship they have.”

Kratz, born in Philadelphia and raised by a single mother, said she always wanted to be a nurse, like her aunt, Audrey. After graduating high school in a small Pennsylvania town, she earned a nursing degree from Drexel University, when the Philadelphia school was affiliated with Hahnemann University Hospital.

Kratz found herself in the inner-city hospital at a crucial time in the fight against AIDS, and she learned volumes.

“I was 18 and taking care of patients on the tail end of the AIDS epidemic,” she said. “I was exposed to a lot. We took care of a lot of young men who were



BATTLE AGAINST AIDS: Upward Health National LLC Vice President of Clinical Services Michele Kratz worked at Hahnemann University Hospital in her native Philadelphia at the tail end of the AIDS pandemic when she was 18.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

dying. Empathy had a place in that hospital. It was exposure to a poor, urban and gay community.”

After four years as district director of case management for Kindred Healthcare in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Kratz then took a position in 2012 with Cigna-HealthSpring. As vice president of health services, she was responsible for the mid-Atlantic region, but working for a big corporation left her missing the nimble ability of a smaller organization.

Kratz accepted the position with

Upward Health this past August. She likens the leadership team to a small family.

Her goals include increased “facilitated virtual care” visits for patients in their homes, especially for the disengaged and those with complex medical conditions such as risky substance use.

Patients feel safer with caregivers coming to them, she said. “It’s about empowering people and giving them the tools to succeed,” she said. ■

A rebel with a cause

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

VICTORIA MALCHAR of Warwick's **Malchar Wellness Center** is a chiropractor, sure. But she does so much more – and has for quite some time.

Basically, patients can come to Malchar with an issue and know it will be fully and carefully considered. If necessary, she will go beyond a spinal adjustment and into full-on investigative mode.

"I dig until I find the cause," she said, crossing areas of medical focus.

Her patients, newborns to seniors, receive whole-person health care derived from nearly four decades in the field and Malchar's willingness to ask the right questions.

Malchar is aware that it can be difficult to describe the work she does, but she takes pride in being a rebel and looking at different disciplines and getting different certifications to treat patients. "Comprehensive" is a good way to sum it up, as she considers factors in each patient that go far beneath the surface.

"We have to know what caused [the issue]," Malchar said, and then develop a plan to treat it in the most natural way possible, often involving changes in diet.

"Can we nourish the muscles and help them repair faster? And is there neurological damage that can be repaired as well?" she said.

Malchar has been out in front in areas of wellness considered, until recently, a bit offbeat.

Years ago, Malchar said, she did things that were "so foreign to everybody else." Depending on the patient's needs, improving the whole person can involve kinesiology, muscle testing, structural and nutritional balance, energy healing and emotional-health considerations.

"The [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] would have come in and closed my office" back in the day, she said. "But now it's all



FINDING A WAY FORWARD: Victoria Malchar, owner of Malchar Wellness Center, treats Brandon Maced at her Warwick offices, where she and her staff offer a number of coaching and therapy options. PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

mainstream. I kind of did it and brought it to New England, but it was more recognized in places like New York and California."

Malchar sees patients for sports and auto injuries such as concussions, which can trigger inflammation in other areas of the body, she said. She uses contact reflex analysis, homeopathy, naturopathy, the chiropractic activator methodology, nutrition and total body modification, which aims to improve the body's functional physiology.

It's all connected, Malchar said. "I'd have patients – kids who were involved in sports – who had numerous concussions," she said. "But they had never told me during the exam. But a few concussions can upset digestion and balance. So, we had work to do to help the brain avoid these permanent effects of that neurological trauma." ■

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Being nourished in a crisis

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

KATIE MCDONALD'S EXECUTIVE CLIENTS span numerous industries, but all have something in common: They are addicts.

"They're struggling with their addiction to busyness," said McDonald, a North Kingstown-based holistic health coach, self-care strategist and public speaker. "They say 'no' to themselves but 'yes' to everyone else."

McDonald founded her holistic coaching business **bnourished LLC** a decade ago, but its relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic is amplified, she said. Themes such as scheduling time for oneself, improving nutrition, setting boundaries and establishing goals are more resonant in these days of telecommuting and disconnection from colleagues, McDonald said.

"We derive pleasure from our work and are afraid of the quiet" normally, McDonald said. "But we're now forced to face it. It's like that Pink song ['Sober'] where she says, 'The quiet scares me because

it screams the truth.' I teach clients how to leverage that. I teach them to show up for themselves as they do for everyone else."

The lack of boundaries and self-care during the pandemic often means breaking promises to oneself, such as plans to exercise, McDonald said. Instead, we let other people's issues or work tasks take over that space and the workout never happens.

Bnourished is a blending of her self-healing experience, holistic know-how and business knowledge, customized to serve each individual client. But applying these resources in ways that help clients didn't happen overnight.

"It took time to take those skills and translate them into tools in my career," McDonald said, "which is helping people change their lives one mindful habit at a



A DIFFERENT PATH: Katie McDonald, a self-care strategist who founded and owns bnourished LLC, says her clients are so busy, they don't take time for self-care and improvement.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

time."

In the past 10 years, McDonald's clientele, her reputation and her mission have all strengthened. The COVID-19 crisis and quarantine requirements have aligned with her theme of reflecting, reassessing and resetting.

Bnourished only takes 10 clients at a time, all on rolling, six-month, custom-designed programs. Participants come from all fields, though women are more

likely to seek bnourished services.

"I am there with information and access until [their efforts for better self-care] are a well-oiled machine," she said.

The program includes individual virtual coaching sessions every two weeks, in which clients are also given homework aimed at reaching goals. McDonald is also accessible if issues arise between meetings, and other content is distributed daily. ■

MARY T. O'SULLIVAN, Encore Executive and Corporate Coaching **ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE**

Coaching up corporate leaders

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

ALL BUSINESS OWNERS look to stand out from their competition. But corporate executive coach Mary T. O'Sullivan is in an industry where her work can be gravely misunderstood.

"There's a huge problem with the word 'coach,'" O'Sullivan said.

O'Sullivan, who founded **Encore Executive and Corporate Coaching** in North Kingstown, not only must differentiate herself from professional peers but also help educate society and potential clients in understanding contrasts between a life coach and professional coach. They are sometimes seen as doing similar work, she said, which isn't the case.

"Coaching has a low barrier to entry. You don't even need a degree [to call yourself a coach]. If you are looking for a coach, investigate one who is board-certified – you need to have a degree to get that certificate," she said.

Changing the wording of her role to "corporate executive coach" was recommended by a public-relations expert. It gives an idea

of a corporate image right away, said O'Sullivan, hopefully smoothing the way for clients looking for services she offers.

Specifically, she works with company leaders who are looking to transform the culture of their organizations, whether that means reining in inappropriate behavior, boosting team morale or retaining talent. O'Sullivan's company offers online, group and individual training with customized strategies.

Executive coaching allows O'Sullivan to help facilitate change and improvement in a different way. It is about asking the right questions, said O'Sullivan, with clients playing a role in figuring out the answers themselves. They fully participate in drawing conclusions and determining areas of growth.

"There are no pat answers,"



AVID ADVISER: Mary T. O'Sullivan offers coaching services through Encore Executive and Corporate Coaching in North Kingstown, an entity she founded after extensive experience in the corporate world.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

said O'Sullivan. "Everyone is on a different path. I help them gain perspective on how to achieve goals." O'Sullivan does this by asking questions, not dictating, so clients come to their own resolutions and fully own the work it takes to get there, she said.

Another client worked with O'Sullivan to determine her future path, namely, whether she should stay in the family business. O'Sullivan guides clients through processes she has gone through

firsthand.

O'Sullivan wants professionals to know there is no shame in seeking help with one's career. In addition to a misconception that all coaches are the same, there is still a stigma in asking for help, she said.

But doing so can lead to transformation. ■

ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE MARCY REYES, The Financial Literacy Youth Initiative

Helping youths understand finance

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

MARCY REYES ALWAYS HAD an innate sense of being a change-maker.

Successful corporate roles, including serving as assistant vice president of consumer credit for Santander Bank N.A., and initiatives were satisfying, but she still wanted to give back more. For Reyes, it wasn't a question of what she'd do to make a mark on her community; it was more a sense of when.

"I was talking about a financial literacy program for years and years ... it never really went away," she said. Nor did the need for helping underrepresented students living within environments of generational poverty.

It's why she founded **The Financial Literacy Youth Initiative** in Cranston in 2017.

Creating a nonprofit that helps young people in the community develop financial literacy skills capable of opening up new opportunities is just part of the picture for Reyes.

She is the manager of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island's small-group rating and operations and an adjunct finance teacher at Rhode Island College. For volunteerism, Reyes is on Blue Cross' Diversity and Inclusion Council board, as well as the board of the Rhode Island College Alumni Association. She also makes time to chair Blue Cross' Latin@Link employee resource group and mentors students pursuing master's degrees in finance at Northeastern University in Boston, a path she, herself, completed.

Empowerment through personal and corporate finance is her passion. Giving back by spreading her wisdom through the FLY Initiative and other means is a perfect mix of getting behind a cause near and dear to her heart while sharing the wealth.

Learning how to manage money is a secret weapon more young



KNOWLEDGE HAS POWER: The Financial Literacy Youth Initiative founder Marcy Reyes says that learning how to manage money is a secret weapon more young people need.
PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

people need, she said, to empower them to make the right choices. Just knowing what questions to ask and where to go for resources goes a long way in spurring opportunity. It's a knowledge and power her teenage daughter Katia has, Reyes said.

"We've been talking about money management for a really, really long time – a savings plan, including the time value of money; opportunities to invest; and how interest is compounded over time,"

Reyes said.

Concepts such as setting savings goals and comparing investment options may seem like baseline considerations to some. But Reyes sees "taking the mystery out of it" in terms of finances and money management as integral to making young people self-sufficient. ■

ACHIEVEMENT HONOREE AMY STRATTON, Moonan, Stratton & Waldman LLP

Advising others during COVID-19

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

AMY STRATTON, of the Providence law firm **Moonan, Stratton & Waldman LLP**, guides clients through wills, probate and estate planning. With founding partner Irving Waldman practicing part time, the small firm is run by Stratton and Kristen Prull Moonan, offering clients legal services that are, by design, personal and meant to cover all bases.

Now the COVID-19 pandemic has added much more complexity to Stratton's role.

With the coronavirus risk, the focus of Stratton's practice – which involves estate planning and business succession – is even more pressing.

Stratton, who is accustomed to considering what-if and crisis-type scenarios, has had to think even further along these lines as clients call with concerns related to the pandemic. Many are anxious to make sure their affairs are in order if the worst were to happen.

"People are afraid and because this is a ... pandemic, it affects every single person," Stratton said. "They are thinking, 'What if I am

not here anymore?'"

The work hasn't slowed. Even as other businesses have shut down temporarily, Stratton and the team at the law office have continued to assist clients throughout the crisis. "This is not a marketing opportunity," she said. "We see this as a service opportunity, and we are lucky to be able to help."

While still maintaining office hours, Stratton said that the firm is doing so with three things in mind: safety, consistency and flexibility. The staff works remotely when it can, but some clients still need to come into the office, such as for signing documents related to real estate transactions, she noted.

Even the smallest precautions



ESSENTIAL SERVICE: Attorney Amy Stratton, who focuses on estate planning and business succession, says clients have sought out the services of her law firm, Moonan, Stratton & Waldman LLP, in these times of uncertainty.

PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

are being taken, such as increased sanitizing and doing videoconferences with clients.

It's an unprecedented time for Stratton, who has been practicing law for 23 years, nine of those with Moonan, Stratton & Waldman, a firm that focuses on real estate law, business law, elder law services, and helps clients with Medicaid matters as well.

In this time of the COVID-19 crisis, Stratton is using all the tools she can to ensure clients and

staff are safe. Software allows her team to work remotely if needed. Hand sanitizer is at the ready, and clients who don't need to visit the office won't.

Serving clients' legal needs in a comprehensive, complete way and delivering information succinctly and creatively is what Stratton's office has been doing all along. Now, with COVID-19, the need for the firm's services is clearer, and it is delivering service to those clients in different, necessary ways. ■

Enjoying her own virtual reality

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

SWOOGO FOUNDER LEONORA VALVO believes that we often fall in love with our own ideas.

Over her decades of starting technology companies, Valvo has succeeded in raising funds and building teams, inspiring others to pursue their dreams of entrepreneurship along the way.

Raised in Bedford, N.Y., Valvo has lived in San Francisco, Chicago and Boston. But it was in New York that she started out in the travel industry and has since built a name for herself, finding ways as to how technology can help companies plan travel and events.

“I am not a product person but a businessperson,” Valvo said. “I know how to find a market and position to sell into that market.”

Valvo founded travel consultancy Options in 1992 and was founder and CEO of Global Executive, an event-management services company, from 1992 to 2007. Valvo started etouches (now Aventri) in 1998, a cloud-based, event-management platform that she grew before

leaving the company in 2013; and InsightXM, which makes a data-analytics tool tailored to the event-planning industry.

Valvo’s path into software innovation began at age 17, working as a KLM Airlines reservation agent in New York. She would speak with General Foods’ corporate travel department often, and was eventually recruited there, she said.

Back then, Valvo saw what she calls a pocket of opportunity for companies to save on travel. The travel-agency model was based on commission for things such as hotels and car rentals, she said.

When she moved to Connecticut with her children, she reengineered Global Executive. “That’s when we developed software” that would allow planners to run global events, find sponsors and other functions, Valvo said.

Global Executive would grow to



VIRTUAL COMPANY: Leonora Valvo, founder and director of Warren-based Swoogo, coordinates a videoconference staff meeting from her computer.
PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

earning \$5 million in revenue.

These days, Valvo works with Warren-based Swoogo – she founded it in 2015 – the company has devised a software tool for event planners called Registration Wizard, referred by Swoogo as “an eerily smart tool for setting up your event.”

A virtual company with 21 employees, Swoogo has become profitable in three years without any external funding, Valvo said. Valvo’s history is illustrative of a person who didn’t attend college and has not followed the beaten

path through life.

“I also feel the world is changing,” regarding the notion that a college degree is a necessity, she said. “There are other ways to move forward. For instance, I have great interest in teaching manufacturing skills. There are awesome things in manufacturing for those who can’t afford [college] – awesome careers,” Valvo said. ■

Unafraid to enter uncharted waters

BY SUSAN SHALHOUB | Contributing Writer

THE BOATS SOLD at Debbie A. Wood’s business, Warwick-based **Wood Boat and Motor Inc.**, only go in one direction at a time. But Wood, who is commonly multitasking, is firing on all cylinders and managing multiple businesses stretched across different industries.

There’s no reason not to also own a jam company, realty company and seasonal wreath business, even if you co-own a boat sales and repair dealership with your husband.

Plus, Wood took on the annual Rhode Island Boat Show. When organizers of what was then the Providence Boat Show decided in 2018 they weren’t going to run it after three decades, Wood saw no other option but to step in.

“We’ve always participated as an exhibitor in multiple boat shows,” she said. “When they decided they were going to concentrate on other things and the Ocean State was not going to have its boat show, I thought, ‘How do you own a dealership, live in the Ocean State and not have a boat show?’

This must mean I need to run this. There is no other answer.’ ”

Wood, a Smithfield resident, started in banking when she worked at Citizens Bank for 27 years. Afterward, she started helping at the boat dealership that her husband, Russell Wood, started in the 1990s.

Calling herself a type A personality, Wood said she isn’t afraid to take on new challenges, systematically seeking information (regulations for jam sales was a learning curve, for example, she said) and setting about to get tasks completed.

When she learned that the state’s boat show was in need of organization – having many contacts in the marine world – stepping in just came naturally. Wood sought



MAKING WAVES: Debbie A. Wood, president and co-owner of Wood Boat & Motor Inc. in Warwick, decided with her husband, Russell, to take over running the Rhode Island Boat Show, after the previous organizers stepped down after three decades at the helm.
PBN FILE PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

information and reached out to venues.

Banking also taught Wood to be organized, she said, a skill that has served her well in her business endeavors. She is also not afraid to ask for help.

She encourages others to reach out and utilize resources available to them to accomplish business goals.

“All state agencies will help you ... you have to be forthcoming and tell them what you are trying

to do. There are many things that are free, [such as] the volunteers at [the American Association of Retired Persons]. You can’t buy the wisdom and experiences they have gone through,” she said. “Break it down into steps. If it’s 200 steps, do it!” ■

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