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**Cover Key:** Nominees for the 2024 Platinum Awards are (Top, L-R) Wanda Bryant Hope of Johnson & Johnson; Lavra Dodge of Excel Environmental Resources; Vasantha Kondamudi, MD, of Holy Name Medical Center; (Second Row, L-R) Debbie Looney of Loopwell; Kelly McCormick of Langan; (Bottom, L-R) Jennifer Philips Smith of Gibbons P.C.; Susan Wernick of Jewish Bar Association of New Jersey; and Cynthia Ziegler of Holy Name Medical Center.

Cover: Clear Tunnels

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## LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

# Impromptu Presentations



By Steve Adubato,  
PhD  
Freelance Contributor

Professionals are asked all the time to speak "off the cuff." Some people call it extemporaneous or impromptu speaking. It's one of the greatest fears of even the most confident people, yet it doesn't have to be this way if you change the way you think about communicating in your professional life. Consider the following tips and tools for impromptu presentations:

- **Be prepared.** Yes, that's right. Be prepared for the unexpected. If you assume it could happen, you will be less anxious. While you may not always know when you will be asked to speak, you can anticipate the probability based on the venue.
- **Keep it brief.** No matter what you say, less is more. Say what you have to say

and then sit down. Avoid the tendency to ramble and fill the quiet. Your audience will be more likely to lean in and retain what you are saying if you are clear and concise.

- **Be a sponge.** Stay in the moment and absorb everything happening around you. When you do this, you are presented with content that you can play off of and make reference to. The other technique is to tie what other speakers have said to your comments.
- **Act the part.** This has everything to do with confidence. If we continually remind our audience that we were not prepared to speak and apologize unnecessarily, it undercuts our message. Instead, be confident with both your verbal and non-verbal communication.
- **Be conversational.** If we view this impromptu situation as a "conversation" rather than a "presentation," it allows us to be more authentic. When we are conversational, we go into story telling mode from a personal experience, which resonates well with any audience. 📌



Confidence and preparation are keys to a successful presentation

Steve Adubato, PhD, is the author of five books including, "Lessons in Leadership." His sixth book, "Lessons in Leadership 2.0: The Tough Stuff," will be released in summer 2023. He is an Emmy® Award-winning anchor with programs airing on Thirteen/WNET (PBS) and NJ PBS. He has also appeared on CNN, NPR and NBC's Today Show. Steve Adubato's "Lessons in Leadership" video podcast with co-host Mary Gamba airs Sundays at 10:00 a.m. on News 12+. For more information visit [www.Stand-Deliver.com](http://www.Stand-Deliver.com)





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## UPCOMING



### Enterprising Women in Commerce 2024 Awards Reception

**August 14**

8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.  
Glen Ridge Country Club  
Glen Ridge, NJ



### CIANJ Fall Golf Outing and Networking Reception

**September 26**

10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.  
New Jersey National Golf Club  
Basking Ridge, NJ



### CIANJ's 97th Annual Meeting & Luncheon

**October 24**

11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Hilton Meadowlands Hotel  
East Rutherford, NJ



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details to see it here.

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# Breaking Down the State Budget

By Anthony Russo  
President, CIANJ

**O**n June 29th Governor Murphy signed New Jersey's Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations Act into law. The State's \$56.6 billion FY2025 budget provides a \$6.1 billion surplus to help the State weather future financial challenges.

It also includes a corporate transit tax on companies netting more than \$10 million a year in revenues, estimated to generate roughly \$1 billion a year. This 2.5% corporate transit tax will be retroactive to January 1, 2024. This tax be used to fund New Jersey Transit operations and will be in effect for the next five years.

The Legislature also added \$700 million more into the final budget to cover a multitude of projects including \$30 million for mental health initiatives; \$45 million for University Hospital upgrades; \$30 million for the NJ Sports & Exposition Authority; \$9 million for Weequahic

Park improvements; and other local municipal assistance. The Governor did line item veto the additional \$14 million the Legislature included for tuition aide grants bringing the total back to the proposed \$455 million. Breaking down the budget by State agencies, the Department of Education leads the way with \$21 billion followed by the Department of Human Services at \$10 billion.

The budget also includes initiatives to advance the Governor's AI Moonshot and augment the AI Hub being created at Princeton University. The funding includes \$400,000 to fund the AI-focused Global Entrepreneurs-in-Residence pilot program to help international students at New Jersey universities launch cutting-edge businesses; \$1.5 million to fund AI education in K-12 classrooms and develop new Career and Technical Education programs targeted to AI; and \$2 million to help entrepreneurs build out start-ups related to general artificial intelligence and connect with the AI innovation hub.

It is important to note that the largest revenue sources continue to be the gross income tax at \$20 billion followed by the sales tax at \$13 billion and the corporate business tax at \$4 billion. Other notable revenue sources are \$600 million from

casinos; \$400 million from realty transfer tax; and \$500 million from inheritance tax. The sales tax exemption for electric vehicles was phased out.

For more information on the budget please visit the New Jersey Legislature's website at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/> or contact CIANJ. 📧

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#### HEALTH CARE AWARD

**Karine V. Airapetian, MD**

Chief of Behavioral Health Services



#### ONE TO WATCH AWARD

**Ilham Atir, MBA, MLS(ASCP)CM**

Director of the Laboratory

## Congratulations

**Karine Airapetian, MD, and  
Ilham Atir, MBA, MLS(ASCP)CM**

on your selection as

## CIANJ/COMMERCE Magazine's Enterprising Women in Commerce Award Recipients

This honor recognizes their accomplishments, leadership, and dedication, which has left their mark on healthcare.



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# 2024 Enterprising Women in Commerce

Celebrating the outstanding achievements of women across industries

Compiled by  
Diane C. Walsh and  
Jamie Grill-Goodman

I am proud and humbled to introduce this year's crop of "Enterprising Women in Commerce" as the new editor of COMMERCE magazine. As former editor Diane C. Walsh passes the baton to me – an accomplished female leader herself – I can think of no better way to get acquainted with New Jersey's business and academia community than through this spotlight on such talented women.

For the awards, now in their fourth year, the magazine again asked the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ) to nominate extraordinary women in business and academia to be recognized for their achievements. While all the stories are remarkable, this year one overall female whose lifelong achievements are significant to the community will be named the "CIANJ/COMMERCE Enterprising Woman of the Year."

The 2024 Enterprising Woman of the Year is chosen out of the "Platinum" award winners, who have all reached the C-suite or pinnacle of their careers and celebrate tremendous accomplishments. In addition, the "Ones to Watch" winners encompass an outstanding group of females just getting started in their careers, but already making their mark on their respective industries. Finally, this year's industry-specific "Enterprising Women" demonstrate a breadth of accomplishments across the accounting, architecture, environmental, financial services, healthcare, higher education, human resources, law, marketing, non-profit, and real estate industries.

I hope you'll join us on August 14th to celebrate these amazing women at the annual Enterprising Women in Commerce 2024 Awards Reception at the Glen Ridge Country Club, Glen Ridge, NJ. The breakfast ceremony not only honors this year's winners but brings the female business and academia communities together for invaluable networking opportunities and the chance to support female peers across industries. Finally, thank you to everyone who took the time to nominate someone this year. Your support brings to light the accomplishments of these bright stars and all of the tireless and innovative female leaders throughout New Jersey.

## Enterprising Women of 2024: By Industry

### 15 ACCOUNTING



**Smolin Lupin & Co., LLC**  
Dina DeMarco  
CPA, Member of the Firm

I am pleased to nominate Dina DeMarco, CPA, from Smolin Lupin & Co., LLC. A licensed CPA in New Jersey with over 15 years of experience, Dina's professional dedication and leadership in serving clients in manufacturing, distribution, and construction are unwavering. Her specialization in ERISA audits complements her expertise in auditing and financial reporting, which clearly set her apart. Notably, Dina's active role in the firm and active membership in the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants demonstrate her commitment to professional excellence. As a member of Smolin Lupin's Accounting & Auditing and Human Resources Committees, and recent election to the firm's Executive Committee, she is instrumental in shaping the future of our organization. Dina balances her demanding career with her roles as a mother and active community member, resonating the quintessential attributes of a successful woman in business.

*Nominated by Noelle Merwin of Smolin Lupin & Co., LLC*

### ARCHITECTURE



**AECOM**  
Abigail Benjamin,  
AIA, NCARB, CNU-A  
Senior Program Manager

Abigail is a licensed architect and Senior Program Manager at AECOM, running the NJ Commercial Studio. Abigail oversees commercial client accounts for the AECOM NY Metro Region and manages a team of 14 architects, delivering design services for two (2) multi-site retail

accounts nationwide. Her leadership of these programs has led to over 500 successfully completed projects and generated \$10M in NSR for AECOM in the NY Metro region from 2022 to the present day. In addition to this, she also mentors twelve (12) team members who are in pursuit of architectural licenses. Active in professional organizations, Abigail serves as AIA NJ licensing Advisor and AIA NJ Young Architect Representative. She also volunteers with Career Carnival for Kids and Morris County 4-H, educating students about architecture. Previously recognized as a Commerce and Industry Association NJ Generation Now Game Changer in 2019, Abigail is a distinguished leader in the architectural profession.

*Nominated by Frank Constantinople, PE of AECOM*

### ENVIRONMENTAL



**ExxonMobil**  
Maureen Forlenza  
Senior Project Manager

Maureen Forlenza has 25-plus years of experience as a Senior Project Manager at ExxonMobil. Her deep understanding of the New Jersey environmental regulations, permitting processes, and 3rd party management have earned her the respect of regulators and industry peers. Maureen has volunteered to be on multiple New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) committees updating guidance documents. Her contributions on NJDEP committees have positively impacted the 700-plus New Jersey Licensed Site Remediation Professionals (LSRPs) that implement NJDEP regulations and policies. Maureen is not a person that just joins a committee; she inspires collaboration within the entire group to ensure best available science is considered by NJDEP. Maureen also is a phenomenal mentor who creates learning opportunities for early-career Project Managers. Lastly, her innovative approach to site safety has achieved amazing results. Since Super Storm Sandy, Maureen developed a best-in-class safety program that connects personnel safety shares with donations to a local foodbank. To date, over 12,000 pounds of food have been donated.

*Nominated by Paul Lucuski of Kleinfelder and Tim Gunter of ExxonMobil*

*Continued*

# ■ Enterprising Women



**New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA)**  
Elizabeth Limbrick  
*Director of Brownfields and Sustainable Systems*

“Helpful, encouraging, supportive” and “passionate public servant who is always bringing people together” are just a few words that describe Elizabeth, a recognized leader in brownfields redevelopment in NJ. She is responsible for numerous programs and projects at EDA that foster thriving and inclusive urban centers through economic development. Her background includes posts at NJDEP and NJSDA, as well as a private sector environmental consultant. She has conducted brownfield research at NJIT and managed numerous high profile brownfield projects. Elizabeth is a Caren S. Franzini Fellow, a Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP) and a Licensed Professional Geologist (PG) in the state of NY. She currently serves on Urban Land Institute’s Northern New Jersey (NNJ) Chapter’s Women Leadership Committee. Elizabeth is also a past Co-Chair for the New Jersey Chapter of the Society of Women Environmental Professionals.

*Nominated by Tracy Straka of Creamer Environmental Inc.*



## FINANCIAL SERVICES



**USI Insurance Services**  
Robin G. Kelliher  
*Counsel to Environmental Solutions Group*

Robin’s professional journey is truly inspiring. After college, Robin embarked on a successful career in insurance, but her dream always was to become an attorney. Midway through her career

she took the plunge and applied to law school. She was accepted and earned her Juris Doctorate from Rutgers Law while working a demanding full time job and raising her family.

Robin began her insurance career at Willis, a large regional brokerage. After several years in client management, Robin was promoted to producer and worked her way up the ladder to become a Senior Vice President and National Environmental Claims Director. After 25 years at Willis, Robin was recruited by USI, one of the largest insurance firms in the world, for the prestigious role of counsel for their environmental solutions group. As a nationally recognized expert in environmental insurance and a practicing attorney, Robin’s achievements stand as a testament to the power of hard work and determination.



## HEALTHCARE



**New Jersey Innovation Institute**  
Jennifer D’Angelo  
*Chief Operating Officer*

For the last 4 years, Jennifer has been leading the Healthcare division at NJII as the Senior Vice President and General Manager. Recently, Jennifer was promoted to Chief Operating Officer, and Executive Vice President, Healthcare Division. This expansion of her scope in key leadership will play an important role in shaping the organization and leading strategic growth initiatives. Jennifer’s leadership and expertise will continue to direct the Healthcare division on its growth trajectory, and now she will have the opportunity to impact operational alignment across NJII. Under her leadership, the Healthcare division focuses on revolutionizing healthcare through digital transformation and managing the NJ Health Information Network

(NJHIN) – the only network built specifically to facilitate the exchange of patient data – on behalf of the NJ Department of Health (NJDOH). With Jennifer at the helm, the division has most recently achieved Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and HITRUST Risk-based 2-year certification.

*Nominated by Victoria McMullen of NJII*



**Bergen New Bridge Medical Center**  
Dr. Karine Airapetian  
*Chair of Psychiatry*

Dr. Karine Airapetian has spent her career dedicated to improving behavioral health services in New Jersey. She is the Chair of Psychiatry at Bergen New Bridge Medical Center and is board certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. She also earned her PhD in neurophysiology with a specific interest in transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). In her more than two decades in the field, she has been a leader and an innovator in behavioral health. She has been the leading force behind its establishment of a new depression treatment center which will offer TMS, a lifesaving treatment option for those whose depression has not been managed by medications and other interventions. She helped establish an ambulatory electroconvulsive therapy program at the Medical Center. Additionally, she is overseeing the expansion of the Emergency Department’s behavioral health area which will be much more welcoming and supportive for those experiencing a mental health crisis.

*Nominated by Tracy Schoenberg of Bergen New Bridge*



**CareWell Health Medical Center**  
Paige Dworak, FACHE  
*Owner, President and CEO*

Ms. Dworak has dedicated her 20-plus career to ensuring that underserved communities have access to quality healthcare. Despite the trials and tribulations of running a hospital that loses money on 94% of its business base, she has found creative ways to keep the hospital in existence over the seven years she has been there. Her pride and determination to ensure the communities she serves receive the highest quality care and experience is unmatched. Further, she believes so strongly in defying healthcare disparities, that she has dedicated \$5M to a renovation that will transform the hospital’s inpatient care areas to mimic that of a high-end hotel. Ms. Dworak believes that the population she serves deserves nothing less than the wealthy communities’ other hospitals reside in. Ms. Dworak sits on numerous boards where she is able to further advance her passion for healthcare by helping fundraise for life saving technology advancements.

*Continued*



Paige Dworak of CareWell Health Medical Center has dedicated her career to ensuring that underserved communities have access to quality healthcare.

Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/SDI Productions





**Hakensack Meridian Health**  
Dr. Nicole Harris-Hollingsworth,  
EdD, MCHES  
Vice President,  
Social Determinants of Health

Dr. Harris-Hollingsworth leads the development and implementation of network wide social determinants of health strategy, stakeholder engagement interventions, and the development of community accessible resources across the Hackensack Meridian Health network.

For over two decades she has specialized in the development of community health programs designed to create behavior change and increase knowledge in hard-to-reach populations including regional school-based programs, national reproductive health organizations, and national child welfare organizations. Her interest areas include the development of effective regional collaborations to increase health equity and increasing the use of shared decision-making practices between health care consumers and health care providers to facilitate community engaged research.

In addition to her work at Hackensack Meridian Health, Dr. Harris-Hollingsworth remains deeply committed to community service and serves as a member of the American Hospital Association Population and Community Health Advisory Committee, has served as a national grants reviewer for the Human Resources Services Administration, and serves on numerous community boards.

*Nominated by Hackensack Meridian Health*



## HIGHER EDUCATION



**Berkeley College**  
LaTysha Gaines  
Campus Operating Officer

To understand the many ways LaTysha Gaines inspires others, one only needs to look to the students she has mentored during her 20-plus years as a higher education administrator and professor. "From the beginning, 'Ms. Ty' helped me see my own strengths," said Erica Valentin, a 2024 graduate. "Her confidence in my abilities inspired me to aim higher. Her guidance has made a profound impact on my journey, as both a student and an individual." Other students remark on Gaines' cultivation of a learning environment where everyone feels valued and empowered, and her open-door policy that made the difference between withdrawing from school and crossing the graduation stage. Gaines also collaborates with local chambers and businesses, leading to internships and jobs for students. She was recently honored by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Paterson/Passaic and

the Paterson Education Fund for building the higher education pipeline for future generations.

*Nominated by Diane Recinos of Berkeley College*



**New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT)**  
Tara Alvarez  
Professor of  
Biomedical Engineering

Alvarez is a distinguished professor of biomedical engineering at NJIT, where she directs the Vision and Neural Engineering Laboratory and leads the undergraduate biomedical engineering program. As the pioneering engineer of a transformative team, Alvarez is revolutionizing the treatment of vision dysfunction in brain injury patients, with a special focus on children with concussions. Her innovative system, designed for cost-effective use at home and by various healthcare professionals, is setting new clinical standards and is being evaluated in collaboration with five major children's hospitals. Dr. Alvarez's groundbreaking research was the first to document the brain's changes due to vision therapy using fMRI, notably improving eye movements in concussion patients. Her work continues to advance the understanding of convergence insufficiency and its neural mechanisms. She co-founded OculoMotor Technologies, leveraging her extensive research to automate eye movement analysis. A Fellow of AIMBE and the National Academy of Inventors, and a Diplomate of the American Academy of Optometry, Alvarez's contributions are pivotal in personalizing diagnostic and therapeutic interventions in vision science.



**New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT)**  
Cathy Brennan  
Senior Vice President and  
Chief Financial Officer,  
Sr VP for Finance and CFO

Brennan strategically leads the development of a more than half billion-dollar annual operating budget and a Finance Division that spans nine offices at New Jersey Institute of Technology, the state's only public polytechnic research university, which holds the highest research classification of R1 and helps diverse students achieve upward economic mobility. She brings financial discipline, fresh thinking, and new models to higher ed based on her years of experience in NJ state government as deputy treasurer and section chief of revenue, finance and appropriations for the Office of Legislative Services. She's leading a remodeling of NJIT's annual budgeting process that's data-driven, decentralized and identifies new revenue streams. The new model is designed to incentivize resource growth and fiscal stewardship, plan across multiple years and better align revenues and expenditures with operations and strategic

priorities – goals shared by a Bain & Company report on The Financially Resilient University.



**New Jersey Institute of Technology**  
Wunmi Sadik  
Professor and Chair,  
Department of Chemistry and  
Environmental Science

Sadik is department chair and a distinguished professor of the Chemistry and Environmental Science Department at New Jersey Institute of Technology. Additionally, Sadik runs the BioSensor Materials for Advanced Research & Technology (BioSMART Center), a lab seeking to develop innovative sensing technologies, functional materials, and environmental devices. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Sadik completed her bachelor's and master's at the University of Lagos before pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Her 30-year career began as a researcher with the Environmental Protection Agency in 1994, then the State University of New York at Binghamton, where she progressed for 24 years before joining NJIT to lead the department. Sadik's research has been awarded for advancements in the fields of nanomaterials, green chemistry and sustainability, while sparking innovation in analytical sensor technologies used for the detection of everything from drugs and explosives, to human disease and environmental contamination.



**New Jersey Institute of Technology**  
Oya Tukul  
Dean, Martin Tuchman  
School of Management

Oya Tukul is the dean of NJIT's Martin Tuchman School of Management, bringing over 30 years of expertise as an administrator, researcher, and educator. Previously, she served as associate dean and chair of operations and supply chain management at Cleveland State University. Tukul's distinguished career includes numerous teaching, service, and research awards, notably two Fulbright Specialist awards in 2016 and 2019, and several ROI Influencer awards. Tukul has an extensive background in training and consulting on supply chain, innovation management, and project scheduling for local businesses. Her scholarly contributions include a book chapter and over twenty-four refereed articles in top-tier management science journals. Under her leadership at MTSM, she has spearheaded the launch of new degrees and programs, such as the Tech MBA and sports analytics program, aligning with the evolving needs of employers and the marketplace. Tukul also oversees the Leir Research Institute within MTSM, which integrates research and education to address critical global challenges and support sustainable economic

*Continued*

# ■ Enterprising Women

development, fostering corporate and business continuity and growth.



## **New Jersey Institute of Technology**

**Grace Wang**  
*Professor and Associate Dean,  
Ying Wu College of Computing*

Wang is a distinguished professor and associate dean for research at NJIT's Ying Wu College of Computing. She is also the founding director of the Center for AI Research. Within the Institute of Data Science, the Center brings together cross-disciplinary AI research and trains postdoc researchers, graduate students and undergraduates in fundamental and applied AI research. Wang is a renowned researcher whose work spans applied deep learning, machine learning, blockchain technologies, FinTech, mobile computing, IoT and intelligent transportation systems. Among her most influential contributions is her acclaimed study, "A Deep Reinforcement Learning Network for Traffic Light Cycle Control," which continues to receive accolades and citations for its innovative application of AI in urban traffic management. Wang is also the director of the FinTech Lab in NJIT's Martin Tuchman School of Management. Her expertise is being leveraged beyond the lab; she is the sole academic appointee on a New Jersey court committee tasked with guiding judges and lawyers on AI's role in the legal system.



## **HUMAN RESOURCES**



### **Whitman**

**Nicole Destin**  
*Vice President  
Human Resources  
and Administration*

Whitman is nominating Nicole Destin for her outstanding achievements and dedication throughout her career. Nicole joined Whitman in 2002 as Business Development Administrator, and due to her determination and ambition has ascended through the ranks to our firm's Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Administration. Nicole consistently demonstrates dedication to her role, actively seeking ways to develop and implement company programs, policies, procedures and efficiencies, and improves every employee's work experience and career growth. Her infectious positive attitude sets the tone for our company, and she serves not only as a valuable resource to our staff, but a shining example of someone who is passionate about what they do, and who strives to help and uplift those around her. Despite her full schedule, Nicole is currently pursuing

her MBA to achieve a personal goal and to use her knowledge learned to bring more value to the organization.

*Nominated by Whitman*



## **LAW**



### **Greenbaum, Rowe, Smith & Davis LLP**

**Barbara J. Koonz**  
*Partner,  
Environmental Department  
Chair, Energy, Renewable  
Resources & Sustainable  
Development Practice Group*

Barbara Koonz focuses her practice in environmental and energy law. As an attorney and a geologist, for over 25 years she has provided guidance on environmental and energy-related legal issues to private and public sector clients, often serving as local counsel to domestic and overseas clients on projects in NJ. She has provided legal advice on some of the most significant solar development projects in the state and was recently elected a Fellow in the prestigious and highly selective American College of Environmental Lawyers. She holds leadership roles both within our firm and in legal and industry organizations and is truly a model for the advancement of women in her traditionally male-dominated area of professional focus. As a volunteer advocate for public safety, she chairs the Middlesex County ASAP Board for the rehabilitation and re-entry of drug dependent inmates and serves on the Middlesex County Workforce Development Board Reentry Committee.

*Nominated by Diana Parker of  
Greenbaum, Rowe, Smith & Davis LLP*



### **Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi's (CSG Law)**

**Lindsay A. Dischley**  
*Practice Group Leader,  
Employment Law Group*

Lindsay represents employers in all aspects of employment litigation, including wrongful discharge, discrimination, harassment, whistleblower, retaliation and wage and hour claims in the state and federal courts of New Jersey and New York and before federal, state, and local administrative agencies, including the EEOC, New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development, and the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights. Lindsay provides counsel in all aspects of employment law, including leaves of absence, accommodations, cannabis, wage and hour law requirements, prevailing wage, employment and separation agreements, restrictive covenants, implementation of employment policies, employee training pro-

grams and other employment issues. She also conducts internal workplace investigations for employers on employment-related issues such as claims of harassment and discrimination, and provides trainings to employees, such as sensitivity and anti-harassment training.

*Nominated by CSG Law*



## **MARKETING**



### **Barnett Design**

**Debbie Barnett**  
*Founder and CEO*

From the humble beginnings of starting a business on her own in her apartment to thriving for over 35 years, Debbie Barnett is leaving an indelible mark on the design and marketing industry. Her determination, creative vision, exceptional listening skills, care for her clients, keen attention to detail, and ability to continually learn and adapt have driven her success. Balancing creativity with business management, Debbie formed a dedicated and talented core team who aligned seamlessly with her vision, delivering innovative solutions in package design, POP, collateral materials, and full branding strategies while embracing current trends in social media, web development, and the evolving digital landscape. She continues to be an inspiration as a flourishing female business owner, creator, and adjunct professor. Her strengths in cultivating relationships and growing her business, while always maintaining a finger on the pulse of her clients, are the keys to her enduring success.

*Nominated by Tara Farley Maratea of  
Barnett Design*



## **NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**



### **Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County**

**Teri Capparelli**  
*Executive Director*

Teri Capparelli began her career with Habitat Bergen as the ReStore Manager and was promoted to the ReStore Director and then Executive Director, all within a matter of 18 months. Teri has worked with the public in many roles: a sole proprietor, retail management, real estate, and event planner and stylist, where she gained considerable knowledge and expertise. This year Teri again was responsible for Habitat Bergen achieving its highest earnings for

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# ■ Enterprising Women

the annual Gala since 1994. Working with other non-profit organizations, Teri has shown that non-profits can work together to support each other and share fundraising activities and ideas. Her community involvement, experience, creative thinking, and favorable personality has guided our affiliate into a strong future, bringing people together to build homes, communities, and hope.

*Nominated by Jane Cook and Gloria Bello of Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County*



## REAL ESTATE AND DEVELOPMENT



### Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi's (CSG Law)

Jennifer M. Porter  
Practice Group Leader,  
Redevelopment, Land Use &  
Zoning Group

Jennifer Porter practices zoning and land use development law in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut, establishing her as a key player in helping clients expand into the regional real estate market. Moreover, Jennifer has successfully led a team of attorneys through extensive, multi-state development and sustainability projects for a national financial services firm for over 100 projects in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. She was also one of the lead attorneys for a major bi-state governmental authority in connection with several major interstate bridge projects and handled the preparation, negotiation and execution of over 20 master utility agreements, as well as multiple design and construction coordination agreements with various state agencies.

*Nominated by CSG Law*



### Terrie O'Connor Realtors

Marguerite Muldowney  
Finance Manager

For the past 10 years, Marguerite (Meg) Muldowney has served as the Finance Manager for Terrie O'Connor Realtors, a leading independent real estate brokerage serving northern New Jersey and southern New York counties of Orange and Rockland. Meg is responsible for the entire company P&L, processing commissions for more than 450 real estate professionals, payroll, accounts payable and receivables, financial reporting to the Executive Team and serving as the primary liaison with the accounting team and financial institutions. Meg acts as our financial watchdog, ensuring efficiencies with suppliers and advising on cost saving initiatives. Meg earned a BA in Mathematics from New York University and has an extensive background in bookkeeping and accounting. Meg is also a

top producing real estate sales associate, having earned the NJ Realtors Circle of Excellence Award.

*Nominated by Terrie O'Connor of Terrie O'Connor Realtors*



## ENTERPRISING WOMEN OF 2024: ONE TO WATCH



### Bergen New Bridge Medical Center

Ilham Atir  
Director of the Laboratory

Ilham Atir has changed the landscape of laboratory services at Bergen New Bridge Medical Center in her role as the Director of the Laboratory, overseeing all laboratory services at New Jersey's largest hospital and the largest nursing home. Ilham also ensures laboratory and testing services off the main campus at satellite offices and CareRite Now primary care locations continue to be met. She provides cutting edge, innovative, and expansive lab services to all those we serve. Ilham assumed her role in 2021 and quickly became a shining star with her innovation and forward-thinking approach. Ilham developed a partnership with BD which brought HPV high risk extended genotype testing to our laboratory, the only lab in the state that provides this testing. Her desire to expand testing like this is what makes Ilham stand out as "one to watch" and it is a privilege to have her as part of the Medical Center's leadership team and family.

*Nominated by Tracy Schoenberg of Bergen New Bridge*



### Holy Name Medical Center

Lori Van Bever, MSN, RN-BC  
Director of Nursing

Lori Van Bever has been Director of Nursing at Holy Name Medical Center since 2023. She supervises nurses in several units across Holy Name - including medical surgical, surgical, and psychiatry inpatient - and oversees daily operations plus staffing, retention, and recruitment. Van Bever represents nurse leadership on Holy Name's Professional Practice Council, an interdisciplinary group that meets monthly to discuss new tactics, technologies, and procedures that promote Holy Name's success. Van Bever has led impactful change at Holy Name, recently introducing new technology that included the adoption of an innovative needle-free blood draw device and a practice model using dedicated licensed nurse practitioners to perform blood draws. It reduces how often a patient requires a needle stick for the purpose of drawing blood throughout their hospitalization. Additionally, inspired by an interactive falls seminar she attended, Van Bever

created a program to educate all staff on how to preempt patient falls that all staff must complete. It has enabled staff to empathize more with patients and better anticipate their needs.

*Nominated by Michele Acito of Holy Name Medical Center*



### Turning Point Community Services Inc.

Karimah A. Hagans, Esq.  
Executive Director

Karimah assumed the role of Executive Director at the age of 26. Under Karimah's four-year leadership, TPCS has witnessed unprecedented growth, propelling the organization beyond its original role as an emergency shelter that has been a haven for women and their children for 22 years. TPCS has evolved to offer a myriad of impactful services and innovative life-changing programs that guide homeless women toward independence and stability. Karimah has overseen significant enhancements to the emergency shelter, elevating it to an energy-efficient, best-in-class facility. In 2022, TPCS acquired its second property to offer affordable family-size housing units. A Clinal + Supportive Services Division offers mental health support, and a pilot Housing Assistance Program will launch in June 2024. Weekly life and skill-building workshops empower mothers, and a new partnership with the Community Food Bank of NJ has established a TPCS food pantry. Karimah's personal mission is to empower women experiencing homelessness and abuse and create a one-stop continuum of care.

*Nominated by Dawn Schwartz of Turning Point*

*Continued on Page 12*



Weekly life and skill-building workshops empower mothers at Turning Point Community Services.

Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto

**CONGRATULATIONS!**



**DINA DEMARCO, CPA**

**CIANJ/COMMERCE Magazine  
2024 Enterprising Woman  
Award Honoree!**



# ■ Enterprising Women

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## **Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi's (CSG Law)**

**Amy Howlett**  
Associate, Renewable Energy & Sustainability Team and Real Estate Group

Amy joined CSG Law in 2022 and has quickly made a name for herself on the field of renewable energy law. At CSG Law, she has assisted in negotiating dozens of solar energy deals, including rooftop solar leases, dual use farmland solar projects, and landfill solar projects, with clients ranging from large institutional landlords to small nonprofits. She has also assisted in advising clients in connection with renewable energy credits and the Inflation Reduction Act. Before joining CSG Law, Amy served in a variety of positions including co-founder of an incubator space focused on sustainable businesses, staff attorney at the Center for Appellate Litigation in New York, associate at a New York-based law firm and adjunct professor at Fordham University School of Law.

*Nominated by CSG Law*



## **Langan**

**Brandi Gray, LSRP**  
Senior Project Manager

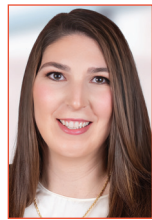
Brandi Gray is a rising star in Langan's environmental practice. She has extensive experience managing commercial, industrial, and residential projects in New Jersey, with specialty in the closure of complex Industrial Site Recovery Act cases under the NJDEP Contaminated Site Remediation and Redevelopment Program. Gray has been a Licensed Site Remediation Professional for over 10 years and currently shares her expertise as a leading expert on the investigation and remediation of NJDEP-led RCRA sites. Gray serves as the Chair of the LSRPA Membership Committee and is a member of LSRPA's Aspiring Professionals and Marketing Commit-



Amy Howlett of CSG Law has assisted in negotiating dozens of solar energy deals and advising clients in connection with renewable energy credits.

tees. She has played a key role in the Case Inventory Document and Response Action Outcome stakeholder groups, which work directly with regulators to support the LSRP program and update guidance documents. She has also taught several LSRPA and NJDEP training courses.

*Nominated by Kelly McCormick of Langan*



## **The Sharpe Group LLC**

**Jenny Sharpe**  
Owner

A Magna Cum Laude graduate from Muhlenberg College, Jenny passed the CPA exam within a year of graduation, showcasing her commitment to continuous growth and excellence. In November of 2023, after working for two other firms, Jenny took a bold step by establishing her own CPA firm. In just six months, she has transformed her vision into reality, employing seven individuals and carving out a niche for serving entrepreneurial companies. Under her leadership, the firm has experienced dramatic growth, a testament to Jenny's exceptional talent, strategic vision, and dedication. At only 31 years old, she is already making significant strides in her field, lighting the world on fire with her passion, expertise, and unwavering commitment to excellence. Jenny embodies the spirit of this award and I wholeheartedly endorse her as a deserving recipient.

*Nominated by Vicki Driemel of The Sharpe Group LLC*



**ENTERPRISING WOMEN OF 2024:  
PLATINUM**



## **Excel Environmental Resources**

**Lawra Dodge**  
President

As founder and president of Excel Environmental Resources, Inc., an environmental consulting firm specializing in the investigation and redevelopment of contaminated properties, or "Brownfields," Lawra Dodge has been an environmental consultant for 40 years and Excel is entering its 30th year of business in 2024. She is a recognized expert in the field, a NJ Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP), a licensed Professional Geologist, and has served for 14 years on the NJ LSRP Licensing Board where she chairs and/or serves on several committees. Lawra works closely with the public and private sector (municipalities, non-profit organizations, property owners, developers, corporations, and law firms) to characterize the environmental conditions of properties the public and private sector clients want cleaned up and redeveloped; access grant funds to offset the cost



Lawra Dodge of Excel Environmental Resources works to characterize the environmental conditions of properties the public and private sector clients want cleaned up and redeveloped.

of cleanup; facilitate the productive reuse of contaminated/underutilized properties; and improve the quality of life for NJ communities. Lawra and her team use innovative systems and solutions to manage continued growth all while mentoring younger environmental professionals to succeed in the goal of cleaning up NJ's Brownfields and other contaminated sites.

*Nominated by Warren R. Love of Gauntlet Advisory Services*



## **Gibbons, P.C.**

**Jennifer Phillips Smith**  
Chair, Real Property Group

Jennifer Phillips Smith is lead land use attorney on several of NJ's largest, highest-profile development and redevelopment projects, including a \$2.5 billion redevelopment considered the largest mixed-use development in state history; transformation of Asbury Park's Waterfront; and development of a 206,000-square-foot industrial building at a former paper mill site. A member of Gibbons's Executive Committee and Co-Chair of its Real Property Group, she helps NJ businesses expand and optimize markets and operations through development and redevelopment of real property for their facilities. She counsels clients on matters ranging from redevelopment projects spanning hundreds of acres to issues impacting small-business owners; represents clients regarding mixed-use, industrial, restaurant, residential, retail, office, medical, educational, and senior living projects; and maintains a niche practice in liquor licensing and alcoholic beverage control. Smith's professional accomplishments have been recognized by NJBIZ, Chambers USA, New Jersey Law Journal, New Jersey Super Lawyers, and other leading publications.

*Nominated by Peter J. Torricollo of Gibbons, P.C.*

*Continued*



**Holy Name Medical Center**  
Vasantha Kondamudi, MD  
*Executive Vice President and  
Chief Medical Officer*

Dr. Vasantha Kondamudi has been integral to the continued success of Holy Name Medical Center since her arrival in early 2023. As Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, she oversees all clinical operations for the hospital, ensuring that Holy Name provides its patients the best in medical care. One of Dr. Kondamudi's primary achievements over the past year is leading the successful progression of Holy Name's first-ever Graduate Medical Education (GME) program, which will welcome residents in 2025. Through faculty development, a clinical learning environment was created for Rowan University medical student education and future residency training programs at Holy Name. Among her vast range of responsibilities she oversees Holy Name's clinical research program, which gives patients access to the latest innovations in science and medicine to address their health concerns. As manager of physician engagement, Dr. Kondamudi also unites clinicians across disciplines to uphold Holy Name's values, vision, and mission.  
*Nominated by Michael Maron of Holy Name Medical Center*



**Holy Name Medical Center**  
Cynthia Ziegler  
*Vice President of  
Revenue Cycle Management*

Cynthia Ziegler has over 25 years of experience in revenue cycle finance and operations, working in both corporate and consulting environments at Holy Name. Ms. Ziegler is responsible for managing and optimizing Holy Name's revenue cycle, which encompasses Patient Access,

Call Center, Health Information Management, as well as billing and collections for both the hospital and Holy Name's physician network. She leads collaboration across departments to streamline processes, improve integration, remove inefficiencies, and create a culture of financial responsibility. Recently, Ms. Ziegler was able to reduce the number of account receivable days. This allows Holy Name to strengthen its financial position and improve cash flow. During her career she has also earned a MAP award from the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA) for most improved revenue cycle. Under her leadership, her team has been able to automate certain functions and focus on using their specialized skills to tackle more complex issues and promote continuous improvement.  
*Nominated by Michael Maron of Holy Name Medical Center*



**Jewish Bar Association of New Jersey**  
Susan Wernick  
*Executive Director*

As the Chief Marketing Officer and Public Relations Director of Bederson LLP for over 14 years, Susan Wernick has demonstrated a commitment to her professional role while also actively contributing to philanthropic causes. Susan's involvement with non-profits like The Tunnel to Towers Foundation and the Valerie Fund Lawyers Run showcases her passion for making a positive impact beyond her corporate responsibilities. She recently co-founded The Jewish Bar Association of New Jersey. With her talents as a marketer, strategist, event planner and social media expert, this association picked up steam and already has a membership of over 200. JBAR's mission is to support Jewish law students and to promote young attorneys and members of the Bar through legal education, mentorship, advocacy, networking, and resources. JBAR is poised to become a force in promoting diversity and collaboration in the legal community. Her leadership and dedication serve as an inspiration to us all.  
*Nominated by Vivian DiStaso of ALM Global LLC*



**Johnson & Johnson**  
Wanda Bryant Hope  
*Chief Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion Officer*

In her role, Wanda is responsible for advancing the company's global DEI strategy to drive innovation and business growth. Wanda and her global DEI team work across J&J to embed DEI into business strategies. Wanda is an accomplished business executive with experience in P&L management, marketing, sales, operations, enterprise performance management systems, commercial

analytics & operations, and human resources. During her career at J&J, Wanda has held various senior business leadership positions, consistently demonstrating an ability to drive growth and profitability, translate insights to action, and develop and execute global change management strategies. She is a passionate mentor helping to develop people to innovate and perform at their best. She also serves as a trusted advisor to the Chairman and CEO and the Executive Committee and is a member of the Human Resources Executive Committee.  
*Nominated by Johnson & Johnson*



**Loopwell**  
Debbie Looney  
*CEO, Founder &  
Chief Wellbeing Officer*

Deb Looney is a force, charting an extraordinary career marked by innovation, entrepreneurship, and unwavering determination. Her career began as an award-winning Art Director at some of the best ad agencies in NYC. While raising three children, she co-founded her own agency, Looney Advertising which has been recognized by Adweek and the Inc. 5000 three years in a row as one of the fastest-growing companies. Now in her third chapter, Deb founded and launched Loopwell, a first-of-its-kind social well-being club, driven by a mission to make well-being accessible to all. Shaped by her upbringing as the daughter of a Syrian refugee, Deb's compassion propels her commitment to giving back. As a devoted wife, mother, and mentor, she impacts everyone around her in ways that can only be experienced, not explained. With Loopwell announcing the opening of their next location soon, Deb's journey is just getting started.



**Langan**  
Kelly McCormick, PWS, LEED AP  
*Associate Principal*

Kelly McCormick is recognized as a top permitting expert by major clients throughout the Northeast, providing expert land use consulting services for both the private and public sectors. Throughout her 25-year career at Langan, she has conducted extensive site investigations; wetland delineations; federal and state wetland, coastal, and floodplain permitting; environmental impact statements; and wetland mitigation for large-scale industrial, aviation, and renewable energy projects in New Jersey. McCormick serves as an expert resource on the federal NEPA process and has played an instrumental role in the development and growth of Langan's natural resource practice nationwide. She is also an active member of the NAIOP New Jersey Regulatory Affairs Committee.  
*Nominated by Kelly Palumbo of Langan*



In her role at Johnson & Johnson, Wanda Bryant Hope is responsible for advancing the company's global DEI strategy to drive innovation and business growth

Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/GettyFour



# Updates From Holy Name, The Valley Hospital, and CBMC

## Holy Name Names Amit Mody as EVP of Business Development

**H**oly Name has named Amit Mody as the Executive Vice President of Business Development. Reporting to President and CEO Mike Maron, Mody will lead service line development for the New Jersey health system, providing a strategic roadmap for financial success by integrating all inpatient and ambulatory care aspects across the continuum.

“Amit has more than 25 years of experience leading large multispecialty medical groups and optimizing hospital networks,” said Maron. “His integrated vision and extensive expertise will be invaluable as we strive to enhance the patient experience, recruit top tier experts, and achieve new levels of clinical excellence at Holy Name.”

Prior to his role at Holy Name, Amit served as Chief Operating Officer of Optum New Jersey, a large multispecialty physician group with a statewide footprint, and an independent practice association with over 4,000 providers. He has also held senior leadership roles at Trinity Health of New England Medical Group and Trinity Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center.

Holy Name provides award-winning inpatient, outpatient and wellness services through Holy Name Medical Center, a comprehensive 361-bed acute care hospital; Holy Name Physicians, a network of nearly 400 primary and specialty care experts; Villa Marie Claire, a home-like residential hospice center in Saddle River, NJ; HNH Fitness, a health and fitness center in Oradell, NJ; the Sister Claire Tynan

School of Nursing, an institution dedicated to training the next generation of nursing professionals in Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Hôpital Sacré Coeur, a 200-bed Hospital in Milot, Haiti; as well as a wide range of services brought directly to patients through home care, telemedicine, and hospital-at-home programs.

## The Valley Hospital Hosts Book Signing and Adds New Imaging

The Valley Hospital hosted a book signing and produce demonstration in Paramus, New Jersey, with NBC Weekend Today in New York’s “Produce Pete” Napolitano and co-author Susan Bloom.

Produce Pete discussed his new memoir and cookbook, *They Call Me Produce Pete*, followed by a produce demonstration and book signing at The Valley Hospital. At the free event attendees were invited to browse health tables set up to offer more information about Valley pediatric and adult services.

The Valley Hospital has also added the new Siemens Healthineers Artis icono biplane to its interventional imaging services.

The ARTIS icono biplane system is engineered for superior utilization in neurointerventions and interventional radiology, with significantly enhanced 2D and 3D whole-brain imaging as well as improved visualization of difficult-to-delineate structures in the brain, vascular system and complex vessel anatomies.

The icono biplane is used to image patients experiencing complex neurovascular conditions like stroke, aneurysms, arteriovenous malformations,



Photo: Holy Name

Amit Mody, EVP of Business Development, Holy Name.

and other cerebrovascular diseases. It delivers high-resolution images for detailed visualization of anatomical structures and pathologies, and clear 3D imaging for the brain for better spatial orientation in complex procedures at a low dose.

The biplane is a key feature of Valley’s new interventional suite and is used to conduct a magnitude of procedures with an emphasis on neurointerventions.

*Continued on Page 16*



Photo: Valley Health

Dorothea Altschul, MD, Director of Neurointerventional Surgery for The Valley Hospital, with the icono biplane.

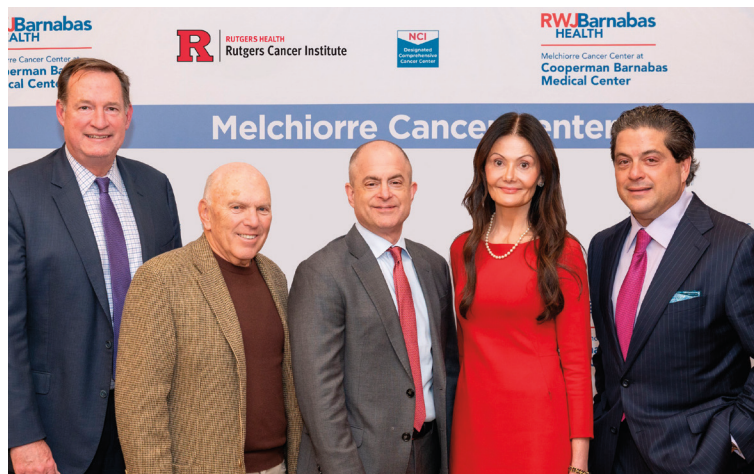


Photo: MMW

Pictured at the signing ceremony: (l-r) Richard L. Davis, President and CEO, Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center; Bruce Schonbraun, Chair, Board of Trustees, Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center; Anthony and Andrea Melchiorre; Mark E. Manigan, President and CEO, RWJBarnabas Health.





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# Healthcare Checkup

Continued From Page 14

"Benefits of the icono biplane include accurate diagnosis and treatment of patients, including reducing radiation up to 60% for patient safety; clearer visualizations of the brain; optimal patient access; and faster procedures with the ability to adapt to different procedures and workflows," said Dorothea Altschul, MD, Director of Neurointerventional Surgery for The Valley Hospital. "We look forward to using this advanced technology to continue to quickly diagnose and treat our patients."

## Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center Receives Historic Gift

Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center (CBMC), an RWJBarnabas Health facility, received a visionary gift of \$30 million from Andrea and Anthony Melchiorre to support the new multidisciplinary standalone cancer center now under construction on the hospital campus in Livingston, New Jersey. Scheduled to open in 2025, the facility will be known as the Melchiorre Cancer Center at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center.

Over the past 12 years, the Melchiorre family has supported numerous programs, including the Cooperman Family Pavilion, Radiation Oncology, and the Emergency Department. The family's most recent commitment brings their total giving to the hospital to nearly \$50 million and supports the new \$225 million, five-story, 137,000-square-foot cancer center.

"Like countless families, we have been personally touched by cancer," stated Andrea and Anthony Melchiorre. "We know that this new cancer center, which will bring together the region's top oncologists with best-in-class services in one dedicated setting, will bring renewed hope to people in New Jersey and throughout the region."

"We are incredibly grateful to the Melchiorre family for this profoundly generous gift, as well as for their unwavering service to CBMC and RWJBarnabas Health," said Mark E. Manigan, President and CEO of RWJBarnabas Health. "Through their investment, we are expanding access to cancer care across New Jersey."

"As a member of the Board of Trustees since 2017, Andrea has embodied visionary leadership and support and has helped build CBMC into a true regional and national destination for world-class cancer care," said Bruce Schonbraun, Chair of the Board of Trustees at CBMC. "I join the board, leadership, medical staff, and the entire organization in conveying our unending gratitude to Andrea and Anthony."

"When this new center opens in December 2025, it will serve as the northern hub for RWJBarnabas Health's oncology services," said Richard L. Davis, President and Chief Executive Officer of CBMC. "Thanks to donors like the Melchiorres, patients will have access to a full array of medical, surgical, and radiation oncology services under one roof." 📌

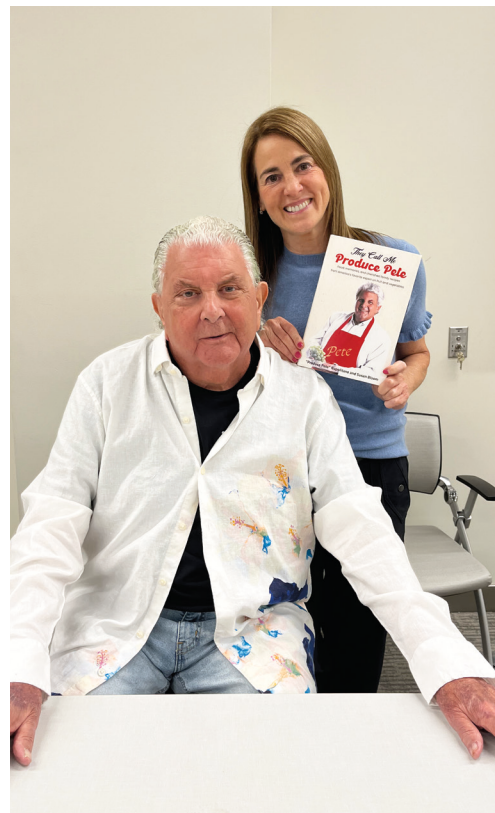


Photo: Valley Health

"Produce Pete" Napolitano and co-author Susan Bloom proudly sharing his new memoir/ cookbook, *They Call Me Produce Pete*.

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# Enterprising Women Panelists Share Leadership Advice

By Larry Feld

Each year, [COMMERCE Magazine](#) and [CIANJ](#) celebrate the dedication and achievements of women in leadership within New Jersey's vibrant business community. August marks the fourth annual [Enterprising Women In Commerce](#) Awards Reception honoring women who inspire and encourage others in their respective industries. In addition to the awards ceremony, the event on August 14 will include a lively panel discussion featuring past honorees and will be moderated by Cindy Myer, President and CEO of Ridgewood Moving Services.

Panelists include Teri Capparelli, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County; Marcia Frieze, CEO of Case Medical, Inc.; Dr. Mildred Mihlon, President, Felician University; Janet Ryan, Founder and Owner of SpectraSpray Global; Deeba Siddiqui, Senior Vice President, Hackensack Meridian Health; Tracy Straka, Executive Vice President at Creamer Environmental; and Deborah Visconti, President and CEO of Bergen New Bridge Medical Center.

In anticipation of this event, we asked the panelists to share their perspectives and advice on leadership qualities.

**COMMERCE:** What is the most valuable advice you received that helped you to achieve your leadership position in business today, and why do you think that advice was valuable?

**Deeba Siddiqui:** This is such a great question. As I look back at my career trajectory and recognize those moments that led to my leadership

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*Always ask for what you want/need. Don't play the gender card. I am a leader who happens to be a woman, not because I am a woman*

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opportunities there is one theme that shines through. I had the pleasure of being mentored by Steve Adubato early on in my career and he asked me to consider this question: "If not me, then who?" This shift in thinking resulted in me removing myself as a barrier. Removing those moments where I may have questioned if I had

enough experience, or if I had the right skill set - because it is in those moments of self-questioning that you hold back and then recognize that you missed an opportunity.

**Tracy Straka:** There is no magic formula for success. Preparation, dedication, and hard work will establish you as a reliable and competent leader. Some of the principles of effective leadership I try to follow include: Communicate clearly and ensure your message is heard and understood. Teach, delegate, and give credit because fostering a collaborative environment builds trust and morale by valuing the contributions of others. Lead by example. Hard work and competence always carry the day. Always ask for what you want/need. Don't play the gender card. I am a leader who happens to be a woman, not because I am a woman.

Figure out your strengths and showcase your abilities. Look at multiple points of view. Considering diverse perspectives leads to better decision-making and fosters a more inclusive environment. Always say thank you. Admit when you are wrong, and try to make things

*Continued*



Deeba Siddiqui, Senior Vice President, Hackensack Meridian Health



Tracy Straka, Executive Vice President, Creamer Environmental



Dr. Mildred Mihlon, President, Felician University



# ■ Enterprising Women

right: Gratitude, accountability, and humility build strong relationships while earning respect.

**Mildred Mihlon:** Always do the right thing, or at least what you perceive as righteous. Hard work pays off, so do not take shortcuts; nothing good comes from lies; lies are transient and short-lived, but truth is eternal. Be true to yourself. People remember real people.

**Marcia Frieze:** I started my professional career as a clinical social worker. While I had no expectation or plan to go into industry or manufacturing, I learned from social scientists and mentors how to listen and solve problems. This led me to a leadership position where I applied a systems approach to helping people and product development. They also taught me to take a team approach to leadership. What that means is I can see the forest from the trees. I understand how our products work as a system, and how to adapt to the user's needs. My process utilizes qualifying questions and investigation techniques to produce sustainable products that address societal needs, specifically infection prevention.

**Teri Capparelli:** The most valuable advice I received was to be confident and to believe in myself and my capabilities. Confidence is key to commanding respect and influence.

**Janet Ryan:** The most valuable advice I have received was how to export and use the resources available through the U.S. Commercial Services, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Having applied and received the STEP grant, I was introduced to the world of international business, which was very eye-opening for a small business. Since it was such a new area for me, I hired a consultant to help guide me through the process. The consultant advised us not to contract with a large company in the early stages because we weren't set up to fulfill an obligation of that magnitude. We surely did not have the experience in trade or the financial resources and legal counsel needed to succeed on a large scale.

**Deborah Visconti:** Successful leadership depends on empathy and active listening. This advice is valuable because it fosters trust and open communication, which are essential for effective teamwork and decision-making. Empathy helps in building strong relationships, while active listening ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to more well-rounded and successful business strategies.

**Editor's note:** This year's Enterprising Women event will be held on August 14, 2024, beginning at 8:30 at the Glen Ridge Country Club. Tickets are available on the [CIANJ](https://www.cianj.com) website.

This feature is an excerpt from a longer interview, available on [COMMERCE magazine's website: www.commercemagazinenj.com](https://www.commercemagazinenj.com). 📖



Marcia Frieze, CEO, Case Medical



Teri Capparelli, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County



Janet Ryan, Founder and Owner, SpectraSpray Global



Deborah Visconti, President and CEO, Bergen New Bridge Medical Center



# NJSC Opinion on First-Party Indemnity Provisions in Contracts Carries Message

By: Kersten Kortbawi & Kathryn Hyde  
Greenbaum, Rowe, Smith & Davis LLP

**T**he Supreme Court of New Jersey (NJSC) recently issued a decision which underscores the importance of drafting clear and unambiguous indemnity provisions in contracts. In the case *Boyle v. Huff*, the Court held that an indemnification clause cannot apply to first-party claims unless the parties include specific language expanding the clause beyond the traditional scope of third-party claims.

This ruling is particularly important for business owners seeking to obtain indemnification for direct claims against a counterparty to a contract because indemnity clauses frequently call for fee shifting, thereby requiring the counterparty to pay the business owner's attorneys' fees and litigation costs, in addition to a settlement or judgment. The precedential ruling emphasizes the advantages of obtaining assistance from experienced legal counsel when drafting commercial contracts.

Typically, an indemnity provision in a contract calls for one party (the indemnitor) to indemnify and hold harmless (pay a settlement or judgment) that another party (the indemnitee) is required to pay in a lawsuit brought by a non-party (the "third-party") to the contract.

For example, a snow removal contractor may agree to indemnify a landlord for claims brought by a non-party who alleges that they sustained bodily injuries on the landlord's property because of the snow removal contractor's negligent conduct. This is third-party indemnity. In the first-party indemnity scenario, however, the snow removal contractor agrees to indemnify the landlord for damages the landlord sustained because of the contractor's negligent conduct, like damaging a roadway or hardscaping. At first glance, paying for the damage might seem like a good business decision to keep the customer happy. But in some cases, the damages are catastrophic, or the question of negligence is not necessarily clear, which often leads to attorneys getting involved and incurring significant litigation expenses. In these situations, first-party indemnity can be invaluable for the landlord because it can subsidize litigation expenses, or it can be a powerful incentive for the contractor to settle early and avoid incurring substantial litigation costs.

By way of background, the plaintiff in *Boyle* filed suit against a condominium association seeking reinstatement of his position after he was ousted from the board of trustees. As part of his complaint, the plaintiff sought



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indemnification from the association for fees and costs incurred in the litigation pursuant to a provision in the association's bylaws. The broadly phrased indemnification provision provided that the association indemnify every trustee "against *all* loss, costs and expenses, including counsel fees, reasonably incurred ... in connection with *any* action, suit, or proceeding" by reason of his or her status as a trustee. The clause excluded actions where the trustee was found to have acted in bad faith or with willful misconduct.

The association argued that the plaintiff was not entitled to indemnification because the indemnification provision did not expressly state that it covered first-party claims. The trial court rejected this argument, reasoning that the plain language of the indemnification provision required reimbursement for the plaintiff's fees and costs because the provision did not limit its application to a third-party claim against a trustee. The Appellate Division affirmed the trial court's ruling, holding that the indemnification provision unambiguously applied to all losses incurred in connection with any action against the plaintiff in his role as trustee.

The Supreme Court, however, reversed the Appellate Division and found in favor of the association, thereby limiting application of the clause to third-party indemnity claims. Justice Michael Noriega, writing for a unanimous Court, found that the indemnification clause was ambiguous because the surrounding sentences applied to third-party claims. The Court,

emphasizing that indemnification provisions are to be strictly construed against the indemnitee, found that the provision could only apply to an action against a trustee by a third party and not to a claim by one trustee against another trustee. In so holding, the Court made clear that it will not *presume* first-party indemnification in the absence of language precluding it. There must be an "affirmative indicia of the intent to indemnify to overcome the presumption that parties will each pay their own way."

The decision in *Boyle* is significant because it is the first time that the Supreme Court of New Jersey expressly recognized that an indemnity clause *could* apply to a first-party action, declaring that "it is not axiomatic that indemnification is limited only to third-party claims." Although the Court has long held that an indemnitee could be indemnified for its own fault when the indemnitee's negligence is specifically referenced in a contract with the indemnitor, the Court has now expanded the potential scope of indemnification to include first-party claims between the indemnitee and the indemnitor.

The key take-away for business owners from the decision in *Boyle* is to ensure that the terms of an indemnification clause are exceedingly clear and specific, such that any intent to include claims for first-party indemnification cannot be lost in a sea of ambiguity. Even where an indemnity provision is broadly worded to encompass *all* losses incurred in connection with *any* action against the plaintiff, as in *Boyle*, it will be construed against the indemnitee. 

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