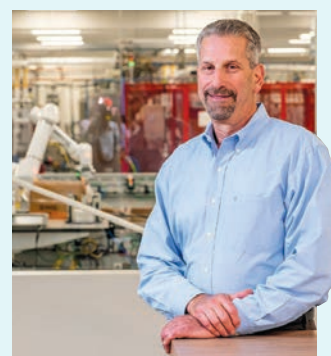
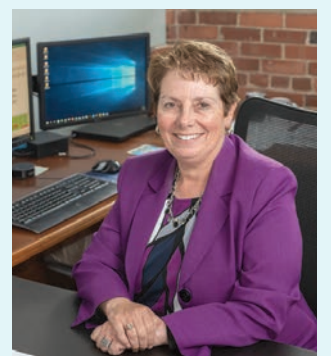


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**Congratulations to all of the honorees.
We look forward to continuing our
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Investing in Rhode Island's infrastructure, economy and environment

FROM THE
EDITOR

25 can make a difference, leave legacy

WHAT MAKES A CAREER?

Professional achievements? Permanent and heartfelt friendships? Impact on a community?



How about all three and more?

This year, Providence Business News celebrates 25 people over the age of 55, the first time we have looked en

masse at business community leaders who have left [and are still leaving] legacies for future generations to take note of.

The honorees range from bankers to nurses, nonprofit leaders to attorneys, and even someone who fertilizes lawns.

But as wide-ranging as the careers of these people are, they all have one thing in common: They have made significant contributions to their fields, as well as to the people who have worked with them. They will indeed be taken note of.

One example is Dennis Littky, who has been disrupting the educational world for decades. He first made a name for himself and his ideas locally when he formed Big Picture Learning, the parent entity of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center – also known as the Met School. But he knew there was a piece to the Met’s approach to experiential learning that was missing, the one that completed the educational journey that many had begun but not – through circumstance, funding or another reason – finished.

Ten years ago, the now 75-year-old Littky formed College Unbound, a degree-granting institution that has graduated 120 adults, students who needed that sheepskin for personal and societal validation. If nothing else, Littky’s work on behalf of lifelong learners here and across the world is worth noting.

Our inaugural 25 Over Fifty-five is fortunate to have partner sponsors Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP and the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank. Their support has helped PBN recognize these extraordinary individuals.

Mark S. Murphy
Editor

SPONSOR MESSAGES

PARTRIDGE SNOW & HAHN LLP

Partridge Snow & Hahn is proud to congratulate the 2019 25 Over Fifty-Five Honorees.

The impressive men and women recognized by this honor have shown strength in leadership in both the industries in which they work and in communities throughout our state.

Their dedication, vision, hard work and commitment to excellence is exemplary.



RHODE ISLAND INFRASTRUCTURE BANK

For the past thirty years, R.I. Infrastructure Bank has been investing in Rhode Island’s infrastructure, economy, and environment. We are honored to be recognized by Providence Business News.

The Infrastructure Bank extends its congratulations to the 2019 25 Over Fifty-Five honorees. We look forward to continuing to work with Rhode Island’s leaders to move our great state forward.

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VICKI COMEAU

Head of corporate operations,
Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport



THE NAVIGATOR: Vicki Comeau's corporate operations department performs many duties at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport. "I have to make sure I manage within a budget and have the right people," she said.
PBN PHOTO/KATE WHITNEY LUCEY

VICKI COMEAU'S ULTIMATE MISSION at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport is decidedly military: Provide support for the research and development of technologies that will give the United States fleet tactical superiority.

But, in some ways, her job has a private-sector feel to it. NUWC employs 3,300 civilian employees and thousands more contractors. But its \$1.1 billion operating budget isn't funded by a line item in the federal budget. Instead, the center "bills" its clients – 95% of which are military – for its services.

"We're a business. I have to make sure I manage within a budget and have the right people because I only have so much money to do this one task," Comeau said. "How do I do this in the most efficient, effective way to get this product done and get it out to the fleet?"

As head of the corporate operations department – which alone has 252 employees – Comeau ensures NUWC scientists and engineers have what they need. She also oversees hiring, training, facilities maintenance,

safety, security, public affairs, information technology and more.

"I love my job. It's a challenge every day," she said.

Her department organizes NUWC's presence at tech conferences to keep up with developments in private industry and recruit talented employees. As an engineer with 22 years at NUWC, she knows what to look for.

Division Newport Cmdr.

Capt. Michael Coughlin gives high praise, saying Comeau has displayed "dedication, creativity and an unrelenting drive to keep the U.S. undersea warfare community

at the forefront of technological development."

That drive continues away from work, as well.

Frequent gym workouts help "to ensure my mind is clear and my stress relieved," she said. And while her children, ages 21, 19 and 16, are older, she still shares her technical expertise as a judge at school science fairs. ■

GARY RUFF
Contributing Writer

'I love my job. It's a challenge every day.'



Thank you

Neil Steinberg and
the 25 over Fifty-Five
for making Rhode Island
a better place.



RHODE ISLAND
FOUNDATION

LIFESPAN CONGRATULATES

**Maria Ducharme, DNP, RN, NEA-BC and
John Murphy, MD**

on receiving the Providence Business News
25 Over Fifty-Five award



MARIA DUCHARME, DNP,
RN, NEA-BC

For over 30 years, Maria Ducharme has dedicated her professional life to educating nursing professionals, encouraging academic and professional development and supporting care that is guided by knowledge and compassion. As senior vice president of patient care services and Chief Nursing Officer for The Miriam Hospital, Maria practices with respect for every individual, whether she is caring for a patient or mentoring an employee. **We thank Maria for her compassion, mentorship, and dedication to the art of nursing.**



JOHN MURPHY, MD

Executive vice president of physician affairs and professor of medicine at The Warren Alpert Medical School, John Murphy, MD, has been a champion at Lifespan since he began in 2003. He has served as Chief Medical Officer for Rhode Island Hospital and director of graduate medical education for Lifespan, as well as director of the geriatrics division at Brown University. Dr. Murphy is a celebrated family medicine and geriatrics physician, lecturing nationally and internationally and testifying before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on aging. **We thank Dr. Murphy for his exemplary leadership and dedication to improving the medical field.**



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SHARON CONARD-WELLS

Executive director,
West Elmwood Housing Development Corp.



COMMUNITY LINCHPIN: As longtime executive director of West Elmwood Housing Development Corp., Sharon Conard-Wells has played a role in innovative projects, such as the Sankofa Initiative, that have revived blighted properties.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

TO HEAR SHARON CONARD-WELLS tell it, she is merely a conduit for robust collaborations that spur innovative community programs built around affordable housing and related social issues. But the 28-year executive director of **West Elmwood Housing Development Corp.** always seems to have a hand in successful community projects – which is probably because she is a linchpin for local change and has been for decades.

“I love the work,” she said. “It’s more of a mission than even a career.”

Raised in the Bronx, N.Y., the mother of three and grandmother of three has a Rhode Island Minority Police Association Civilian Award, is a YWCA Woman of Achievement winner and was chosen for an Outstanding Leadership in Community Development Award by Rep. David N. Cicilline, D-R.I.

“I may be good at building coalitions, but potential solutions often come from someone else,” said Conard-Wells. “My excitement comes in seeing the solution. I can

see a connection with their idea ... and we work together to marry it.”

Conard-Wells was named head of the Providence nonprofit in 1991. Under her leadership, more than \$115 million has been raised to improve local housing and the community. She’s guided low-income tax credit rentals, adaptive reuses of brownfield historic mills and the creation of lead-safe units.

She’s especially proud of Sankofa Healthy Housing, a \$13.5 million affordable development on formerly blighted lots, now connected to Sankofa Community Farm.

Dunamis Synergy is a new West Elmwood Housing initiative geared toward parents or expectant parents who are ages 15 to 25 and pursuing an education.

Being nimble is a key to Conard-Wells’ success, as is creative use of resources.

“Some say a glass is half full or half empty,” she said. “I just see something in the glass I can use. Even if there is only air to breathe, there is something in that glass.” ■

SUSAN SHALHOUB
Contributing Writer

‘I may be good at building coalitions, but potential solutions often come from someone else. My excitement comes in seeing the solution.’



Congratulations to our compassionate, courageous leader!

HopeHealth is honored that our President & CEO,
Diana Franchitto,

is recognized as an extraordinary leader on the inaugural Providence Business News “25 over Fifty-Five” list.

Her visionary leadership drives HopeHealth to strive for excellence and deliver the highest quality care to our community, our patients and their families.

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Thank You

All of Team Blount stands united in congratulating Bob Sewall on being named to PBN's inaugural "25 Over Fifty-Five" accomplished leaders list.

We thank him for his unyielding dedication, relentless tenacity, market-moving insights and difference - making leadership.

Bob, you are the catalyst that's fueled our growth for over 25 years and set us on a trajectory for the future.

Your dedication to Blount and to the community in which we live and do business is an inspiration to us all.



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Executive VP of
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JEFFREY DIEHL

CEO and executive director,
Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank



COMMUNITY-MINDED: Jeffrey Diehl had extensive experience in global investment banking before becoming the CEO and executive director at the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

JEFFREY DIEHL, CEO and executive director of **Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank**, has big perspective for someone leading an organization in the nation's smallest state. He's also a pro-bono adviser with the United Nations Development Programme, and has 35 years of experience in global investment banking.

"It's what attracted me to the job here," the Michigan native said of his work in Rhode Island. "I wanted to be doing good things for local communities."

A quasi-public agency, Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank finances investments that address infrastructure needs. Diehl said the finance programs have saved cities and towns millions of dollars in interest expense and energy costs, created or supported thousands of jobs and improved the environment. About \$515 million has been invested in local infrastructure since Diehl took over in 2016.

His roles with the U.N. – his responsibilities require him to travel to New York City each quarter – and the infrastructure bank have goals in common, such as environmental sustainability.

'It's about fostering dialogue, getting buy-in as to why we are going in a certain direction, and being flexible and open.'

getting buy-in as to why we are going in a certain direction, and being flexible and open," said Diehl.

The bank oversees revolving loan funds for causes such as clean water and brownfields remediation.

"I like to keep my finger on the pulse of what's happening internationally," he said. At the same time, he enjoys the more hands-on involvement with the infrastructure bank.

As a past vice chairman with HSBC Bank, he was tasked with repairing relations with the U.S. government after the London-based bank was implicated in a money-laundering scheme. He successfully led the bank's reorganization and rebranding, garnering awards and recognition, and rebuilding trust.

"It's about fostering dialogue, streamlining processes and improving efficiencies, giving clients the ability to apply for loans or get disbursements online, getting loans into the local economy faster. ■

SUSAN SHALHOUB
Contributing Writer

MARIA DUCHARME

Senior vice president and chief nursing officer,
The Miriam Hospital



THE CARING KIND: Maria Ducharme began her career at The Miriam Hospital in 1987 and is now The Miriam's chief nursing officer, overseeing about 750 nurses.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

MARIA DUCHARME SAYS The **Miriam Hospital** has grown a lot over the last 32 years, and she's grown with it.

When Ducharme, vice president for patient care services and chief nursing officer, started at The Miriam in 1987, the hospital was considered a moderate-sized community institution, she recalled. Since then, Miriam has become part of Lifespan Corp., Rhode Island's largest health care system, and the hospital has developed a reputation for delivering top-notch care.

"When I started my career I had no thought of being a [chief nursing officer], but I availed myself to be open to opportunities," Ducharme said. She received a bachelor's degree in nursing from Rhode Island College in 1987 and a master's in nursing from the University of Rhode Island in 1996. She became chief nursing officer at Miriam in 2010. She earned a doctorate in nursing practice from the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute of Health Professions in 2015.

The Miriam Hospital, with 750

'There's been such phenomenal support here for nursing practice from the executive team, and from the community.'

nurses, has received prestigious Magnet designations for nursing excellence five times spanning 20 years, an achievement matched by only four other hospitals in the country, according to Miriam. "There's been such phenomenal support here for nursing practice from the executive team, and from the community," Ducharme said. "That's not found in every organization."

Ducharme said hospitalized patients these days tend to face more complex medical issues than they did years ago. She said it's important to create teams of doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel, with the goal of achieving the best results for patients.

At the same time, nurses have far more data at their disposal to measure quality of care. But Ducharme said the human touch is still a key element in nursing practice. "Nurses are so adept at how they make a difference. ... We're the ones who are there 24/7, doing the assessments, doing the listening." ■

ANDY SMITH
Contributing Writer

DR. JACK A. ELIAS

Senior vice president for health affairs and dean of medicine and biological sciences, *Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University*



LAB WORK: Dr. Jack A. Elias, a top administrator at Brown University's Warren Alpert Medical School, is also considered a leader in research designed to be put to use in doctors' offices and hospitals to improve health outcomes.

PBN PHOTO/MIKE SKORSKI

YEARS AGO, AS a resident at the University of Philadelphia, Dr. Jack A. Elias had a patient in his mid-50s with pulmonary fibrosis. "He was a wonderful man and it was really hard to tell him he had it – and that we, as a medical community, did not have a treatment," said Elias. "I decided then: We've got to fix this."

That early interaction with a patient with lung disease has spurred Elias toward research.

He has published over 230 peer-reviewed papers. He has several patents, with more pending. He's held appointments at the University of Pennsylvania and was Yale School of Medicine's chief of pulmonary and critical care medicine and chair of its department of medicine before coming to **Brown University.**

Now the senior vice president for health affairs, dean of medicine and biological sciences, the Frank L. Day professor of biology and a professor of medicine at Brown's Warren Alpert Medical School, Elias is a leader in translational research, which translates into

information that improves health outcomes.

"It's not just science for the sake of science anymore," Elias said. "We owe it to the people and colleagues in our community and the patients to take our knowledge as far as we can, to improve their lives."

And Brown is doing well in this regard. Under Elias' leadership,

beginning in 2013, the awards on grants have more than doubled for Brown's Division of Biology and Medicine. External research funding is up 88%.

Elias noted the importance of collaboration, pointing out that

knowledge from a single entity may not lead to treatment. He said there is much to gain.

"As discoveries that go into the community get patented, they are translated as new companies in the Jewelry District in Rhode Island and other places," he said. "This is an economic engine for the biotech community in Rhode Island." ■

SUSAN SHALHOUB
Contributing Writer

'We owe it to the people and colleagues in our community and the patients to take our knowledge as far as we can, to improve their lives.'

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KENNETH J. FILARSKI

Founder and principal,
Filarski/Architecture+Planning+Research



BY DESIGN: Architect Kenneth J. Filarski enjoys working on projects for the betterment of his profession and of Rhode Island.
PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

ARCHITECT KENNETH J. FILARSKI thinks of himself at this point in his career as diving deep into the third phase of life, with the phases defined as learning, earning and serving.

In 1976, Filarski founded his Cranston-based firm, **Filarski/Architecture+Planning+Research**, which he describes as “an integrated architecture and planning, ecology design studio and research workshop.”

“I have been blessed with a different pathway,” said Filarski, an Ohio native who came to Rhode Island in 1974 after earning architecture degrees in Washington, D.C., and Vermont.

The different pathway that Filarski refers to, reaching back into his graduate school work, is to always think of man-made structures, the natural environment and the human mind as deeply intertwined parts of the design process.

Now, after 43 years of contributing to community-building projects in Rhode Island, Filarski said it is good to feel he has the professional credibility to keep doing projects for the betterment of his profession and of Rhode Island.

‘I get excited about being a catalyst for ideas.’

This kind of effort would be nothing new. Filarski is one of only 34 people who holds a fellowship in both the American Institute of Architects and in LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

He helped establish the School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation at Roger Williams University. He is chairman of the U.S. Green Building Council Rhode Island. He directed the council’s LEED for Neighborhood Development to create neighbor-

hood revitalization plans for Providence’s Olneyville and Smith Hill neighborhoods.

“I get excited about being a catalyst for ideas” that use design to help communities live more lightly on the land, said Filarski.

He believes that a positive attitude toward innovation and a willingness to thank people for their efforts are important in the workplace. His advice to his 20-year-old self would be summed up this way: Do not fear the discomfort of starting from scratch; just dive in and begin. ■

MARY LHOWE
Contributing Writer

DIANA FRANCHITTO

CEO and president, *HopeHealth*



TIME MANAGER: At this stage of her career, Diana Franchitto, CEO and president of the nonprofit HopeHealth, says she’s much more mindful about using her time efficiently.
PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

DIANA FRANCHITTO works in a growing field, managing a \$70 million company that she had a large role in creating and doing lots of public speaking and consultation work.

But don’t expect to meet a frantic, go-go executive, barking orders to underlings and screaming into the phone.

Past the midpoint of her career, Franchitto puts great value on peacefulness, collaboration and careful listening. One of the things she would advise her own 20-year-old self, Franchitto said, is to practice patience.

Franchitto is CEO and president of **HopeHealth**, a large nonprofit home care, hospice and palliative care organization. HopeHealth has 550 employees, and it cares for about 2,200 patients a day in settings – often their homes – where patients prefer to recover from a serious illness or approach the end of their lives.

In her role in the company, where she has worked for 12 years, Franchitto has led the assimilation of two nonprofit hospice and palliative care or-

‘You are more successful when you go about your work with a more peaceful approach.’

ganizations. She implemented a palliative home care program, led the construction of a new 24-bed hospice facility and new administration headquarters, and many more major initiatives.

Now 29 years into her career, Franchitto said she’s at a stage where she wants her work to have meaning. “I get great satisfaction in knowing we make a difference in caring for seriously ill people

and their families,” she said.

The current stage of her life and career, Franchitto said, also makes her extra aware of using time well.

“Being intentional about how we use our time is more prominent in my mind,” she said. “Earlier on in my career I was not as deliberate with my time.”

Franchitto counsels calmness in doing one’s work. “You are more successful when you go about your work with a more peaceful approach,” she said. “More-mature people learn this through the good times and the bad times.” ■

MARY LHOWE
Contributing Writer



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GARY E. FURTADO

CEO and president, *Navigant Credit Union*



ON HIS WATCH: Gary E. Furtado has overseen tremendous growth at Smithfield-based Navigant Credit Union in his more than 30 years as CEO and president.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

GARY E. FURTADO IS a firm believer in leading by example.

“Surround yourself with good people and then get out of the way,” said Furtado, CEO and president of **Navigant Credit Union**. “Our challenge to all of our employees – from the senior management team, to team leaders and entry-level employees – is to treat our members, our co-workers and the members of the communities we serve like they’re family. That means making sure everyone within the organization knows that you’re in their corner. It means no matter your title, take action and be an example. If we can do that, we know we’ll always find success.”

After graduating from Bryant University in 1978, Furtado landed an entry-level role with Credit Union Central Falls (now Navigant). He never left and was appointed CEO and president in 1987. Under his leadership, 104-year-old Navigant has grown from a small credit union on Broad Street in Central Falls into one of the largest credit unions in

‘Surround yourself with good people and then get out of the way.’

the state, boasting 18 branches, \$2.3 billion in assets and more than 95,000 members.

Navigant has experienced tremendous growth over the past three years, fueled by the opening of branches in Warwick, East Greenwich and South Kingstown. In addition to placing a stronger emphasis on the institution’s digital strategy and cybersecurity efforts, Navigant has furthered its commitment to helping its employees find success and better serve members by creating the new role of vice president of learning and organization

development.

Furtado said it’s easy for him to remain passionate about his job because he feels his work matters.

“By doing business with us, our members are trusting us with their hard-earned money,” Furtado said. “They’re leaning on us for guidance and expertise as they plan out their entire financial lives. That’s a huge responsibility and it’s a responsibility we don’t take lightly.” ■

JOHN A. LAHTINEN
Contributing Writer

SCOTT A. GIBBS

President,

Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island



GRAND PLAN: Scott A. Gibbs’ career in economic development has spanned nearly four decades. He leans on the experience as president of the self-funded, nonprofit Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

AS A SOPHOMORE at Wabash College, Scott A. Gibbs wrote a paper on regional development for an urban government course he was taking. That paper would serve as the launching point for Gibbs’ career in planning and economic development, a career path he values to this very day.

“I am fortunate to be in a profession that constantly challenges me every day and that offers a variety of experiences,” said Gibbs, president of the **Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island**. “These qualities allow for my continued growth as a professional and a person. Most importantly, my profession offers the opportunity to leave a positive mark in the communities I work. This sense of purpose and value is a luxury.”

Gibbs plays an active role for the nonprofit, which focuses on real estate-based economic-development projects and strategies for Rhode Island communities – including as developer for the Innovate Newport project, a collaboration with Newport and the Newport County Development

‘Most importantly, my profession offers the opportunity to leave a positive mark in the communities I work.’

Council on an \$8 million remodeling of an empty school into a technology and cowork facility.

In addition to working closely with the nonprofit’s volunteer leadership, Gibbs also partnered with attorney Karen Grande to come up with recommended modifications to Rhode Island’s tax-increment financing statute so it could be more widely used by cities and towns. The changes were signed into law by Gov. Gina M.

Raimondo in 2018.

Faced with a challenging commercial real estate market, Gibbs leans heavily on his nearly 40 years of experience and relationships.

“For me, leadership means a fundamental commitment to leading change while demonstrating uncompromised honesty, integrity and professionalism,” Gibbs said. “I have been blessed to work with a great board of directors and professionals from both the private and public sectors. Every one of these relationships [has] contributed to my leadership style.” ■

JOHN A. LAHTINEN
Contributing Writer

DAVID M. GILDEN

Founding partner, *Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP*



CONSTANT PRESENCE: David M. Gilden has been a partner at Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP since the firm was established in 1988.
PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

DAVID M. GILDEN WAS originally expected to go into his family's retail jewelry business in his hometown of New Haven, Conn.

A change of heart at Brown University led him to pursue politics, and he never turned back. After college in 1980, armed with a political science degree, Gilden got involved with two ill-fated Republican presidential campaigns, including George H.W. Bush's first attempt to win the nomination.

Afterward, Gilden enrolled in the Boston University School of Law, where he earned his law degree in 1982. Six years later, Gilden became one of the eight founding partners of **Partridge, Snow & Hahn LLP**, where he also served as managing partner for 17 years. "I took a risk. I was the youngest of the partners committed to this brand-new venture, before it was fashionable to do so. ... Fortunately, the risk paid off."

Gilden led the firm during a period of substantial growth. "Over the last 31 years, we have been able to grow the firm surely

and steadily in terms of revenue, profitability and breadth," he said. "We have gone from a startup to an institution. I'm extremely proud of the firm we have become."

Gilden manages to make time for his community as well. He has served on the board of directors of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, the Taco/White Family Foundation and Crossroads Rhode Island, where he is also a member of its executive committee. In the private sector, he has served on the board of directors for Providence Mutual Insurance Co., and as general counsel of

the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. He doesn't plan to slow down.

"I intend to keep practicing business and real estate law while contributing to the continuing growth and success of the firm and remaining active in nonprofit organizations, while continuing to serve on boards of for-profit business entities," he said. ■

JAIME LOWE
Contributing Writer

'We have gone from a startup to an institution. I'm extremely proud of the firm we have become.'

Congratulations to Keith Kelly

and all of this year's 25 Over Fifty-Five award winners.

We thank **Keith Kelly** and the other recipients of this prestigious award for their strong leadership in both their fields and in the region.



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Rhode Island
State President

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JOHN C. GREGORY

CEO and president,
Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce



CHAMBER KEEPER: John C. Gregory has built the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce into a success in the 27 years since he became CEO and president. Now he's near retirement.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

THE NORTHERN RHODE ISLAND Chamber of Commerce was near bankruptcy when John C. Gregory joined as CEO and president 27 years ago. Today, it's a thriving organization representing 600 businesses in 13 communities.

Gregory's entrepreneurial spirit is largely responsible for the turnaround. He boosted membership and sponsorship by hosting more networking events and seminars – more than 60 each year. The Chamber's Eggs and Issues breakfasts are especially popular because they feature speakers – such as Gov. Gina M. Raimondo and Secretary of Commerce Stefan Pryor – who have a big influence on the business community.

"It gives [people] the opportunity to hear from these folks in more than just a sound bite," Gregory said.

Gregory also has been opportunistic. After the Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce Federation folded, several chambers were left without lobbying support. Gregory founded the Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce Coalition in 1996 to fill the void. "We had a full-time

lobbyist on staff, so we talked with other chambers and said for a small fee, we'll lobby on behalf of not only our members but your members, too." Gregory still leads the coalition.

Collaboration has been crucial to Gregory's success. In addition to the R.I. Chamber of Commerce Coalition, he's a founding member of the Rhode Island Business Coalition, an advocacy organization representing business groups at the Statehouse. "We took folks who might have been considered

competitors because we're all membership-based organizations and we changed the mindset," Gregory said. "Instead of having a small spotlight where we try to elbow each other

'Instead of having a small spotlight where we try to elbow each other out of the way, we make a bigger spotlight.'

out of the way, we make a bigger spotlight."

Gregory has also held leadership roles at the Greater Providence and Cranston chambers of commerce. His next gig? Retirement later this year.

"I'm planning not to plan," he said. ■

SARAH PARSONS
Contributing Writer



GARY E. FURTADO
Providence Business News
25 Over Fifty-Five Winner
President & CEO, Navigant Credit Union

A true **champion** of our members, our employees and our community.

Congratulations, Gary, from your entire team at Navigant Credit Union.



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TIM HEBERT

CEO and founder, *Trilix LLC*



SELF-STARTER: Tim Hebert's first business venture went from a two-person startup to a \$170 million, 300-employee company. In 2017, he started something new: Trilix LLC, a software development and business intelligence company.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

TIM HEBERT HAS ALWAYS had the blood of an entrepreneur coursing through his veins.

He vividly recalls watching astronauts land on the moon on his family's black and white TV as a kid – a very apropos recollection during the 50th anniversary of that mission.

"I was fascinated by the science, technology, innovation and adventure," Hebert said. "I knew in that moment my career would flow in that direction."

After high school, Hebert enlisted in the U.S. Air Force to study computer technology. Upon fulfilling his military service, he entered corporate America and worked several

jobs, including software engineer, hardware design engineer, test engineer and systems engineer.

Feeling unfulfilled and uninspired, Hebert leapt feet first into the world of entrepreneurship, first with information technology services provider Atrion – a two-person outfit operating out of a spare bedroom that eventually grew into a \$170 million, 300-employee operation.

'One of my philosophies in life is that there is no straight line, and my path is no exception.'

In 2017, Hebert founded software development and business intelligence startup **Trilix LLC**, where he now serves as CEO.

Faced with both the challenges and opportunities of guiding a new company, Hebert thrives.

"For me, it's all about impact and inspiration," he said. "I am passionate [about] the long-lasting impact our day-to-day actions can have on our employees, clients and communities. The opportunity to

inspire others to constantly strive for excellence keeps me passionate. I believe that leadership is everyone's business. I stress that every single employee is a leader regardless of their title."

Unsurprisingly, Hebert isn't one to kick back and relax when he's not in the office. From climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to undertaking a rim-to-rim crossing of the Grand Canyon, he is always on the search for the next great adventure.

"One of my philosophies in life is that there is no straight line, and my path is no exception," he said. ■

JOHN A. LAHTINEN
Contributing Writer

Congratulations

to Ann Kashmanian,
and all the winners of PBN's
25 Over Fifty-Five 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.

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Angela Caliendo, MD, Vice President
Peter Hollmann, MD, Chief Medical Officer
Tammy Lederer, Chief Human Resources Officer
David Hemendinger, Chief Information Officer

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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ANN M. KASHMANIAN

CEO, *Brown Medicine*



FULFILLING ROLE: Brown Medicine CEO Ann M. Kashmanian said she finds it rewarding to be leading a physicians group where “their dedication to patients is unmatched.”

PBN PHOTO/MIKE SKORSKI

IN MANY WAYS, Ann M. Kashmanian’s job as CEO of multispecialty physicians practice **Brown Medicine** is much like trying to fit together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle – a challenge she enjoys.

While working as a certified public accountant for KPMG early in her career, Kashmanian was drawn to the health care industry, finding the accounting a rewarding experience.

Over a nearly 20-year span, in addition to holding financial leadership positions for several behavioral health groups and Butler Hospital, she served in critical roles for Lifespan Corp., including chief financial officer at Newport Hospital, before joining Brown Medicine as chief financial officer in 2016. She’s now CEO.

“I come to work every day knowing that I am working for physicians who are making a difference in peoples’ lives,” she said. “I am truly in awe of what they accomplish. Their dedication to patients is unmatched.”

Like many other large practices, Brown Medicine has learned to evolve. In the past two years, the

organization rolled out a multi-year strategic plan that included a restructuring to provide more support to its physicians in order to capitalize on opportunities and control costs. Further, Brown Medicine’s information technology infrastructure and services have been improved and the organization has revamped its compliance program.

“Leading an organization through change is always challenging,” Kashmanian said. “Creating an environment where change is seen as positive has been some-

I come to work

every day knowing that I am working for physicians who are making a difference in peoples’ lives.’

thing we needed to work through. Reiterating the need to change, while reinforcing the value people bring to our organization, was something we needed to instill in our workforce.

“I fully embrace the mission and vision of Brown

Medicine,” she said. “I feel privileged by the opportunity to support my physician colleagues in cultivating an environment that allows them to continue their important work.” ■

JOHN A. LAHTINEN
Contributing Writer

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KEITH KELLY

Rhode Island state president, *Citizens Bank*



AT THE TOP: Keith Kelly oversees the financial aspects of Citizens Bank's Rhode Island operation as state president. He's highly involved in the philanthropy side of the business, too.

PBN PHOTO/MIKE SKORSKI

KEITH KELLY IS Rhode Island state president of **Citizens Bank** and head of its corporate banking group. But in many ways, he's not what you'd expect for someone in such a high-ranking position.

"Whereas some managers will sit at a desk and look at numbers, he's out there on the front lines almost as if he's one of us," said Kevin Chamberlain, Citizens senior vice president of corporate banking. "He supports us in the community and the market and in everything that we do."

Kelly mainly works with businesses with \$25 million to \$800 million in annual revenue. His leadership and ability to generate new clients is one of the reasons behind Citizens Bank's success. Kelly said the bank has met or exceeded analysts' expectations for the past 19 to 20 quarters, despite challenges such as splitting from the Royal Bank of Scotland Group in 2015.

Kelly also oversees Citizens Bank's philanthropy in Rhode Island. With 5,300 employees – more staff than any of Citizens' other

state operations – the charitable events range from volunteering at food banks and soup kitchens to working with veterans groups. Kelly will sometimes spend his lunch at the McAuley House or another local organization. He also serves on the boards of Hope-Health Hospice & Palliative Care, United Way of Rhode Island, the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, the Rhode Island Bank-

ers Association and the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council.

"I've been very fortunate in my career, and it's important to give back," Kelly said.

"One of the key

cornerstones for Citizens Bank is being engaged locally."

Kelly has been at Citizens Bank for nine years and has worked in banking for more than 30 years. He's held leadership positions at The Washington Trust Co., Square 1 Bank, UPS Capital Business Credit Inc., First International Bank, Bank of Boston and Bank of New England. ■

SARAH PARSONS
Contributing Writer

'I've been very fortunate in my career, and it's important to give back.'

SALLY E. LAPIDES

CEO and president, *Residential Properties Ltd.*

CONNECTIONS MADE:

Sally E. Lapides says real estate is "a relationship business," and she's excelled at making lasting relationships over the years.

PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS



FOR SALLY E. LAPIDES, founder, CEO and president of real estate company **Residential Properties Ltd.**, a key to success is staying connected to your community.

"That's always been my mantra in this business. You get by giving back. When I interview a potential broker for my company, that's one of the questions I ask. Not just how many houses have you sold, but what have you done outside of the office. You'll never make a living by just going from your house to the office and back again," Lapides said.

She practices what she preaches, and over the years has been on the boards of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Roger Williams University, Smith Hill Center, Trinity Repertory Company, Providence Country Day School, The Gordon School, the Newport International Film Festival, and GAIA (Global Alliance to Immunize Against AIDS). She has worked with Rhode Island Foundation, Year Up Rhode Island, Habitat for Humanity and more.

"She gives back to the commu-

nity in multiple ways, and she's been doing it forever," said Libby Isaacson, Residential Properties chief operating officer.

At the same time, Lapides built her company into a multifaceted operation with 200 agents, 25 support employees, a relocation division and a commercial real estate division. Isaacson said Lapides is a great negotiator with a keen sense of the Rhode Island market.

Real estate is "a relationship business," said Lapides, and even though she no longer sells houses herself, she has clients from 20 or even 30 years ago call looking for referrals for themselves or their children.

Lapides received a bachelor's degree in art history from Boston University, and originally planned to work in a museum. Her mother, Myrna Lapides, was also a Realtor and when an early art gallery job fell through, she suggested her daughter try selling real estate.

It turned out she was a natural. ■

ANDY SMITH
Contributing Writer

'That's always been my mantra in this business. You get by giving back.'

E. PAUL LARRAT

Dean of College of Pharmacy, *University of Rhode Island*



THE RIGHT MIX: E. Paul Larrat, dean of the University of Rhode Island's College of Pharmacy, says the pharmacy program is among the nation's best because of the atmosphere of teamwork among students and faculty. PBN PHOTO/KATE WHITNEY LUCEY

E. PAUL LARRAT MADE a steady climb to the top of the College of Pharmacy at the **University of Rhode Island**.

Growing up, he watched his aunt and uncle run a pharmacy, and his interest was piqued. So that's what he studied when he attended the University of Rhode Island, earning a bachelor's degree in 1982.

That was just the start.

He soon became interested in business. "I enjoyed managing things, and trying to make things grow," he said. He earned his MBA at URI in 1984, then obtained

a master's degree in pharmacy administration four years later. He also wanted to give academia a try, so he earned his Ph.D. from Brown University in epidemiology in 1992, and became an assistant professor of epidemiology at URI.

After appointments as associate professor and professor of epidemiology, Larrat was named associate dean of the College of Pharmacy in 2001. He oversaw the growth in funded college research from less than \$2 million a year

to more than \$11 million. He also co-chaired the committee that designed and oversaw construction of the \$75 million pharmacy building. In 2004, he was selected as a NASA fellow.

During his tenure as dean, which started in 2013, URI's pharmacy program has attained "top 25" status in most quality met-

rics among U.S. schools.

"The quality of the education here is top-notch," Larrat said. "It's a really collaborative and supportive environment here. The students aren't competing against each

other, they're helping each other, they're part of a team ... we've created that type of atmosphere."

Larrat's favorite part of the job is interacting with a variety of people. "I love dealing with the students, working with them as colleagues, and I love getting out into the community, seeing my alumni, seeing professionals from other disciplines. I think it's about being with people, if you boil it down." ■

JAIME LOWE
Contributing Writer

'I love dealing with the students, working with them as colleagues, and I love getting out into the community, seeing my alumni.'

DENNIS LITTKY

President, *College Unbound*



A CLASS OF HIS OWN: Dennis Littky has gained the reputation of being an innovative educator by developing projects such as College Unbound, a nontraditional, degree-granting school. PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

WHILE RHODE ISLAND is home to world-renowned institutions of higher education, Dennis Littky is focused on helping students he says are underserved by those colleges and universities: adults who started college but, for one reason or another, never finished and didn't go back.

Littky is the founder of **College Unbound**, a nontraditional, degree-granting school that has graduated 120 adults since it started in 2009.

"If you want to boost the economy and get better jobs and make more money, [we] need to give them skills and a degree," said Littky. "That's what I set out to do."

College Unbound is "the most diverse college in Rhode Island ... [with] around 70% people of color; the average [student] age is 38," Littky said. With an annual budget of \$1.5 million, full-time annual tuition capped at \$10,000, and federal financial aid available, College Unbound has partnered with United Way of Rhode Island and Providence Community Health Centers, where employees can take classes at their

workplace. Littky is in discussions with Citizens Bank, Cox Communications and Ocean State Job Lot to offer College Unbound classes to their employees, as well.

College Unbound is part of Big Picture Learning, Littky's nonprofit that established the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence and more than 175 schools worldwide. Littky's passion for "starting things and carrying them out"

inspired him to develop College Unbound.

Littky's lifelong educational innovations have earned him recognition – a TV movie and a book – and myriad awards: The Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Educa-

tion; the George Lucas Educational Foundation's Daring Dozen; and Fast Company named Littky No. 4 among 2004's Top 50 Innovators. Local awards – including the Bank of America Local Hero Award and the New England Higher Education Excellence Award – are most meaningful to Littky. ■

NANCY KIRSCH
Contributing Writer

'If you want to boost the economy and get better jobs and make more money, [we] need to give them skills. ... That's what I set out to do.'

R. RUSSELL MORIN JR.

President, *Russell Morin Catering & Events*



KEY INGREDIENT: R. Russell Morin Jr., in the kitchen at Russell Morin Catering & Events in Attleboro, says finding the right personnel was the most important step in running his business.

PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

R. RUSSELL “RUSTY” MORIN JR. says he’s had little to do with the success of his company, **Russell Morin Catering & Events**, the caterer of choice for myriad New England-based events over the last 50 years. It’s the employees. “They’ve made me successful,” said Morin, president of the Attleboro company. “It has nothing to do with me. I realized that I was going to be successful if I had great employees.”

The food-service industry is not known for offering generous employee benefits, but Morin’s company offers its 90 full-time employees a generous benefits package, including profit-sharing, parental leave and rewards for top earners.

The company’s core values – be professional, work as a team, create “wow” experiences and get it done right – are top-of-mind at the weekly staff huddle, where income statements are shared with employees.

Things have changed since Morin took over the fourth-generation food-service business in 1972. “When I started with the company in the early ’70s, it was

all-male,” he recalled. “Hiring younger women ... helped me grow the company.” Transitioning from his father’s red scheduling book to computerizing in 1986 also proved beneficial. After several years of running the company, Morin realized that success came when he was “sales-driven and not chef-driven.”

With operations in several Rhode Island venues and a restaurant in Attleboro, the company continues to evolve. In addition to expanding its warehouse and sales office, Morin recently launched

Fresh Eats, a new approach to healthy, upscale, casual catering. The company donates \$250,000 each year to local nonprofits.

Russell Morin Catering & Events remains a family affair, with Morin’s brother, wife and two sons involved, too. Self-starter employees are those who stay and grow with the company. The company’s biggest challenge, Morin said, is keeping all the details in place to create that “wow” experience. ■

NANCY KIRSCH
Contributing Writer

‘I realized
that I was going to
be successful if I had
great employees.’

DR. JOHN MURPHY

Executive vice president of physician affairs,
Lifespan Corp.;

Professor of medicine and family medicine,
Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University



TOP OF HIS GAME: Dr. John Murphy is not only in charge of physician affairs at Lifespan Corp., he’s also a professor at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

DR. JOHN MURPHY HAS always been a leader.

He has held leadership positions since shortly after he graduated from medical school, beginning with chief resident. In his 36 years in health care, he has held several chief positions and directorships at Memorial Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital and **Lifespan Corp.**, and he has been president of the American Geriatrics Society. He’s currently the executive vice president of physician affairs at Lifespan, a four-hospital system with a \$2.2 billion operating budget.

His secret to effective leadership isn’t complicated. “I listen,” Murphy said. “It’s not about me; it’s about the people we serve, the patients and families we care for, and our employees.”

Murphy supervises the hospitals’ medical staffs, as well as quality and safety; medical education; key service lines such as cancer, cardiac, diagnostic imaging, pathology and pharmacy; and Lifespan’s \$85 million-a-year research program, among other duties. Of Lifespan’s 15,000 employees,

Murphy oversees 2,800 of them.

Murphy has always made time for teaching. He’s a professor of medicine and family medicine at Brown University’s Warren Alpert Medical School, though most of his classes these days involve health care finance and the politics of funding health care.

“I love interacting with young minds,” Murphy said. “It keeps me young.”

He has also taught in Shanghai, China, and Germany, and he has

helped develop postgraduate primary care training programs in China, Jordan and Russia.

Murphy said his ultimate goal is to provide quality care at the lowest possible cost

to Rhode Island residents, but he has another dream, too: a merger of Lifespan, Care New England Health System and Brown to form a single academic medical system in the state. Merger talks recently broke down, but Murphy won’t say it’ll never happen. “I never say never,” he said. ■

SARAH PARSONS
Contributing Writer

‘It’s not about
me; it’s about the
people we serve,
the patients and
families we care for,
and our employees.’

CATHERINE M. PARENTE

Partner, *Sansiveri, Kimball & Co. LLP*



ALWAYS EXCELLING: Catherine M. Parente, a partner at Sansiveri, Kimball & Co., has held numerous leadership positions at public accounting firms during her 41-year career.
PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

HARD WORK HAS long been part of Catherine M. Parente's life.

Whether it was becoming valedictorian of her high school class at St. Mary's Academy of the Visitation, or graduating with the highest distinction from Bryant College (now Bryant University), where she earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1977, it seemed she was destined to excel.

Her 41-year career in public accounting firms – most of it in leadership positions – has established her as among the best in her field. As a partner at **Sansiveri, Kimball & Co. LLP** in Providence, she has been instrumental in developing the firm's forensics and valuation service areas.

Parente has a few favorite achievements in her four decades in her profession – “making partner in a CPA firm [Murphy & Co.] in just nine years was certainly one of them – especially in 1987 when there weren't as many women in the profession, let alone in the upper management ranks.” In addition to her work

at Murphy & Co., which became Suls, Westgate & Parente LLP, she has partnered in the forensic and valuation services group at Grant Thornton LLP, and at CCR LLP, where she was a member of the executive committee, as well as office managing partner.

Parente values her community work equally. She has taken on volunteer leadership roles with United Way of Rhode Island, Crossroads Rhode Island and the

Rhode Island Community Food Bank. And she's proud of how she's helped others in the accounting field.

“My greatest accomplishment doesn't have to do

with personal workplace performance, as much as it does with making a positive impact in the lives of my colleagues,” she said. “I believe strongly in mentoring those I work with and helping them develop their talents. Nothing is more satisfying than running into a former colleague and hearing them say, ‘I have learned so much from you.’” ■

JAIME LOWE
Contributing Writer

‘I believe

strongly in mentoring those I work with and helping them develop their talents.’

BOB SEWALL

Executive vice president of sales and marketing,
Blount Fine Foods Corp.



FOOD AND FOUNDATION: Not only does Blount Fine Foods Executive Vice President Bob Sewall travel the country promoting Blount products, he started his own charity to help the needy.
PBN PHOTO/KATE WHITNEY LUCEY

FALL RIVER-BASED Blount Fine Foods Corp. says it controls more than 60% of the national fresh soup market, thanks to Bob Sewall, Blount executive vice president who spends 46 weeks a year crisscrossing the country to promote Blount products. Notwithstanding his senior leadership role, Sewall said, “I work for the people who are making the soup. Every decision I make is based on what's in their best interest.”

Of CEO Todd Blount, who joined Blount in 1994, when Sewall was hired as regional sales manager, he said, “We've developed a great management team. ... Our personalities are totally opposite ... so we complement each other.”

Sewall focuses on helping existing customers sell more Blount products and turning prospective clients – particularly on the West Coast – into committed customers. “If we continue to be committed to quality products, there's no end in sight,” said Sewall, whose local customers include Dave's Marketplace, Stop & Shop, Market

Basket and The Capital Grille, his first customer. Known for anticipating food trends, Sewall said he believes that people's commitment to consuming cleaner, healthier and better-quality food contributes to Blount's success, as did persuading Panera Bread and Legal Sea Foods to enter the retail market

by licensing their soup brands to Blount. These and other successes have helped grow Blount's revenue from \$20 million in 1994 to \$425 million today, according to Sewall.

Sewall established Bob's Big Give (bobsbiggive.com), a foundation that donates

Thanksgiving meals to those in need and provides clothing, furniture, toiletries and more to individuals or families who lose their homes due to fires or other disasters and those who flee abusive domestic situations. “Outside of my family [his wife and four children], that's my passion ... giving back to those who need a hand up,” said Sewall. ■

NANCY KIRSCH
Contributing Writer

‘I work for

the people who are making the soup. Every decision I make is based on what's in their best interest.’

BRIAN J. SPERO

CEO and president, *The Beacon Mutual Insurance Co.*



RISE AND SHINE: After decades of practicing law, Brian J. Spero climbed the executive ranks at The Beacon Mutual Insurance Co. and has successfully led the workers' compensation insurer since 2017.

PBN PHOTO/MIKE SKORSKI

BRIAN J. SPERO, CEO and president at **The Beacon Mutual Insurance Co.**, knew at a young age that he wanted to be an attorney.

"My wife always teases me that I was born with a briefcase in my hand, so my parents gave my wife a picture of me going off to kindergarten with briefcase in hand," Spero said. "From high school on, the ideas of helping people resolve issues and public service were very important to me."

Spero, a Rhode Island native, returned to his home state after graduating from Boston College Law School. A stint as a law clerk to U.S.

District Judge Francis Boyle gave him a solid legal foundation. "Judge Boyle was known as a tough taskmaster in the courtroom, but he was a great teacher and mentor to his law clerks," Spero recalled.

After nearly 30 years practicing law at Tillinghast, Collins & Graham and Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP, where he was a founding partner with expertise in insurance law, Spero became general

counsel and vice president at Beacon, a workers' compensation insurer, in 2008. He was prepared for the career transition. He noted that "during the 1980s, the practice of law began to change dramatically and lawyers were expected to be good business advisers, in addition to good lawyers."

Spero moved up Beacon's executive ranks until he was appointed CEO and president in 2017.

Beacon has thrived, in part, because of Spero's and his management team's oversight of the insurer's financial infrastructure, investment strategy and preservation of assets.

"I have been extraordinarily fortunate to have the privilege to lead such a committed group of employees with strong support from my leadership team," he said. "I thoroughly enjoy what I do every day, and my contributions to Beacon's recent success have all stemmed from successes of our team as a whole." ■

JAIME LOWE
Contributing Writer

'From high school on, the ideas of helping people resolve issues and public service were very important to me.'

NEIL D. STEINBERG

CEO and president, *Rhode Island Foundation*



TIME WELL SPENT: Neil D. Steinberg has been the top executive at the Rhode Island Foundation since 2008, after stints in banking and higher education in Rhode Island.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

NEIL D. STEINBERG SAYS he's been fortunate in his career to work for three iconic Rhode Island institutions – Industrial National Bank (which became Fleet Bank), Brown University and now the **Rhode Island Foundation**, where he is CEO and president.

"I've been here for 11 years," Steinberg said. "It's the best job I ever had, and I've never worked so hard."

Steinberg, who earned a degree in applied mathematics at Brown University in 1975, said his progression from banking to Brown to the Rhode Island Foundation wasn't planned.

Steinberg took the job at Brown in 2004 at the request of then-Brown President Ruth Simmons. He was vice president of development and led a \$1.4 billion fundraising campaign. He moved to the Rhode Island Foundation in 2008. His skills at fundraising and managing large institutions made him a good fit.

He said certain management principles have remained the same: "Value people, respect people, listen to people. Take some

risks. And be willing to step up and lead."

And the experience he's accumulated over his career is a valuable asset.

"You learn from what you did wrong and what you did right," he said. "I can leverage that experience. It gives you a little more confidence moving forward."

The Rhode Island Foundation has an endowment of about \$1 billion, which the non-profit has invested. Grants are funded with investment earnings from the endowment.

In 2018, the foundation distributed about \$52 million in grants to local causes. For Steinberg, giving a financial boost to organizations and individuals is the best part of his job.

"Every day I am inspired by generous people giving back to their communities, and by nonprofits doing great work," Steinberg said. He quickly added his colleagues at the foundation, which has 47 employees, to that list. ■

ANDY SMITH
Contributing Writer

'It's the best job I ever had, and I've never worked so hard.'

JAMES WILKINSON

President, *SeaScape Lawn Care Inc.*



A GREENER THUMB: James Wilkinson had an advantage when he launched SeaScape Lawn Care Inc. in 1992: He has a degree in horticulture and a doctorate in agronomy.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

NECESSITY IS INDEED the mother of invention for James Wilkinson, president of **SeaScape Lawn Care Inc.** He founded his lawn-care company in 1992 after his previous employer was sold and he needed a job.

“It was the best thing I ever did, and I haven’t regretted it since,” he said.

Together with his wife, Cheryl, he grew the company to 70 employees and has since added complementary services for customers in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

His 35 years of experience, a degree in horticulture and a doctorate in agronomy give him a business edge.

‘Mentors and their encouragement made the difference.’

Unhappy laying off employees in the winter, as most landscapers do, Wilkinson searched for ways to stay busy longer. SeaScape jumped into the holiday lights craze and now strings bulbs for thousands of residential customers and companies such as Foxwoods Resort Casino.

“Lawn care and putting up Christmas lights are entirely different things,” he said with a laugh. However, the lifts and

other equipment SeaScape already owned for tree work came in handy for installing decorations. “It was so much bigger than I ever thought it would be,” he said. “We now keep half of our people busy through the better part of the winter.”

Wilkinson is a respected leader in the industry, with published articles in scientific journals and trade publications. And his own experiences with helpful professors and business mentors inspire him to do so for others. “Mentors

and their encouragement made the difference,” he said. In 2017 Wilkinson partnered with Apprenticeship R.I. and the Rhode Island Nursery

and Landscape Association as the first landscape company in the state to offer a year of paid, on-the-job and classroom training.

His commitment to environmental responsibility was demonstrated when SeaScape became the first Rhode Island landscape company to earn a green certification from the R.I. Department of Environmental Management. ■

WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL
Contributing Writer

RONALD YANKU

Plant operations director, *Edesia Inc.*



FACTORY CERTIFIED: Ronald Yanku has been credited with boosting Edesia Inc.’s production of lifesaving nutritional packets with robotics, while cutting costs and maintaining jobs. He’s plant operations director for the nonprofit.

PBN PHOTO/DAVE HANSEN

RONALD YANKU’S 34 YEARS in manufacturing all led to his most prized job yet: saving the lives of children around the world with nutritional peanut butter packets as **Edesia Inc.’s** plant operations director.

“With our ever-increasing production since 2010, we have to date provided full treatments to 9.6 million children,” said Yanku. “That, in itself, is pretty satisfying if not downright unbelievable.”

In 2016, Edesia, a nonprofit, moved to a new factory with increased automation at Quonset Business Park in North Kingstown. Yanku

also introduced X-rays into the assembly line to check for contaminants, setting the standard in the industry.

Still, he didn’t want automation to replace any of Edesia’s 105 employees. It didn’t. Thanks to the company’s mission of improving people’s lives and its high-level training, former “box-filling people” operate robotic cells and have taken leadership roles in training others. Job satisfaction and wages have increased.

“I’m so proud that this fantastic

factory is operated by many of the same fantastic employees that it started with and that the winning culture continues with the many that have joined us,” he said.

Before joining Edesia 10 years ago, Yanku worked for several manufacturing companies, honing his skills in safety management, new technologies and lean manufacturing.

He participates in Polaris MEP, a statewide nonprofit that’s an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology’s Manufacturing Extension Partnership and a business unit of URI

Ventures. “It is [Yanku’s] ingenuity and leadership that allows us to break records every quarter both in quantity of product produced but also

in cost savings,” said Edesia CEO and founder Navyn Salem. “Every quarter since we started, he has found a way to reduce the cost of our humanitarian product so we can reach more children with the same dollars.” ■

WENDY PIERMAN MITZEL
Contributing Writer

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