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Cover Photo: Russ DeSantis Photography and Video

Cover Photo: As an environmental leader, Tracy Straka is committed to protecting and preserving our state's natural resources. Here, she is overlooking one of its most valuable assets, the Great Falls, in Paterson.

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CIANJ Applauds Women And Begins New Venture

By Anthony Russo
President, CIANJ

As we celebrate Women's History Month, we are excited to share the story of a woman who made history at CIANJ. It is our own Tracy Straka, who was the first woman elected to chair our organization in 2012.

Tracy is a strong and capable leader, as well as a powerful voice for the environmental business industry. We are proud to tell the story of how she honed her skills and grew to be the founder of our Environmental Business Council – one of the most respected trade associations in the state.

Along with Tracy as the cover story, you will see our focus on women drew us to Rutgers' Center for Women in Business. Under the leadership of Lisa Kaplowitz, the center is removing barriers and building a community for women, enabling them to develop the skills and confidence to thrive at their jobs.

We also invite you to read about Alision Roach Wilson, the consul general of Jamaica, stationed in New York. Her mother brought the family from Jamaica when she was young. As a teenager she was homeless for several years. But she was undaunted, landing an entry job in the finance world that catapulted her to pursue her dreams. Her drive and determination opened doors that led to being appointed as consul general. Today, CIANJ is working with her office to

develop business opportunities that will benefit the United State and Jamaica.

To cap off our celebration we are holding our 2nd Annual Fashion Show at the American Dream in Rutherford on March 27. The show will explore the evolution of women's wear. We believe fashion is one way that women express their most authentic selves, especially in the workplace. For more information on the show or how to make donations to our partner, the YWCA of Northern New Jersey, please visit our website at www.cianj.org

CIANJ is also making history this month by announcing a new venture with TAPinto, an award-winning news network of nearly 100 franchised local online news and digital marketing platforms covering more than 125 towns in New Jersey.

Our association and COMMERCE Magazine, the flagship publication of CIANJ, are teaming with TAPinto to launch the first business news website on the TAPinto network, which now delivers original local news reporting to nearly 2 million readers per month through its network of local news sites.

We are pleased to extend our magazine's up-beat and thoughtful business news coverage to the TAPinto network. For more than 50 years COMMERCE Magazine has been the voice of New Jersey's business community, providing insightful stories on the latest news and trends. Four years ago, COMMERCE launched its digital publication to complement its hard-copy version, which is mailed monthly to all CIANJ members, political leaders and select readers throughout the state.

Through this venture, COMMERCE Magazine will enhance the value and extend the reach of our publication to millions of New Jersey residents and businesses. We are fortunate to be partnering with such a proven and successful network as TAPinto to share the news that matters.

TAPinto, headquartered in New Providence, is one of the only scalable sustainable local journalism models in the country and recently celebrated its 15th birthday. TAPinto local news and digital marketing platforms are franchised to local owner/publishers who provide original local news reporting every day for their communities. TAPinto has no paywall, enabling all residents of New Jersey to be informed and involved in their communities. TAPinto now offers publications that wish to be on the TAPinto platform yet maintain their own branding to do so through an innovative licensing product.

Michael Shapiro, the founder and CEO of TAPinto, is pleased to partner with CIANJ and COMMERCE Magazine to expand the magazine's reach and provide statewide business content for his readers. He called it a ground-breaking license partnership that will create unique content and advertising collaboration. It will be a model for how publications can work together to not only survive, but thrive.

The new COMMERCE Magazine site on TAPinto, is available at commercemagazine.nj.com. It will feature news stories from major industry sectors, commentary, member spotlights, and member notes, as well as a link to the monthly digital version of the magazine. 📖



Tracy Straka, executive vice president of Creamer Environmental Inc. and founder of the Environmental Business Council.



Alision Roach Wilson, consul general of Jamaica, stationed in New York



Lisa Kaplowitz, leader of Rutgers' Center for Women in Business.

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Tracy Straka: Trailblazer in NJ Environmental Industry

By Diane Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

On her way to becoming a doctor, Tracy Straka got sidetracked by her passion for music. But when the rock band fizzled out, she leaned on her science background – finding fulfillment and great success in New Jersey's burgeoning environmental industry.

Since the 80s when she was hired to help build an environmental laboratory at a Paterson start-up, Straka has been a trailblazer in a male-dominated profession. In every position she has held, she rolled up her sleeves and proved her worth.

Most of her career has been with Creamer Environmental, Inc. As executive vice president of one New Jersey's pre-eminent environmental remediation companies, Straka is a leading voice in the industry.

One of her earliest and most significant accomplishments also was establishing the Environmental Business Council within the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ). The EBC concentrates on environment issues through a business lens. Its parent, CIANJ, is a statewide business advocacy organization representing every industry sector. In 2013 Straka rose to become the first woman chair of CIANJ.

"She's fearless," said Agnes Antonian, chair of the environmental business practice at Connell Foley, who has been Straka's colleague and friend for more than 25 years. Antonian laughed as she recalled a zany moment they had together. On a job site in Brooklyn years ago, Straka dared her to climb a 50-foot old "gasholder." Back in the day, the massive storage tanks were used to hold coal gas.

There was no reason to scale the tank, but once they were at the top Straka explained every aspect of it and its history. "That's Tracy," the attorney said, adding, "She's technically incredibly astute and driven."

"I had to work hard to prove myself," Straka said. She was keenly aware of the skepticism and doubt among those who were unaccustomed to a woman in a hardhat. To overcome the trepidation, she relied on strong communication skills. "I needed to get them to be comfortable with the fact that hey I'm just a person and I was going to do their work. I was going to get it right and solve their issues."

After graduating from George Washington University with a degree in biology, she was initially hired by pharmaceutical giant, Hoffman LaRoche, doing research on their Nutley campus. The job was short-lived, however, since she and 1,100 other co-workers soon were laid off. Realizing there was

a very competitive job market in research, Straka answered an ad to work with a Ph.D. chemist building an environmental laboratory in Paterson.

Her duties became more complex when she was asked to resolve compliance issues the company's financial backers faced with their real estate holdings. State environment laws and land use regulations were intensifying at the time. "They said to me 'go figure it out' – so I did," Straka recalled. Looking back, she said the assignment became her first environmental consulting job. The experience also sprouted a new company, Environmental Waste Management Associates, where she worked for eight years.

Through what Straka described as "word-of-mouth relationships," her client base grew and with it her knowledge and understanding of the industry and its demands. When the opportunity arose to join Creamer, "I came over here and I really haven't looked back in 30 years."

J. Fletcher Creamer Jr., the owner and director of the business, said Straka and Tom Cawley were the first two employees. "We built it from zero," said Creamer, explaining Cawley was tapped for his construction experience and Straka brought a background in regulatory affairs and compliance. "She is very well respected in the industry and very knowledgeable," Creamer said, adding "and she's as loyal as can be."

At the onset when Creamer Environmental was building its brand the company was cleaning up fuel oil spills on the highway and even removing background oil tanks. Over the years it grew to be one of the state's most sought-after remediation firms with major projects throughout the region and a client list that includes PSE&G, Veolia, and other major utility companies. "I'm very proud of what she has accomplished," Creamer said.

As Straka's career developed, she felt the growing industry was being hampered by a lack of collaboration in the state. "In the early days, everybody was competed with each other for market share. They didn't cooperate. They didn't talk to each other about what was important for the industry," she said.

Neighboring states had professional associations and at their prodding she decided to form the Environmental Business Council. It is dedicated to providing education and awareness to all the stakeholders in the industry, while also serving as a business networking forum. The first meetings were in Straka's living room. But it soon outgrew the space, moving on to facilities offered by Bergen Community College in Paramus and later at PSE&G offices in Edison. The monthly sessions easily draw more than 100 consultants, attorneys, engineers, technicians,



Tracy Straka committed 30 years of her career to Creamer Environmental, Inc.

and scientists anxious to trade information, ideas and even job opportunities.

CIANJ President Anthony Russo said the EBC is recognized as a key voice in the industry, often invited by the state Department of Environmental Protection, legislators and the governor's office to give input and participate in stakeholder groups.

Valerie Montecalvo, the owner of Bayshore Recycling, is among Straka's long-time friends and colleagues. "She is a fine example of someone who excels in the environmental landscape providing a personal and efficient touch to manage her client's needs."

"Tracy and I share very similar interests in protecting our natural resources. This isn't always easy in the construction industry. Tracy is deeply dedicated to her work," Montecalvo said. "Her passion for the environment and intelligence in connecting the dots were instrumental in introducing our team to the CIANJ way back in 2003. We quickly became invested in their mission for promoting business and industry throughout New Jersey," added Montecalvo, who served on the CIANJ board for many years.

Montecalvo credited Straka for mentoring her vice president, Jennifer Solewski. Solewski, who now serves on the CIANJ board, said "Tracy is one of the most sincere and collaborative individuals I've had the pleasure to work with. She has an amazing ability to bring people together to exchange information, ideas and provide insight toward achieving common goals across the industry."

Continued

TRACY STRAKA

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dedication to our company, our state,
and the environment.*



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Mentorship has always been a priority for Straka. She likes to speak to high school students about her career path, especially encouraging young women to explore jobs in science, technology and mathematics. Most recently she has been working with organizations that help veterans transition into civilian life. She helps them explain how the skills they learned in the military can be adapted to the business world.

"It's been very rewarding," said Straka, who is also a board member of several executive leadership groups, including Continuing Professional Education Services Inc., a not-for-profit that provides education for licensed site remediation professionals. One of her biggest cheerleaders there is Rayna Laiosa, a senior manager in regulatory affairs at The Chemours Company, a global chemical company, who also serves on the board.

Laiosa was flattered last year when Straka nominated her for a women's leadership award. In the application, Straka emphasized not only Laiosa's professional commitment, but her work with the Passaic County Brownfields Commission and the Hawthorne Environmental Commission. "She listened and she heard," said Laiosa, who was very honored in receiving the award. Straka "is definitely a woman who will bring other women up," Laiosa said, adding that her friend always "fights for the industry and what is right and what is reasonable and practical." 🍷



Photo: Russ DeSantis Photography and Video

On job sites, Tracy Straka was often the only woman in a hard hat.

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Exploring Newark's Influence on Jazz

Rediscovering The Brick City's Musical Heritage

By Larry Feld
Contributing Editor

New Jersey has a rich musical history. The birth home to everyone from Frank Sinatra to Whitney Houston and Red Bank's very own legendary William "Count" Basie, the Garden State grows musical talent as much as it does cranberries.

For all of New Jersey's musical wealth, Newark earns special respect for its role in jazz music and culture. From first-class venues like the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Newark Symphony Hall to local clubs and summer street festivals and even a venue on Rutgers University's Newark Campus, the city continues to be a proud, living celebration of jazz.

Newark is also home to the only jazz radio station in the metropolitan area, WBGO, 88.3 FM. A non-profit publicly-funded broadcast station, the station's roots go back to 1949 when it was established by the Newark Board of Education. The station was first housed in Central High School. Eventually, the station became the state's first public radio station in 1979 when the license was transferred to Newark Public Radio and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"Since signing on in 1979, WBGO has played a role in legitimizing Newark as a touchstone for jazz authority and has become the world's most

recognized and most listened to broadcaster of jazz," relates Steven A. Williams, CEO and President of WBGO. "Responsive jazz status quo in a constant state of renewal, as evidenced in the celebrated work of Newark native and 2017 MacArthur Fellow Tyshawn Sorey," he notes.

The players who put Newark's jazz scene on the map included all the most significant headliners of the day, from Billy Eckstine, Miles Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie to homegrown locals.

"Sarah Vaughan, Wayne Shorter, and Larry Young, as well as Woody Shaw, Scott LaFaro, and James Moody, were just a few of the numerous artists that were unsuspecting ambassadors of the Newark vibe," notes WBGO's Williams. (For the record, technically, Moody was born in Georgia, but his family moved to Newark where he was raised.)

Why Newark?

"Years ago, going back the 1930s through the 1960s, Newark was a predictable stop for all sorts of very significant jazz," notes John Schreiber, CEO and President of Newark's New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

"During that time, Newark Symphony Hall, called the Mosque in those days, was where all the greatest names in music performed," he recalls, naming stars ranging from Aretha Franklin to Tony Bennet.



Steven A. Williams, President and CEO of WBGO-FM, Newark's Jazz Radio Station

"Broad Street and Halsey Street were hot strips of jazz performance, with clubs such as Cadillac Club (later known as Sparky J's) and The Piccadilly," adds WBGO's Williams.

"Redd Foxx, long before he was an international film and TV star, performed comedy at the Cadillac Club. He was also responsible for hiring the musicians. A big jazz fan, Foxx booked many well-known artists there, including all-star saxophonist Hank Mobley. He made his first live recording at The Piccadilly, which was made public in the 2012 release "Hank Mobley: Newark 1953", notes Williams.

Keeping Jazz Alive

While Newark's impressive renewal in recent decades continues to reshape downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, its jazz past has been well preserved. Besides jazz radio, performances still grace stages around the city.

"What I love," NJPAC's Schreiber offers, "Is that we still have older Newark residents who remember when Sarah Vaughn would play clubs

Continued



Headquarters of WBGO-FM, Newark's Jazz Radio Station.

here and in New York as a young singer. Many of those folks are still around and sharing their memories and experiences with our young musicians. Young players are so thirsty, not only to learn how to play their instruments and improvise but also to understand the history of the music," he explains.

The TD James Moody Festival

One of the most significant stages for jazz celebration is the TD James Moody Festival. In its 14th year, the festival is the brainchild of NJPAC's CEO John Schreiber. No stranger to Jazz, John began his career working for the infamous Newport Jazz Festival.

"He (Newport Festival Founder George Wein) hired me right out of school, and I stayed with him for almost 20 years," Schreiber recalls, adding that the experience provided him with "An enormous education as a producer, presenter, and aficionado of the music."

Schreiber worked with and befriended many talented musicians, including the late alto sax player James Moody. "When I came to NJPAC, Moody had already passed. His wife, Linda was a friend, and I said to her that I would like to create a jazz festival in Newark, and we would like to name it after Moody."

The first generation of the festival was called the James Moody Democracy of Jazz Festival. As John explains, it was not intended as a political statement. "We called it that because we believe that jazz is the most democratic of music. To create great jazz, artists have to listen to each other. They have to collaborate and be respectful. At the same time, they get to exercise their creativity," Schreiber says. However, not long after, TD Bank joined as a sponsor and the name was updated.

The Moody Festival is a multi-day, multi-venue program running for several days in early November. The program includes performances by well-known artists at NJPAC as well as lesser-known performers and local talent at both free and ticketed performances in and around the city.

A highlight of the festival is the Sarah Vaughn International Jazz vocal competition. According to organizers, every year the festival receives hundreds of submissions from singers around the world. A panel of judges selects five finalists to perform at a live event.

"The community comes and cheers their support," notes Schreiber, who notes that one of the favorite winners is Samara Joy. Last year, the 24-year-old won Best New Artist and Best Jazz Vocal Album at the Grammys. "Watching the talent that passes through The Sarah Vaughn competition is really satisfying," he says.

The Archive

Surprisingly, Newark is also home to one of the world's premier Jazz archives, The Institute for Jazz Studies, located at the John Cotton Dana Library at Rutgers University's Newark campus on University Avenue. Founded in 1952 by jazz scholar Marshall Stearns, the program is a massive compilation of over 100 collections, including recordings, periodicals, photographs, as well as manuscripts, legal paperwork, and even unpublished materials that chronicle the story of Jazz from its roots to today. There are also fun artifacts on display, including an engraved horn owned by Miles Davis, Count Basie's first Grammy, and even a wig owned by Ella Fitzgerald. The Dana Library building is also home to Clement's Place, a jazz performance stage operated by the Institute for Jazz Studies.



John Schreiber, President and CEO of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC)

"Jazz is embedded in the city – it is part of our heart and soul; it is embedded in the fabric of our community," Schreiber concludes. 🎷



Dee Dee Bridgewater Performing at the TD James Moody Festival.

Rutgers' Center Empowers Women for Careers in Business

By Diane Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

When Mona Mehvash stepped into a new position, she faulted herself for accepting assignments too quickly.

"It was hard for me to say no," said the business planning and development manager, who despite years of experience at a communications giant, was feeling uncomfortable.

She brought the situation's challenges to her mentoring group at the Rutgers Center for Women in Business. Through the GROW (Gaining and Retain Outstanding Women) small group discussions offered by the center, Mehvash developed the confidence and communication skills to be more discerning. She learned to "pause for a moment and ask, just what is this task and is there value to it."

Before accepting projects, Mehvash now weighs how it will affect her, her team and her family obligations. She is setting parameters too.

"It's been eye-opening," she said. The experience is making her a better manager. "I have to overcome some hurdles. But slowly and surely, I'm moving in the right direction."

Mehvash's progress exhilarates Lisa Kaplowitz, the founder and executive director of the Center for Women in Business, who is also an associate professor in the finance and economics department at Rutgers Business School.

Kaplowitz wanted to target Mehvash's exact demographic when she established the center in 2019 – a mid-career woman at a managerial level with 10 to 15 years of experience, who wants to scale-up while also juggling family, community, and social demands.



One of the pillars of the women's center is to build community among the participants.

"Our mission is three-fold and we're doing it through education, opportunity and thought leadership," Kaplowitz said. "We are removing barriers, building community and empowering women with confidence and skills."

The center's core values drew Rutgers alumnae, Katie Stratton, to become a founding board member. Stratton is the chief growth officer for Shipt, the retail technology company offering same and next day delivery services.

A staunch advocate for gender equity, Stratton focuses on fund-raising to maintain and expand the center's reach.

Stratton has attained a C-suite position in her early 40s and she attributes much of her success to having developed a support network. "I want to be able to provide that support and help for others" she said. The board member is proud of the studies conducted by the center. "It's important to deliver real actionable research that will go from academic to industry."

Advocating for women has always been one of Kaplowitz's passions also. As a student athlete at Brown University, Kaplowitz was part of landmark Title IX case before the

Continued



The programs offered by the Center for Women in Business targets mid-career women executives.



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U.S. Supreme Court that opened the door to create more varsity athletic opportunities for women. She was captain of the women's gymnastics teams at Brown and in 2018 she was inducted in its Athletic Hall of Fame. She earned an MBA at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

The professor has nearly 25 years of experience in the private sector, beginning with Deutsche Bank and Bank of America, where she was an investment banker. Later in her career Kaplowitz became treasurer of Bed, Bath & Beyond and CFO to various private-equity backed start-up companies.

She knows what it's like to be the only woman at the conference table. "And times when I was told I don't look like a CFO, even as I was trying to raise money for the company."

When she joined the Rutgers business school faculty, she found there was a lack of "comprehensive or cohesive" programming for women. With the consent of the dean, she began organizing and fund-raising to create the Center for Women in Business. The efforts came to fruition late in 2019 as the threat of the COVID virus emerged. One of the first studies conducted by the center was born from the pressures of the lockdown.

The study examined the overlap between work and home created by the pandemic. Through a web-based survey for 1,500 people, the center honed-in on the division of household labor. While the study found most of the household duties were performed by women, men's roles also increased. Furthermore, men's new-found household contribution had an impact on women's career, as they cited enhanced productivity and satisfaction.

The Rutgers study was reported in Forbes Magazine, which noted 30 percent of the working parents saw an increase in productivity during the pandemic, as compared to 21 percent of the people without children. Traditional gender roles shifted and norms were redefined as a result of the pandemic



Male executives are exploring what it means to offer "allyship" in the small group sessions offered at the center.

pressures. It may also have an effect on the "mommy track" stigma, the study concluded, as women and men feel less ashamed of creating home and work boundaries.

Since the initial study, the center has published its work on How Men Can Advance Gender Equity at Work and How Caregiver Employees Bring Unique Value to Companies. Their latest thought leadership is focused on male allyship gender perceptions of power.

Men are integrated in many of the center's initiatives. A companion program to the women's mentoring group is G.A.M.E. (Generating Allyship in Male Executives).

James Chae, a vice president in the client advisory group at PGIM, was encouraged to join the group and found it rewarding. He said the sessions were well moderated and the discussions were thought-provoking, especially since relevant articles and other materials were provided in advance.

One topic they explored in their small group was the challenges and perceptions women face

when they raise their hand or offer their voice in a male-dominated forum. The question centered on how to give women a platform to speak and eliminate any connotations ascribed to aggressiveness or reticence in the situation.

As a father of three daughters, Chae wants to help with programs that will benefit women workers.

Chae's group found providing an "agenda" is the most practical solution to the dilemma. "It levels the playing field," he said, adding "the agenda gives structure and gives everyone a role."

The G.A.M.E. discussions can be illuminating, Kaplowitz said. She said the goal is to introduce the male executives to issues they are probably not even aware of. It's never done to belittle or shame, the director said, but rather to educate and eliminate barriers. "The unique perspective that each of us brings is going to get us to better solutions."

For more information, visit www.women.business.rutgers.edu. 📌



It's been only a few years since its creation, yet so many have already benefited from the Center for Women in Business.



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Accountants Strategize to Attract Next Generation to Profession

Compiled by Diane C. Walsh

There's a reboot occurring in the accounting profession. The continual decline of students choosing and pursuing the career has industry leaders strategizing over how to reverse the trend. Aiysha "AJ" Johnson, the new CEO and executive director of the NJ Society of Certified Public Accountants (NJCPA) refers to it as the "pipeline challenge" and she is making it a priority of her administration.

The complex issue has its root in the course study needed to become an accountant and the certification process. While there have been reforms in academia and the testing process. More work is needed in other areas, such as the upward mobility within the profession's ranks, office culture, benefits and even perceptions about accounting. Zack Cohen, the chair of a NJCPA task force, strongly advocates measures that will quash the stereotypical image of accountants as stodgy and boring. He is working on programs and outreach to make certain that accountants are respected as trusted advisors, who play vital roles in their community and society, at-large.

At COMMERCE, we asked accounting firms to discuss what strategies are being used in the workplace. We wanted to know what they are doing to improve their office culture as a way to attract and maintain the next generation of accountants. Here is what we learned:



Aprio, LLP
Adam Venokur
Northeast Regional Leader,
Tax Partner

Aprio is committed to fostering a positive and inclusive culture that enhances our ability to deliver superior client service and attracts and retains the next generation of accountants, tax professionals and business advisors. We practice activating our culture daily by living Aprio's 31 Fundamentals. Examples include 'be relentless about improvement,' 'embrace change,' and 'celebrate success.' Our firm is focused on upward mobility and career growth within the walls of Aprio and, more broadly, in support of the profession. In conjunction with firm leadership, Aprio's Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Council recently launched national Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), just another way we are driving intentional professional development and creating engaged communities. Further, we have incorporated a flex work environment that embraces the hybrid

model in support of various stages of life and career needs for our team members.



Citrin Cooperman Advisors, LLC
Robert Sloomaker
Assistant Office
Managing Partner

For modern professional services firms, rapid advancements in technology, along with evolutions in the overall business landscape, are driving change. To keep pace, Citrin Cooperman continues to offer flexible and hybrid work environments, foster personal and professional development through individual and team coaching, provide comprehensive health and wellness programs, and invest in a supportive and inclusive workplace culture. Even the firm's physical presence is changing as we modernize our offices to support hoteling and shared workspaces to match our employees' lifestyles.

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of cloud-based accounting software as well as a move toward automation and artificial intelligence. The Citrin Cooperman team has responded with a heightened focus on interpreting complex data, offering strategic insights, and making well-informed decisions. Our cloud-based accounting software, video conferencing capabilities, and modern digital tools allow our professionals to access real-time data and analytics from anywhere in the world, enabling them to make better decisions and provide more accurate guidance for the firm's clients. Citrin Cooperman's continuing growth reflects our ability to understand the unique requirements of our employees and clients as well as our proactive approach in building the structure and work environment necessary to accommodate their changing needs.



CLA (CliftonLarsenAllen LLP)
Molly Lockwood
People Solutions Director

One of the significant challenges the accounting profession faces is building and attracting the next generation of diverse talent. To help make CLA one of the top choices for new accountants and those seeking a forever firm, we are working to make culture a competitive advantage. Some of the ways that CLA is creating a positive and inclusive office culture, include:

- Creating opportunities within the firm for inspired careers, and outside of the firm by supporting community programs that further education, employment, and entrepreneurship.
- Emphasizing work-life integration by offering structured work arrangements and time off policies that support employees' needs, helps make the firm a place where people can achieve their career goals and thrive by creating a culture that values their and their family's wellbeing.
- Fostering a culture of continuous improvement by regularly seeking feedback from all levels through a variety of sources including our CLA Family Engagement App, employee engagement surveys, and regular employee check-ins and implementing changes based on that feedback.
- Investing in adding dozens of new wellness opportunities to allow our people to live well and be happy. CLA's Wellness platform is built around four dimensions of life: physical, financial, social and emotional.



CohnReznick, LLP
Steven C. Schinella, CPA
Roseland Office Managing
Partner

Creating opportunities for our people is central to our purpose at CohnReznick. And with a hybrid workplace strategy now in full force at the firm, we are continually looking for new ways to build an inclusive culture that attracts and retain the next generation of accounting professionals. To that end, here are two recent initiatives.

Continued



Many accounting firms are making diversity, equity and inclusion an integral part of hiring and retaining trained, capable employees.

Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto/Cecile Arcurs



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Giving with passion and purpose

Bank of America celebrates Women's History Month and is proud to support the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey's Second Annual Fashion Show.



Drew Maldonado

Managing Director, Private Client Advisor
Bank of America Private Bank
500 Campus Drive, Florham Park, NJ 07932
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Accounting

tives. We have introduced, and continue to roll out, NextGen leadership programs for our core industries. Through skills building, career mentorship from practice leaders, and networking, the goal is to inspire our next generation of firm leadership. Earlier this year, we also launched a wellness benefit reimbursement program for all employees. Whether their passion is going to the gym, skiing, taking karate classes, or exercising at home, the firm reimburses employees up to \$600 for equipment, lessons, and memberships that help them maintain physical and mental wellness.



Goldstein Lieberman & Company LLC

Phillip E. Goldstein
CEO

What better way to create an improved office culture than to begin it at a “New And Improved and Much Larger” Corporate Headquarters said Phillip E. Goldstein, CEO of Goldstein Lieberman & Company LLC. The GLC Firm has a head start on an amazing future at their new state-of-the-art Corporate Headquarters.

Now operating from 225 Brae Boulevard in Park Ridge, New Jersey 07656, the firm will be better able to accommodate its steady and impressive growth, with significantly larger office space for an increasing number of team members with upgraded conference facilities and technological advancements for its rapidly growing employee and client roster.

“I call it back to the future”, Goldstein adds. “Our insistence on maintaining a well-equipped, state of the art office which helps attract and maintain a “new-fashioned” staff that clearly prefers to work outside of their home – a place where comradery with colleagues and clients is a traditional part of the corporate culture.” According to Goldstein, this is the culture that has contributed to the company’s rapid growth. He maintains that in the new, “larger” location the firm will continue the face-to-face tradition that has led to life-long relationships with the vast majority of their clients.

Goldstein Lieberman & Company has found that the next generation of accountants want to learn in person from more seasoned professionals. While we still can do Zoom or Team calls, our professionals prefer the personal touch.



Grassi

Michael Hochman, CPA, CCIFP
Partner, Co-Leader of New
Jersey Market

Grassi conducts employee surveys throughout the year to gauge satisfaction and elicit feedback on the workplace experience. We have used this feedback to continually enhance the culture, benefits and opportunities we offer our team members. Once unheard of in the account-

ing industry, hybrid work schedules and remote work remain popular options for many employees. Grassi’s history of flexible schedules and customized work arrangements long pre-dates the pandemic and has helped us retain key employees through life’s many milestones and changes.

We have also responded to the philanthropic inclinations of today’s workforce by introducing Grassi Gives Back, a program that provides paid volunteer time and opportunities for employees to contribute more tangibly to the organization’s longstanding corporate support of local nonprofits. Grassi has expanded our DEI programming, partly in response to our employees’ desire to play an active role in promoting diversity and inclusivity. Grassi took a huge step toward cementing this employee-centric culture long-term through the establishment of our Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) last year. ESOPs are proven to attract/retain employees by giving them an ownership stake in the company. This paved the way for an alternative practice structure, whereby our nonCPA employees can also aspire to become partners.



Smolin Lupin & Co., LLC

Sal Bursese, CPA
Chief Operating Officer

At Smolin we have improved the office culture by recognizing and prioritizing work/life balance. We encourage the staff to work in the office as it enhances their overall learning experience. As a result of our company culture, the majority of employees come into the office or work at a clients’ location on a daily basis.

I believe we have built a camaraderie with the younger generation because the Partners and the experienced staff have taken an interest in the next generation. We are not all business. We are genuinely concerned with their personal lives and assist them when we can.

All work, all day, does not make for a happy place. This has been Smolin’s philosophy for a while and is demonstrated by our low turnover rate. We are family at Smolin and have an open-door policy that assists in our communication with the younger generation. There are times they just want to talk about sports or life issues, which makes them feel at home and comfortable. We stress to them not to sweat over any pressure. We are all here to work together, and no problem is too big to solve. Our success comes from working hard and playing hard.



Traphagen CPAs & Wealth Advisors

Robert J. Traphagen, CPA,
CGMA
Managing Partner

The culture of a firm is centered around whether an associate feels valued, supported and is truly part

of the team. At our Firm, our core values of: Vision, Care and Trust, have helped us foster a team culture, where our associates have a sense of purpose and belonging. This is a significant factor in attracting the next generation of accountants.

How to Attract NextGen Accountants:

- **Celebrate & Project Who You Are:** Share your story and place emphasis on your core values and social responsibilities through social media and your website which will attract the next generation of associates.
- **Invest in Your People:** Embrace Individualized mentoring to establish a Pathway and timeline for personal and professional success within your firm.
- **Engage & Retain:** Encourage entrepreneurial dialogue, implement, and support flexible work options, and promote wellness in the workplace. Embrace Technology: Invest in technology to streamline efficiencies and digitize processes – this will attract Gen Zs, who are the first digital natives, a generation born into a world of technology.

It is imperative that firm leaders understand this new generation and recognize their potential impact which will be a key ingredient in the success and sustainability of their firm!



WilkinGuttenplan

Daniel T. Fiorentino, CPA,
CGMA
Managing Shareholder

Our firm’s culture has remained strong for over forty years: focus on the people. When employees are heard, valued, and respected, they then provide better client service.

We have decided not to mandate any ‘back to the office’ requirements. While some staff still prefer to go to the office every day, it’s their decision, and we’ve expanded our hybrid footprint into several new states. We still recognize the importance of face-to-face time and fly in all employees several times throughout the year for company-wide training and social events.

We embrace flexibility in our schedules, not enforcing any specific hour requirements, but rather, we let the staff decide what time commitment works best for them. This flexibility even extends to what hours during the day they want to work and what practice areas they’d like to focus on. We prioritize work results and great client service, not where you are sitting or what time of day it is. This empowers our staff to determine what’s best in each individual situation. In fact, our firm’s internal motto, developed by the manager group years ago, is “external success via internal success: it comes from within.” 🍀

Wall Street Experience Shaped Consul General of Jamaica

By Diane Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

Jamaica's Consul General Alston Roach Wilson seems to have a charmed life, catapulting from an entry level job at an investment banking firm to helping close multi-million bond deals on Wall Street. But the Caribbean diplomat has an amazing back story that includes a time as a homeless student in New York and a fierce determination to get ahead.

In 2019 Wilson was appointed consul general and her responsibilities stretch across 33 states, including New Jersey and New York, where her office is located. Her focus is to build international relations and promote the interests of Jamaica's – a lush Caribbean island, where reggae was born and tourists flock, especially to the premiere resorts along Montego Bay.

She is impressed by the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey's outreach to the international community. The consul general has participated in several events hosted by CIANJ and want to pursue a relationship that will be beneficial for her diaspora and the business group's members.

Over the past few years CIANJ has signed agreements with Hungary and other nations to pursue business opportunities. CIANJ President Anthony Russo said he eager to discuss the possibilities with Jamaica.

Wilson said she makes business and finance a priority because of her Wall Street background. As a teenager she decided on a business career, despite her mother's disapproval. Her mother

moved the family from Jamaica to Brooklyn when Wilson was in her teens. She was enrolled in the prestigious Erasmus High School in Brooklyn, where Barbara Streisand, Bobby Fischer and Clive Davis are counted among its famous graduates.

Wilson's mother wanted her to become a nurse as most of her family had. But the young student felt no allure for it. Instead, she loved fashion and wanted a job where people dressed smartly in the workplace. Her counselors encouraged her to consider the business world, especially since she loved math. But Wilson said her mother was appalled and kicked her out of the house.

For more than a year Wilson lived in Covenant House in midtown Manhattan, a facility run by the Catholic Charities to help homeless youth. "I think it was the worst year of my entire life," she said. She felt so alone without her family. But Wilson was very appreciative of Covenant House's help. "What I got was very important from them – the support. The support that if you want to a businesswoman, you can actually do it."

Her first job was in the mail room at Morgan Stanley. In every situation she persevered, learning skills and showing her abilities. In 1996 she was hired by Bear Stearns, the investment bank, securities trading and investment firm. There, she had the opportunity to work with traders as a public analyst.

One of her most cherished memories was when she met Alan "Ace" Greenberg, the chairman of the executive committee at Bear Sterns.



Alston Roach Wilson defied her mother's wishes and entered the business world.

"He told me 'you're going to be a superstar one day.'" Wilson recalled.

When Bear Stearns was vying to become the underwriter for a \$500 million bond sale by Jamaica, Wilson was assigned to assist in it. The Jamaican trade minister was impressed that a native was on the Bear Stearns team. The relationships she developed in that first successful bond deal served Wilson well, opening doors for her and giving her expertise in Caribbean business and finance.

As her career advanced, her network grew to include leading figures from the islands, including Michele Rollins, the former lieutenant governor of Delaware, who owns huge swaths of property in Jamaica, especially in Montego Bay, and the former U.S. ambassador to Jamaica, Brenda LaGrange Johnson. Wilson said both women have been great mentors to her.

Their effect on her life and career lead the consul general to work with 40 young women today, many of whom are in Jamaica. She meets with many of these "mentees" virtually to provide guidance and assist them in their careers.

Giving back is very much a part of Wilson's nature. During the pandemic she raised funds to buy 6,000 tablets and laptop computers for Jamaican students to make certain they could continue their education during the lockdown. "If it's within our power to assist, we try to figure it out" she said. 🇯🇲



The relationships Alston Roach Wilson built on Wall Street served her well and continue to help in her new role as consul general to Jamaica.

Photo: Getty Images/stockphoto/andreykrav

Understanding Coming Changes in H-1B Work Visa Regulations

By David H. Nachman, Esq.,
Ludka Zimovcak, Esq.,
and Snehal Batra, Esq.
Freelance Contributors

In recent years, the landscape of H-1B visa regulations has undergone significant changes, impacting both employers and foreign workers alike. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has introduced new rules and requirements, reshaping the way companies hire foreign talent. This article delves into these changes, offering a comprehensive overview for immigration practitioners, professionals, and prospective H-1B employers and employees.

The Electronic Registration Requirement

Effective from December 6, 2019, USCIS mandated that employers file H-1B cap-subject petitions, including those under the advanced degree exemption, through an electronic registration system. This process requires a nominal fee of \$10.00 per registration. The initial registration period spans at least 14 calendar days each fiscal year. During this period, prospective petitioners or their representatives must electronically register each candidate they wish to sponsor for an H-1B cap-subject petition.

The Selection Process

Post-registration, USCIS conducts a random selection of the necessary number of registrations to meet the H-1B cap. This selection occurs after the initial registration period closes, no later than March 31, 2024. Only those with selected registrations can file an H-1B cap-subject petition for the named individual. Importantly, multiple registrations for the same beneficiary in the same fiscal year will be discarded to prevent duplication.

Proposed Rule to Curtail Misuse

A DHS rule proposed on October 20th, 2023, seeks to alter the H-1B registration selection process. The aim is to reduce misuse and fraud by ensuring that each individual is entered into the selection process only once, regardless of the number of registrations submitted on their behalf.

Understanding the H-1B Cap

The H-1B visa cap is currently set at 65,000 annually. However, not all are available under this cap. Up to 6,800 visas are reserved for the H-1B1 program for Chile and Singapore nationals, reducing the actual number to 58,200. An additional 20,000 visas are set aside for individuals with master's or higher degrees from U.S. institutions.

A forthcoming article will address the specifics of qualifying degrees for this category.

Preparation for H-1B Sponsorship

Employers must identify potential H-1B candidates early, allowing time for petition preparation, including Labor Condition Application (LCA) certification. Effective planning is crucial, particularly for the USCIS fiscal year beginning October 1, 2024.

Duration of H-1B Petition Acceptance

USCIS will start accepting H-1B registrations in early March. If a sufficient number of registrations are received, a selection will be made to meet the H-1B cap. USCIS will provide guidance on using the registration system prior to the registration period.

Restrictions on Multiple Registrations

Employers are prohibited from submitting more than one registration per prospective employee per fiscal year. This includes petitions for different positions for the same employee. However, related employers (like parent and subsidiary companies) can file for the same beneficiary if a legitimate business need is demonstrated.

Continued



David Nachman, Esq., NPZ.



Ludka Zimovcak, Esq., NPZ



Snehal Batra, Esq., NPZ

U.S. Department of State
APPLICATION FOR IMMIGRANT VISA AND ALIEN REGISTRATION

PART I - BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Instructions: Complete one copy of this form for yourself and each member of your family, regardless of age, who will print or type your answers to all questions. Mark questions that are **Not Applicable** with "N/A". If there is insufficient space, use a separate sheet using the same numbers that appear on the form. **Attach any additional sheets to this form.**

Warning: Any false statement or concealment of a material fact may result in your exclusion from the United States. This form (DS-230 Part I) is the first of two parts. This part, together with Form DS-230 Part II, constitutes the application for an immigrant visa and alien registration.

1. Family Name

2. Other Names Used or Aliases (If married woman, give maiden name)

First Name

Native Alphabet (If Roman letters not used)

wages within specific timeframes after the employee's entry into the U.S. or upon a change of status.

Compliance: LCA Posting and Public Access Files

Employers must post notice of the LCA and maintain a Public Access File (PAF) containing all supporting documentation. These requirements are critical for transparency and compliance.

Employer-Employee Relationship

For H-1B petition approval, the employer must demonstrate a sufficient level of control over the employee, establishing a legitimate employer-employee relationship.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of H-1B visa regulations presents both challenges and opportunities. Employers and foreign workers must stay informed and prepared to navigate these changes effectively. For further assistance and detailed guidance, the expertise of immigration lawyers and professionals is invaluable.

For more information about the H-1B nonimmigrant work visa process or to consider H-1B nonimmigrant work visa options, the immigration and nationality lawyers and attorneys at the Nachman Phulwani Zimovcak (NPZ) Law Group, P.C. invite you to visit them on the web at www.visaserve.com or to email them at info@visaserve.com or to call the firm at 201.670.0006 (x104).

Seeking help from an experienced attorney can help you navigating the confusing bureaucracy.

Qualifications for H-1B Visas

Both the employee and the job position must qualify for an H-1B visa. The position must be a "specialty occupation" requiring specialized knowledge and a bachelor's degree or higher. The prospective employee must have the required degree or equivalent experience in the specialty.

which varies based on employer size. Other fees include a \$500 Fraud Prevention and Detection fee for initial petitions and, in some cases, a supplemental fee for certain companies. Employers may also choose to pay a premium processing fee for expedited adjudication.

Salary and Benching Costs

Employers must pay the higher of the actual wage or the prevailing wage for the position. They are also responsible for nonproductive time costs ("benching") and must start paying LCA-stated

Filing Fees and Costs

Employers must pay various fees, including the \$10 registration fee, a base filing fee (currently \$460), and an additional ACWIA fee,

Hackensack Meridian Health is proud to support
CIANJ's 2nd Annual Fashion Show.



Best wishes on a successful event!



Hackensack
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HackensackMeridianHealth.org

DEP Commissioner Answers Questions from Industry Leaders

By Diane Walsh
Editor, COMMERCE

If there were any doubts, Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection quashed them when he admitted he's a "systems-oriented person," while discussing a restructuring and several new initiatives within the department during an update with CIANJ.

The commissioner is beginning his fourth year heading the department in charge of protecting the public's health and ensuring the quality of the state's air, land, water, natural resources, and historic sites. CIANJ President Anthony Russo posed questions to the commissioner during the program, drawing on issues identified by engineers, environmental attorneys, contractors, licensed site remediation professionals and others working in the environmental business industry.

Foremost on their minds was news that Deputy Commissioner Sean Moriarty is leaving the department. LaTourette noted that he and Moriarty joined the department on the same day in 2018. Back then LaTourette was chief legal and regulatory policy adviser to then Commissioner Catherine McCabe, who left 2021. Both men are attorneys with extensive experience in environmental law.

As deputy commissioner, Moriarty leads the DEP's internal legal team on all matters of regulatory compliance and rule-making, overseeing the Office of Enforcement Policy. Even though LaTourette said he is "loathe to see him go," the commissioner said a restructuring is afoot in the department. It's his plan to develop a more definitive and concerted legal and regulatory affairs unit. Paul Stofa, department's chief counsel, will transition to oversee it.

Moriarty's responsibilities also had extended beyond legal and regulatory affairs in recent years. The commissioner said many members of Moriarty's team will directly report to him now. LaTourette said the new deputy commissioner will have a "different portfolio," reflecting a reorganization within the department. He also advised the CIANJ members they will likely deal more with Kimberly Cahall, the department's chief enforcement officer. "She is another shining star," LaTourette said.

His focus has been on building an infrastructure to withstand change within the department. "I think we'll see it pay dividends in a seamless transition."

Licensed Site Remediation Professionals (LSRP)

New Jersey's 12-year-old LSRP program was lauded by LaTourette as an "overwhelming success." It was conceived as an innovative way of dealing with the tremendous backlog of contaminated sites that needed DEP's attention. The state relies on these specially trained and accredited LSRPs to evaluate sites, devise remediation action plans and oversee their clean-up.

The commissioner is so pleased with the pace of the LSRP operation that he wants to "lean into that." There are new plans for a restructuring of the site remediation program and it will depend greatly on the LSRPs. "I care a lot about organizational structure and ensuring that we are set up for success... and we don't adhere to the old models either organizationally or as a matter of procedure, just because they exist," he said.

LaTourette said the restructuring will encompass the "independent professional judgment initiative" and new instruction and guidance will be forthcoming. "What we're trying to do is improve the process and improve the outcomes," he added.

Dirty Dirt Law

Four years ago, a new law was put into effect, aimed at companies that handle the disposal of soil and fill that can be recycled. It's been dubbed the "Dirty Dirt" law and it requires these businesses to also apply for a A-901 license for the proper handling of the material. Lawmakers drafted the legislation to protect against illegal dumping and improper handling of contaminated material and waste. But since it was enacted, it has set off alarm bells with many companies, such as landscapers, home remodeling businesses, even plumbers and electricians, who are concerned they could be erroneously subjected to the new regulations.

When Russo asked LaTourette for a status update on the law, the commissioner acknowledged the environmental business community's widespread concern. He also emphasized that his department is considering all the issues raised by Russo and other advocacy groups. The commissioner said even though "I don't have a specific timeline," the legal review of the law is ongoing and he expects to have the regulations for implementation completed by the end of the second quarter. "That's my goal, whether the rest of the apparatus is so aligned, I don't get to control. But I'll be pushing where I need to be," he said.

Brownfield Redevelopment

New Jersey may be known as the Garden State but it has a rich and long history as an industrial hub on the East Coast. An unfortunate consequence of



Shawn M. LaTourette, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

that history is an abundance of brownfields – sites contaminated by the residue of the industrial age or later development that left hazardous material.


The DEP created a brownfield redevelopment program to assist and encourage reclaiming these sites and clearing them of pollutants. LaTourette said there plans to expand the program. He described it as a gateway to additional funding that can help in site remediation. He encouraged the CIANJ audience to explore how brownfield programs can assist them.

Stakeholder Input

CIANJ President Russo also asked the commissioner to give the environmental business community a clearer picture of its role as "stakeholders" in the DEP process of developing rules and regulations. Often times, the department invites stakeholders to comment as it is developing new concepts and policies.

The commissioner maintained there was confusion among the environmental business community about the stakeholders' role. He said the precise language of new rules will never be shared prior to their publication. "I don't understand why that was ever a thing," he said.

Budget Hearings

Each department within the state government will soon be asked to appear before the Legislature to discuss their budget requests. The commissioner urged all parties within the environmental business community to reach out to state lawmakers and voice their support for the DEP programs and initiatives funded by the budget. LaTourette said lawmakers want to hear from those most affected by their budget decisions. "That engagement should be had by groups like this," the commissioner said. 



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