



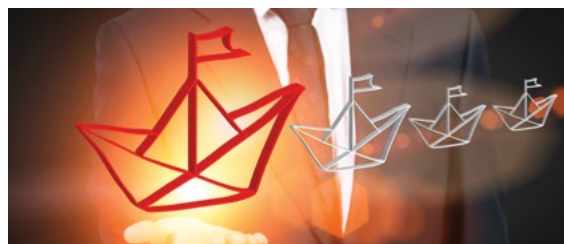
IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

CEO

Of Influence

2020

Presented by:
PERKINS coie
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Blue
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Blue Cross of Idaho is proud to honor this year's top CEO nominees. Just like these leaders, we strive for excellence with a continued focus on our members and helping fellow Idahoans throughout our communities.



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FROM THE *Editor*

2020 is a big milestone for the Idaho Business Review's CEO of Influence awards. This year marks a decade since we launched the CEO recognition program to honor the state's top leaders across industries, as well as those who are heading up nonprofit organizations or government entities.

During that time, we have been proud to celebrate over 50 true innovators, strong mentors and tough professionals. The 2020 class of honorees adds 20 new members to this esteemed group. Their backgrounds and career paths are diverse, but each one is a model of excellence.

Our 20 honorees for 2020 include Jessi Roberts, who has built her online boutique, Cheekys, into a kind of community for fans of country-chic style. Her Instagram has over 45,000 followers — not bad for this “Backroads Boss Lady,” who is now also an author of a memoir by that name.

There's Rebecca Hupp, who has spent the past eight years building the Boise Airport into an award-winning transit hub that is known for its focus on safety. In 2019, the Boise Airport was named “Airport of the Year” by the Air Line Pilots Association, which noted that the airport excels at collaboration with pilots and

other aviation professionals.

Odette Bolano, the President and CEO of Saint Alphonsus Health System, is another powerhouse, leading the organization through one of the biggest medical challenges in decades, the coronavirus pandemic. Bolano, a former nurse who held leadership positions in health systems in Texas and California, said she has a true love for the Catholic not-for-profit medical model.

The success stories just keep coming from Jay Larsen at the Idaho Technology Council to Liza Roeser at Fifty Flowers and Shawn Barigar at the Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

From North Idaho to Pocatello, our CEO of Influence winners have boosted our economy; shaped our business landscape; and added immeasurably to our community spirit, which is the envy of many states.

While we weren't able to celebrate these wonderful leaders in person this year due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we can still raise a glass in their honor.

So, let's toast these 20 exceptional CEOs for all their hard work, dedication and service. Cheers to you!

Kim Burgess
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Congratulations to Our Member CEOs on Their Accomplishments and Recognition as a **CEO of Influence**

The Chamber is proud to have most of the CEOs of Influence as members.

It's an honor to be supported by your great leadership.

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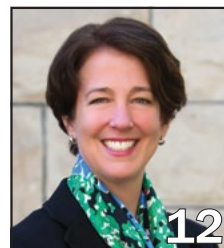
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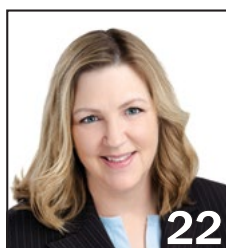
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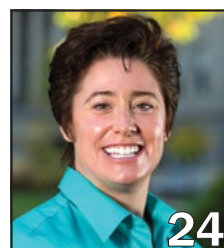
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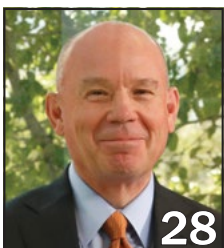
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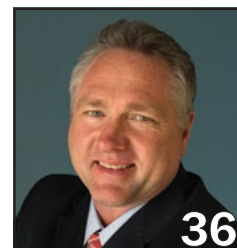
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Presenting Sponsor

Giving back to the community is central to firm culture at Perkins Coie. It is in that spirit that we are proud to serve as a presenting sponsor for the IBR's "CEO of Influence." The individuals honored tonight have made their marks not only in their enterprises, but also in their surrounding communities. Their actions have positively impacted our lives.

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staff regularly share their skills and resources to help those in need. We also support many charitable organizations such as Opera Idaho, Veteran Entrepreneur Alliance, Friends of Zoo Boise, Idaho Governor's Cup, and the Idaho Environmental Forum.

Perkins Coie is honored to recognize the leaders who have shaped Idaho's business and community landscapes. Congratulations to the 2020 "CEO of Influence" honorees!

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Rhea Allen

Peppershock Media

By Ashley L. Clark

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Creativity and community fuel Rhea Allen's passion for people and production. As the CEO and co-founder of Peppershock Media, a Nampa-based marketing and brand development firm, Allen strives to "disrupt, connect & inspire" in all aspects of her life. A hardworking wife and mother of two, Allen continues to push boundaries, feed minds and achieve excellence in her personal and professional life.

Growing up

As a young girl, Allen's hard work ethic was impressed upon her by both sets of grandparents: one side was in the farming industry, the other helped start and worked for a meatpacking business but eventually transitioned into motel management in Oregon.

"For summers on summers, I was either farming or cleaning toilets in Baker City," Allen said. "But I also got to help run the motel and learn all about hospitality and service and what it takes to run a business."

Allen's experience behind the scenes of the family businesses helped develop skills she later used to start her own company.

"If you don't do it right the first time, you're doing it again," Allen said. "So, I learned right away the ethics of the job. Hard work is just what you do."

Education & early career

While attending Vallivue High School, Allen started in a work-study program at Channel 6 Idaho News when she was 15 and continued as she pursued her undergraduate degree in mass communication and business management at Boise State. She transitioned into working as a newscast director for Fox 12 News at Night, where she would meet her soon-to-be husband, Drew Allen.

"He was my technical director," Allen said. "We basically started there and now he's my business partner 20 years later."

After Allen earned her bachelor's degree from Boise State, the pair moved to Seattle together to further their careers and continue their educations. While pursuing her MBA in marketing and entrepreneurship at Capella University, Allen worked long days and late nights at multiple news firms. In the afternoons, she worked promotions and did the nightly news in the evenings. She was the technical director during the weekdays and then on the weekends was the weekend director.

Eventually, Rhea and Drew Allen decided they were ready to pursue their dreams of starting their own company, a venture using all of their skills in marketing, design and production.

"I decided I needed to become my own boss," Allen said. "I never really made a good employee."

And so in 2003, Peppershock Media was born. The passion project was housed in their bonus room. The two continued their jobs at other firms as they worked to develop an operational company and strategized how to reach their potential.

Peppershock Media

"We were going to start in Seattle, but knowing that we'd be a tiny little tadpole in a big sea, we decided we were going back home to Boise and bringing all of our big city experience back to where we really wanted to start our business," Allen said.

Now, after over 16 years of videography, graphic design, photography, social media campaigns and multimedia brand development, Peppershock Media has blossomed into a nationally recognized media powerhouse, uniquely combining marketing strategy and in-house production.

Allen and her team work hard to create personalized content and media design that is specifically tailored to each client.

Peppershock Media has worked with firms like CenturyLink, Albertsons and VentureCapital.org, as well as organizations such as the Jayden DeLuca Foundation and Nampa School District.

The Peppershock Media crew includes employees and interns with many skillsets, such as video production, graphic design and business development. They create branding and marketing plans to produce content solutions for each client.

Company culture

But clients and content aren't everything to Allen and her close-knit team. Peppershock Media aims to build community and encourage a positive, family-driven company culture. "Our culture is our brand," she wrote. "We strive every day to take incredibly great care of our people, and in turn, our people take great care of our brand and bottom line! We put our passions before our profit and have fun."

Allen hosts multiple teambuilding and personal development events for employees. Friday Fun Lunch (or "funch" as the team has nicknamed it) is for birthdays, professional mile-



Authentic service

Allen has continued to serve her community through personal endeavors as well as through her company. “My philosophy is to just show up, care an awful lot, be authentic and give 60, take 40,” Allen wrote. “I am deeply connected with our community and find pure joy in sharing my connections.”

Peppershock Media has served as video and/or media partner to the Jayden DeLuca Foundation, Canyon County Festival of Trees, Nampa Family Justice Center, Boise Philharmonic, Boy Scouts of America, Meals on Wheels, Make a Wish Foundation and several other organizations.

“Rhea is always out in the community rallying support for many charitable events and showing genuine interest in learning about people and local organizations,” wrote Megan Bryant of the Idaho Women’s Business Center. “She has a great vision for understanding people and the passion that drives them so she can merge strengths and be an advocate for others as she continues toggling throughout her network of connections.”

stones, and “workaversaries.” Twice a year, employees attend Peppershock Powwows where the team goes camping and participates in business building and team bonding exercises.

Allen gives the example of their January powwow activities: “We list out all of our big wins and our losses for the year, and we burn them as kind of a release for the new year.”

Peppershock Media aims to be inclusive. Allen’s focus is to create a comfortable environment focusing on development and well-being. “People either love or hate their job mostly because of the people they are surrounded with,” she writes. “We want people to love where they spend the majority of their days, and we want them to love Peppershock because of who they get to work with as crew and our clients.”

Accomplishments & accolades

That hard work has brought recognition. Peppershock Media was named Next Generation Best Place to Work by Boise Young Professionals in 2012. It was also nominated for Small Business of the Year by the Small Business Administration and Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce in 2007 and 2008 and won in 2017.

Allen and her Peppershock Media team have acquired local and national honors for various projects, including an Emmy for the Best Single TV Commercial in the Northwest in 2013, a Silver People’s Choice Telly in 2013, Bronze Tellys in 2013 and 2016, and two Idaho Press Club awards in 2008. She has also produced commercials, short films and feature-length films.

Allen has served as a workshop facilitator, keynote speaker and panel member since 2003. More recently, she has become a members facilitator and masterclass presenter with the Marketing Expedition Podcast, which she hosts with Drew.

For her outstanding leadership and contributions to her community, Allen was honored as Woman of the Year by both the Idaho Business Review (IBR) and the National Association of Women Business Owners in 2007. She also received the “Accomplished Under 40” award from IBR in 2006 and was an Emerging Leader Program recipient in 2015 and 2016.

“ I used to laugh when people would ask me about my ‘work-life balance.’ You don’t balance it, you just do. ”

Allen is a member of the Meridian, Nampa, Boise Metro and the Idaho Hispanic Chambers of Commerce. She was a founding member of the Nampa Public Art Commission, appointed by the Mayor of Nampa from 2007-2008, and was a co-founding board member of the Idaho Media Professionals Group. “She is a born leader,” wrote Suzi Boyle, a peer of Allen’s. “She has always believed in service above self.”

Allen has also been heavily involved with VentureCapital.org’s Women Entrepreneurs Realizing Opportunity for Capital event, serves on the marketing committee and as a board member for the Idaho Aerospace Alliance and is vice president of the board for Buy Idaho.

A full life

While her accomplishments and contributions are impressive, Allen insists being wife and mother is her number one job.

“Rhea often says opposites attract and that I’m the yang to her yin,” wrote Drew. “She’s my business partner, my wife, my friend. She’s my inspiration. She pushes me, sometimes near the edge, but then she’s there with a rope to reel me back in.”

Drew and Rhea take pride in raising their two boys, Emerson and Kaden, in Nampa. Allen notes she loves participating with them in Boy Scouts of America and being a “football mom.”

“I used to laugh when people would ask me about my ‘work-life balance,’” Allen said. “You don’t balance it, you just do.”

Karen Baker

Museum of Idaho

By Ryan Lowery

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Karen Baker attributes her career successes to other great leaders willing to share knowledge with her.

“From the very beginning, I think it came down to mentors,” Baker says. “I’ve been fortunate to always have a great leader around me that really wanted to share their wisdom.”

Baker’s career began in 1985 as a financial analyst doing internal audits. She moved into the nonprofit sector in 1991, finding her corporate knowledge and experience translated well. She also found nonprofit industries suited her management style.

“I really believe in servant leadership. I try not to micromanage my staff or dictate the process in which they achieve their goals,” she said. “There’s nothing greater for me, as a leader, than seeing my staff shine.”

Managing growth

The Museum of Idaho began operating in the basement of the Bonneville County Courthouse in 1979. In 1985, it moved into the vacant Idaho Falls Public Library building, which began as a Carnegie library in 1914. The museum began expanding in 1992, and by 2003, it had become the largest museum in the state.

Today, the Museum of Idaho has served more than a million patrons and has expanded yet again with an additional 24,000 square feet of exhibit space. The museum does not receive federal funding, so the \$5 million addition was made possible through grants and donations.

Baker has worked for the museum since 2016, and as executive director, was instrumental in raising funds for the addition.

“This is a project I am very proud of,” Baker said. “I am pleased to say we opened on time and on budget in September. This expansion and subsequent renovation, funding and installation of a new permanent Eastern Idaho exhibit, Way Out West, are two major undertakings that are key to our long-term sustainability as an organization.”

Before the expansion, the museum had to shut three months a year to switch exhibits. The addition means it remains open year-round and accommodates large traveling exhibits.

Servant leadership

Baker said she believes in paying it forward by investing in other leaders the way people invested in her.

“I think the greatest gift you can give to the next generation of leaders is to share the things that you’ve learned — to become a really good listener and not try to solve (problems) for them, but ask questions,” Baker said.

Baker accomplishes this by giving her staff the tools, trust and space they need to succeed, saying that you have to trust your staff, or they’ll never thrive. It’s also important to allow them to fail occasionally too, Baker said.

“You give them the opportunity to succeed, but you also give them the opportunity to maybe even fail, so they can learn lessons along the way,” she said. “Because if you always succeed, you’re never learning.”

But failure is a rare outcome, Baker said, because when given the opportunity to shine, most people will. Her staff shines all the time, and though her role as executive director means she often gets the spotlight, it’s her staff who deserve the accolades.

“This is really their award. My name just gets to be on it because they make me look extremely good,” Baker said.

Supporting nonprofits

Baker’s commitment to servant leadership extends beyond her duties at the Museum of Idaho. She said one of her favorite things about her role as executive director is that she’s in a position to help other nonprofits. In fact, Baker is a committee member for the East Idaho Community Commitment Fund, a partnership with Bank of Idaho and Idaho National Laboratory, created to help nonprofit agencies in need of rapid funding to continue operations in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We work together as nonprofits in our region, supporting each other, especially through (the pandemic). We’re coming together as a community,” Baker said. “The community commitment fund was created to break down barriers. The people on this committee will be listening to the needs of nonprofits and breaking down many barriers to get money infused.”

Ann Marie Peters, director of strategic partnerships for the College of Eastern Idaho, said Baker has always been supportive of other nonprofit organizations, statewide and nationally.

“She helps in every way possible,” Peters said. “First, she is very generous with all of her previous experience ... Second, she shows up. Karen is a very visible, active participant supporting important community causes and events.”

Jeff Carr, director of public relations for the Museum of Idaho, said Baker plays a key role in getting nonprofits across east Idaho to collaborate.

“Baker seeks out needs in the community and strives to meet them with the newfound nimbleness and reach she has brought to the museum and the collaborative as a whole, which now works together for the greater good,” he said. “She



is visibly guided by an inner drive to do what's right rather than what's lucrative, and yet this same drive often leads to revenue opportunities, allowing the work to continue and grow."

Bringing STEM to children

As a former executive director for the Washington State STEM Education Foundation, Baker knows the value of bringing science, technology, engineering and math to children.

Peters said in addition to her collaboration efforts among nonprofits, Baker also plays a key role in introducing and expanding STEM programs to children across eastern Idaho.

"Her leadership has resulted in many organizations, in addition to the Museum, becoming more active in these programs, particularly for young women," Peters said.

Baker says the recent expansion has allowed the museum to double its education program space. The museum now has two classroom spaces for hosting informal education programs, such as a lecture series for adults. But the museum also offers STEM classes to children as young as three.

"I believe humanities is the pond in which STEM swims, because if you don't understand place — where you are, your history and your culture — STEM doesn't make as much sense," Baker said. "As a history and science museum, it gives us an ability to dig into higher-level thinking, and questions."

Bringing Idaho to the world

The Museum of Idaho's mission and vision is to bring the world to Idaho, and Idaho to the world. But according to Baker, some natural barriers must be removed before the museum can reach its goal. For Idahoans experiencing financial problems, visiting a museum is often an unjustifiable expense. It's another barrier Baker set her sights on removing.

"I believe that culture, humanities, need to be accessible for the underserved community in rural Idaho," she said.

To remove that barrier, Baker and her team initially partnered with the Food Basket, giving tickets for free admission to families, but Baker said that too created a barrier because fam-

ilies had to remember to bring the tickets to the museum.

"I think there's something psychological that when you make something free, it's perceived to have no value," Baker said. "My grant director and I were brainstorming, discussing, 'How do we create value? How to break down barriers?'"

That led to the idea of offering \$1 admission to anyone receiving SNAP benefits. And because most who receive SNAP benefits carry their SNAP card in their wallet or purse, Baker and her team decided that the discounted admission would be granted to anyone who shows their card at the door, removing the barrier of having to remember to bring tickets to the museum. And by charging only \$1, they were able to create value.

"All they have to do is come in, show their SNAP card, and it's just \$1 per person. A family of five can get into the museum for \$5," Baker said.

She and her team have also partnered with Habitat for Humanity, offering a free membership to every family. The memberships are valid for one year, and the family can reapply each year, for as long as they're in the Habitat program.

"It's really important for families to be together in a learning environment. They just have to bring in the membership once," Baker said. "We're trying to break down barriers to access."

“I’ve tried to retire twice.
I’m really bad at it.”

Away from the museum

Baker is also the co-founder of a networking group for women in eastern Idaho. "It's women helping women," she said. "We call it the no-book book club, so it has all the fun of a book club, but no pressure to read a book."

The group began a year ago with eight women and has grown to around 80 members. The group meets for dinner every two weeks, with about 30 members attending at a time.

Peters said it's a great way to relax while meeting interesting women in a casual atmosphere. "The response has been overwhelming, and these women have made connections to help each other professionally as well with community projects."

Making improvements to her 1910 home also keeps Baker busy outside of work, and she takes watercolor painting classes. But she says her favorite activity is taking time to curl up with a good book.

"I love to read," Baker said. "I think I'm really an introvert at heart, but I work in an extroverted world, so I enjoy times that are quiet."

Those quiet times allow her to return to work ready to take on new challenges. And as of now, she plans to meet new challenges for some time to come.

"Someday I'll retire," she said with a laugh. "I've tried to retire twice. I'm really bad at it."

Shawn Barigar

Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce

By DeWitt Smith

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Given the national economic crisis, leading the business community to navigate these difficult times is like a captain trying to take his ship through an iceberg field. It will take grit, faith, stamina and a steady hand, despite all the obstacles — words that describe Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Shawn Barigar.

“Our operations came to a screeching halt,” Barigar said. “The Visitors Center is closed, all operations have been significantly impacted and the revenue stream has basically been halted. Now, more than ever, we as a Chamber of Commerce have a significant responsibility to our community.”

Barigar’s goal is to keep the 825-member business community connected and informed — a major challenge, given how many unknowns there are.

For instance, at Easter, the solution for the U.S. population was practicing self-quarantine and social distancing, which meant no Easter Sunday church services. Furthermore, the problem of containing the contagion in the U.S. was exacerbated by the lack of a vaccine; the lack of masks; and a nationwide shortage of life-saving ventilators.

“Everything seems to change every four hours, which is very tumultuous,” Barigar said about the early days of the shutdown.

Leadership in a time of pandemic

Now in his fourth term as a City Council member, Barigar, 48, has had plenty of hands-on experience making community decisions, starting in 2004 when he served his first term.

Although his term as the Twin Falls mayor for the past four years ended in January, he is still deeply involved with city issues. A game-changing recent one, of course, was the stay-at-home decree ordered by Gov. Brad Little on March 25.

But even with that restriction, Barigar feels it’s his duty to lean into his leadership to keep everyone connected.

“We provide a voice and vision and focused leadership to enhance the quality of life in our community. In this crisis, it’s

the health of our neighbors first and then to understand the economic fallout,” he said. “I think last week (April 7) our spirits were a little higher, but for individuals, there’s a little bit of confusion.”

The first point needing clarification was defining who the essential workers are. Food processing employees are essential workers, as are health care workers and first responders, such as police and the fire department.

“Everybody has heeded the warning pretty well,” said Barigar, about the stay-at-home practice, which medical experts say will cause a drop in the rate of infection and deaths.

A case in point was the spike of COVID-19 cases in the resort community of Blaine County, the site of the Sun Valley ski resort. Even though Sun Valley has a small population, the influx of skiers helped spread the COVID virus.

“The Sun Valley outbreak came two weeks ahead of ours,” said Barigar. “At this point, people are feeling weary, and the reality is setting in — and that’s the uncertainty.”

So what’s the next step? He doesn’t want Twin Falls to get caught the way Seattle or Portland did. But back here, Barigar said he was shocked at the lack of information.

“Many smaller chambers just threw up their hands. So we took the position of adapting, connecting through social media and figuring out how to stay relevant to our members,” he said.

Link to the community

The immediate action Barigar took was to redo the chamber’s website, www.twinfallschamber.com.

It’s a powerful example of how to keep everyone in the community well-informed and up-to-date.

“We tried to keep our forum of connectivity to give summaries of the CARES Act,” Barigar said, such as the Paycheck Protection Program for workers and solo entrepreneurs.

The chamber — inundated with calls by people wanting to know what to do — keeps its website updated so everyone will know where to find the pertinent forms, how to apply for help and other information. Barigar made sure website information was complete because of the urgent and complex situation.

There was a boost of another sort from the federal government with its recent designation of Twin Falls, the state’s seventh largest city, as a metropolitan area. These designations happen in Census years, and the population growth of Twin Falls for the past century has shown a steady increase. Starting with the census a hundred years ago, the 1920 population was 8,324. By 1990, it was 27,500, and then it just about doubled by 2010 to 44,000. And so the trajectory continues upward.

Statistics define a metropolitan area. To qualify, the metrics



must show an urbanized area with a population of 50,000 or more. Combining Twin Falls and Kimberly meet that criterion, Barigar said in February, and it will be reflected in the 2020 Census. The Census will be delayed because COVID-19 has curtailed the work of the Census takers and the stay-at-home order being observed all over the United States. At present, the Census is scheduled to be released in 2021.

But when the dust settles, post-virus, that designation will be a helpful public-relations asset in attracting businesses.

Food processing center

Twin Falls is already known as a food-processing center, hosting businesses such as Chobani, which arrived in 2011; and Clif Bar and Glanbia, as well as Clear Springs Food in Buhl.

Not to be overlooked, of course, is the hoped-for ancillary growth in research and development. Barigar emphasized the importance of the food sector and food science, which is learning how to feed people in an environmentally friendly way.

To help bring Chobani to Twin Falls, Barigar served on a Ready Team — including the city manager, a coalition of economic development organizations, and the College of Southern Idaho — to work with Chobani to relocate. In addition to tax incentives, the Ready Team was instrumental in site selection.

Chobani broke ground in 2011 and opened for business in 2012. While the company came to the Magic Valley primarily because of the milk, now it's getting into more plant-based products. And that research is now in Twin Falls.

There is also Glanbia with its Cheese Innovation Center in downtown Twin Falls. It works to develop new flavors and new processes which can be taken to the company's main factories, Barigar says. Relocation of its corporate headquarters to Twin Falls has been the result of the company consolidating its business operations.

Barigar also included the presence of Clif Bar, the energy snack, as an important new business in Twin Falls, which opened in 2013.

He also spoke of the long-term companies like Clear Springs Foods, which processes trout. Starting in 1966, Clear Springs and other aquaculture companies in the Twin Falls area produce about 70% of the world's farm-raised rainbow trout.

Other businesses include the Gem State Dairy processors.

"A new dairy processor will be under construction this year," Barigar reported.

In addition, there's Lamb Weston, a potato processor of specialty products, and Amalgamated Sugar Company, which produces White Satin sugar.

"They're still producing from sugar beets, grown in Idaho, and they've been around 100 years," Barigar added.

In addition, there are a few organic farms that produce grains, and some organic dairy farms.

30-year resident

Barigar is definitely the right man in the right place at the right time. He received his degree at the University of Idaho, Moscow, in telecommunications and in broadcast news, and started his career as a TV news reporter in Twin Falls, where he spent six-and-a-half years. From there he went to work doing PR for a local hospital for five years, at the Magic Valley Regional Medical Center, now St. Luke's.

“Now, more than ever, we as a Chamber of Commerce have a significant responsibility to our community.”

"When the Chamber of Commerce head was retiring, my boss approached me and suggested I apply. So I did and made the leap," he says.

A fifth-generation native of the Valley who was born and raised in Buhl, Barigar has lived in Twin Falls for nearly 30 years. He and his wife, Camille, just celebrated their 20th anniversary, and they have two sons, Brock, 23, and Alexander, 18.

As for recreation, kayaking is the family sport of choice. "I love being able to paddle away, and then we go hiking and biking in the mountains," he said.

As for business, the big unknown will be the employment figures. By mid-April, 16.8 million Americans had lost their jobs.

What's the biggest challenge for small businesses right now and how to respond to the far-reaching dominoes that keep falling in response to the coronavirus pandemic?

Echoing Winston Churchill's words of never, never, never give up, Barigar's advice also is the voice of a present-day leader: "Just hang in there."

Karen Bilowith

Idaho Community Foundation

By Hutch Troyer

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Many people choose their careers years in advance, carefully planning and executing each step they will take to achieve their ambitions. For Karen Bilowith, president and CEO of the Idaho Community Foundation, however, the journey was a bit more of a process of trial and error.

“When I was in graduate school, I had my first real job, working in a couple nonprofit organizations, and I realized that not the nonprofit sector overall, but individual nonprofits were really a key partner in solving a community’s challenges,” Bilowith explains. “So, it was another way for me to think about how I could help communities as opposed to a policy approach, and also that nonprofits have a lot of heart and soul. So, I just got hooked, and I was really fortunate in my career path to have some really wonderful opportunities to work both on the nonprofit service side but then also on the philanthropy side. So, in the rearview mirror, it looks like it makes perfect strategic sense, but it was a combination of opportunity and chance, I guess.”

No matter how chance may have been involved in getting her to where she is now, there’s no doubt hard work and natural talent played a role as well. Bilowith’s colleagues, such as ICF Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Jennifer Kronberg, rave about the impact her work ethic and ability to synthesize diverse opinions have had on their organization.

“Karen is a participant in all aspects of her life, not just an observer,” Kronberg wrote in a letter of recommendation. “As a newcomer to Idaho, she immediately immersed herself in the role of a statewide leader by traveling the state, connecting with past and present board members, and meeting longtime donors and members. I admire Karen’s willingness to consider input from our staff and board on an issue before making a final decision. She encourages an atmosphere, and she models these qualities both in and out of the office.”

Seeking collaboration

According to its website, The Idaho Community Foundation aims to enrich the quality of life throughout Idaho. It does that by helping “build and strengthen the communities they serve by bringing together people and organizations to improve the

quality of life through collective giving.”

As CEO, Bilowith is responsible both for identifying areas of need in the state and for convincing donors to help relieve these needs.

“I’m CEO, which means I do a little bit of everything, really,” Bilowith explained. “But I love it because our organization is really the bridge between generous people and communities. And I’m kind of on that bridge, I guess, because I work with our donors to encourage gifts to support Idaho communities, and then I also help, mostly through our staff, work in communities across Idaho to identify what the needs are, what the challenges are, and then which organizations are being effective in addressing those needs so that our grantmaking can be successful. It’s a combination of management of our staff and our resources overall, but then I do actively work with our donors and engage communities.”

When describing what attracted her to nonprofit work in the first place, Bilowith describes the collaborative approach and the focus on community as contributing factors to choosing this particular career path.

“You know, the thing that I really love, and I’ve been working in community foundations for the past almost 15 years, is that there are so many people of all different backgrounds, income levels, abilities, who want to give back to their communities,” she said. “And we provide the way to do that, and we also help those people identify opportunities to give back. So it’s kind of like matchmaking, charitable matchmaking.”

Navigating these diverse backgrounds, income levels and abilities has become something of a strength for Bilowith. Candi Allphin, vice chair for the Idaho Community Foundation, noted Bilowith’s ability to tactfully build relationships with other Idaho nonprofits and through this, effectively address the needs of her community.

“Partnership-building is one of Karen’s key strengths,” Allphin said in a letter of recommendation. “She has developed relationships throughout the community, including with the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, the Idaho Nonprofit Center and many others. These relationships have helped Karen and her team better understand the needs in Idaho, which has helped the Idaho Community Foundation develop its grant-making and impact strategy. As a newcomer to Idaho, it can be a challenge to build trust and rapport within this ‘tight-knit’ group, and Karen has done an outstanding job.”

What Bilowith describes as the “heart and soul” that nonprofit organizations possess seem to have only grown stronger with the trials that recent months have brought. She remains optimistic about the relief nonprofits can provide to those impacted by COVID-19, despite the financial challenges this pandemic have brought on.



through foundations that are located somewhere else, but learn our work through my involvement with Philanthropy Northwest.”

Serving Idaho’s women

Particularly rewarding to Bilowith is the work she does with the Idaho Women’s Charitable Foundation, of which she is a member. She explains that working with this organization allows her to be involved in a number of different ways and to help educate the IWCF’s members on the issues they are attempting to help with.

“The Idaho Women’s Charitable Foundation is like the work we do at the Community Foundation,” she said. “It’s a foundation that’s set up and gets its resources, its money, from many different donors. So members of the IWCF all provide an annual support to the organization and that is pooled together, and then granted out to the community organization. So as a member, I contribute, but part of what the organization does is a lot of work around engaging and educating its members here in the Treasure Valley. What are key issues? Which organizations are supporting those issues? And you can be involved on a lot of different levels. So I participate on the education committee, and what we do is provide a series of learning opportunities throughout the year to the other members of Idaho Women’s Charitable Foundation just to learn more about some of the issues that are impacting our communities.”

While taking on so many challenging nonprofit activities may sound overwhelming to many, the positive impact Bilowith’s work has makes the challenges worth it. She emphasized that, above all, the most rewarding aspect of her work is helping communities address the issues they feel are the most pressing, and through this, developing closer community ties overall.

“Especially during this particular time, I think all nonprofits are feeling a lot of anxiety as they’re challenged to serve more people,” she explained. “And I think they’re the real heroes, the people working in nonprofits and helping people every day. But we are supporting all those groups. So the job is big, but it’s also really rewarding.”

Spreading the love

As her love and aptitude for nonprofit work have grown, Bilowith has expanded her efforts to other organizations aside from the Idaho Community Foundation. She serves on the boards of groups including the Idaho Nonprofit Center, Philanthropy Northwest, and the International Women’s Forum - Idaho, and is a member of the Bogus Basin Recreation Association Advisory Board. However, she notes that, in keeping with the collaborative approach of nonprofit work, all of the other work she does ties back to her work with the ICF.

“The other organizations that I work with and the boards that I serve on are all in some way related to my work at the Community Foundation because we try to be a really good partner. We know we can’t resolve all of Idaho’s challenges on our own, so we look toward the nonprofit community for partners, other foundations for partners, businesses, government.”

She also explains that expanding her philanthropic efforts have helped her develop a better sense of how to effectively help communities in Idaho.

“I’m on the board of the Idaho Nonprofit Center, which is a wonderful organization that provides training and education and advocacy on behalf of individual nonprofits across the state,” she said. “So that’s a complement to the work we do at the Foundation. I also serve on the board of Philanthropy Northwest, which is a six-state regional association of grant-making foundations. And that’s a wonderful opportunity for me to keep my finger on the pulse of what’s happening in the philanthropic sector across our region and hear what other funders are doing and find ways to partner and collaborate with other groups even beyond Idaho. So through that network, I’ve been able to bring additional resources into Idaho

“ (My career) looks like it makes perfect strategic sense, but it was a combination of opportunity and chance. ”

“I think what’s really important to me, both as a leader of an organization, but also for our organization is to really listen to community voices and be collaborative in your approach,” Bilowith said. “So, what that means at an organization level is really, at all levels of our organization and on our team, trying to facilitate conversations so that everybody has a voice in developing our strategy and our work. We ask people in that community to help us identify the most pressing needs, and then we help generate support for those. So really, the collaborative and community-led approach is something that has been evident throughout all of the different positions that I’ve held that really drives my approach to philanthropy.”

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Saint Alphonsus
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Odette Bolano

Saint Alphonsus Health System

By Ryan Lowery

Special to the Idaho Business Review

From an early age, Odette Bolano knew she wanted to enter health care administration.

After graduating from Texas Christian University with a nursing degree, she went on to pursue a master's degree in health care administration from the University of Houston. She's worked as a critical care nurse and as an operating room nurse, which she said allowed her to understand the clinical side of health care better.

"I've been blessed to be able to work in very different sectors of the healthcare world," Bolano said.

She has held a number of leadership roles over the years, including being a nursing director, a chief nursing officer, and a CEO, and Bolano was formerly the president of the Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise. Today she is the president and CEO of Saint Alphonsus Health System.

Bolano also spent more than a decade in Catholic health care in Arizona and Texas before moving to California for a senior vice president position with Kaiser Permanente. But the chance to once again work in a Catholic health care setting brought her to Saint Alphonsus and to Idaho.

"I love Catholic health care, for what the ministry stands for — the mission and the commitment to the poor and vulnerable," she said. "I am honored to be here and to lead this mission-grounded organization that does incredible things for our community."

Boldness and making mistakes

Bolano said her approach to leadership begins with asking her staff to be bold, to take chances on new ideas, and, most importantly, to not fear making a few mistakes along the way.

"I try to push for boldness and for allowing people to think outside of the box," she said. "You have to allow people to make mistakes to be able to learn. I think that most of my learning came from the failures that I had. I was able to learn

from those. If you're allowed to make mistakes, you're willing to make bold moves and not be apprehensive about trying something new."

Diversity is important too, she said, including differences in ideas from people in different sectors of health care and from those who've worked in industries outside of health care as well.

"I think in health care, we sometimes become very myopic in what we believe," Bolano said. "We're always saying that we're different, but I think we're really in a consumer industry that's very focused on people at their most vulnerable time. We're not that different."

Bolano said it's important to allow employees to see your vulnerabilities, too, to let them know that you're not perfect. She said that by allowing them to see you make mistakes, it will allow them to see that you trust them.

Beth Malasky, medical director at Saint Alphonsus Women's Heart Care, said she's impressed by Bolano's approach to leadership.

"Odette takes an objective, thoughtful approach to understanding all perspectives and engaging teams to advance initiatives forward," she said.

Darrel Anderson, president, and CEO of Idaho Power is the chairman of the Saint Alphonsus Health System Board. Anderson said the board was very excited to have Bolano take over at Saint Alphonsus.

"Odette is a tireless leader who inspires the board, the leadership team and the Saint Alphonsus Health System colleagues with her exemplary character," he said. "Among the leadership traits I particularly value in working with Odette is her straightforward, 'what you see is what you get' leadership approach to communication. Transparency is perhaps an over-utilized term in business currently, but it is very descriptive of Odette. I observe that when Odette is working with the board, she strives to be abundantly clear about her vision and objectives."

Commitment and openness

A faith-based Catholic ministry and nonprofit health system, Saint Alphonsus Health System employs thousands of medical professionals while serving more than 700,000 people in Idaho and Oregon. Its services even reach to Utah, Montana and Nevada. Saint Alphonsus also provides primary and specialty care at five acute care hospitals and more than 170 clinic locations.

Running a large operation such as Saint Alphonsus requires planning, something board chair Anderson said Bolano



brought to the table within weeks of taking the reins.

“Within a few weeks of her assuming the SAHS president and CEO role, Odette laid out a 120-day plan for her personal objectives during that time, which included communication with community stakeholders and personal meetings with every SAHS board member to gain input and understand their needs,” he said.

Anderson said Bolano has an open leadership style that enables her to welcome input and expertise from her leadership team and the board.

“She then has the ability to flex to refine her thinking as it makes sense,” he said. “She is an incredibly agile, as well as insightful and analytical, thinker. She is confident but humble and is constantly expressing thanks to all those who serve and support SAHS.”

Tiffany A. Whitmore, vice president of strategic planning and development for Saint Alphonsus Health System, said while Bolano’s professional achievements are impressive, her work ethic and her commitment to leading by example are what truly set her apart.

“On evenings and weekends, Odette can be found rounding on colleagues and patients. She takes the feedback she hears and truly strives to improve the organization with a work ethic that is unparalleled,” Whitmore said. “She shows appreciation for those she works with and values the contribution of each team member.”

A new challenge

The coronavirus pandemic brought new challenges to health care providers across the world, and Saint Alphonsus Health System was no exception. Bolano said that, like most health systems, she and her team were forced to make quick changes to meet the new challenges.

“Before COVID-19, we had our own challenges in the industry, and how it was changing,” Bolano said. “I think the silver

lining (during the pandemic) is, as an industry, we’ve really identified how we can make big, bold moves quickly.”

As the threat of COVID-19 spread to Idaho, Bolano said she and her staff began refining their workflows and that they had to change the way they did many things as they prepared for the threat of a surge of people hospitalized from complications from the coronavirus. Bolano said preparing for a surge meant making drastic changes to Saint Alphonsus’ operations, including shutting down many revenue streams, like elective surgeries.

“That’s been a challenge for health systems across the country,” she said.

Making a difference

Bolano’s son is a general surgeon resident going into a plastics fellowship in Georgia, and her daughter runs a small business in Texas. Bolano said she loves traveling to visit them. She recently became a grandmother and said she is looking forward to assuming the role.

“Learning to be a grandmother, I think, is very different than learning to be a mother,” she said.

She also loves to read, and while she reads a lot about the health care industry, she said it’s important to gain ideas from other areas too.

“I always say people in health care should read outside of health care because there’s so much to learn from other industries,” she said. “I love to understand other industries and see how they solve problems.”

Books provide new ideas, but Bolano said having the right people around you makes the biggest difference. And it’s rewarding to watch people change the lives of those they care for, she said.

“ I try to push for boldness and for allowing people to think outside of the box. ”

“I get to work with some fabulous people. You want to surround yourself with people that are smarter than you,” she said.

She said her colleagues perform miracles while caring for people at their most vulnerable time in life.

“It’s something that is very special as a caregiver,” she said. “There are, at times, events that mark a family or patient for life, create significant milestones — whether it’s having a baby or dealing with cancer or a death. Seeing our caregivers make a difference every single day is something that nourishes me.”

Stephen Cilley

Ataraxis PEO

By DeWitt Smith

Special to the Idaho Business Review

When you're starting your own business, how do you come up with a name? It's like naming a child. Sometimes it's poetic, other times it's historical, sometimes it's made-up. But Steve Cilley had a meaning in mind when he came up with Ataraxis.

Yes, Atta-RAX-iss. It means the lack of stress or anxiety. And as CEO, Cilley got to have his own naming rights.

The name is apropos of the service he offers clients: freeing companies from the stress and hassle of HR administration and hiring. For any firm that wants to outsource its HR, Ataraxis relieves it of administrative paperwork, the bulk of which is tracking employee benefits, particularly health care.

And sometimes, Ataraxis, a professional employer organization, does the hiring. "We do hire for some clients," said Cilley. "Most of the time, the client does the interviewing and vetting as well. But we do all the paperwork and take over from there."

In addition to Ataraxis, which he started in 2009, he's CEO of three other companies. Two do staffing and recruiting: TalentFill, run by a vice president, started in 2018; and Jobu Jobs, jobs-matching software, started in 2017. Then there's his software firm, True Care, which Cilley started with partners in 2019 — a patient-centered medical app that lets patients own their medical history, including scheduling appointments and paying bills.

Each firm is focused on streamlining the old way of doing things, establishing order and simplifying business life. An example is the Affordable Care Act. "It ended up complicating business because it was complex, and it made companies realize how time-consuming it was. So they started looking to outside firms to do that work."

Family business

Cilley, 49, developed his knack for numbers by working with his father after he left college early. "I had had about a year and a half of college at University of Idaho and Boise State University but needed money to finish. So I got a job in sales, Kirby vacuums, and then sold sports-poster advertising," he

says. "It was a national business, and I drove through 47 states. It was a blast. But there came a point when I chose to return to Idaho because I saw lots of opportunity, liked what I saw and wanted to come back to be part of it."

His on-the-job training in sales and traveling whetted Cilley's appetite for business. That's when he started running an insurance claims and risk management business with his father.

"I started running the business, and he took care of the insurance adjusting," Cilley explained. "And the business, called Idavada (for Idaho and Nevada), expanded so much that by the end of 1999, there were four offices and 15 employees. We had offices in Boise, Twin Falls, Pocatello and Idaho Falls. It got bigger than my father ever imagined. So I bought him out in 2000. We worked together until 2015," he said.

Not one to stand still, Cilley started another claims business, Touchstone Claims Solutions, in 2005. Still in operation in Boise, the firm handles claims for other insurance companies.

In 1996, Cilley returned to school, while still working full time, to study marketing and finance. His real-world experience gave him a deeper understanding of his courses. "The subjects were no longer theory. I could really apply what I was studying to my experience in the work world," he said.

By 1998, business had grown where it was difficult to do school and work. Armed with new skills, he left school to work with his father. "I bought him out a year a half later and was able to run the business faster because I was willing to take more risk," he said.

His next move was to buy an insurance adjusting business in Salt Lake City, and by 2007, was looking to acquire another business. Along with new business partners, they finished the acquisition of that insurance adjusting company in 2008.

The acquisition created a company with more than 50 people in five states. With the growth, Cilley decided to change the name of the company, from Idavada to Paragon Claims.

"That's when we started looking for a PEO for our own business. We didn't want or know how to handle the HR, payroll and compliance for more than 50 people," he said.

Solving his own problem

The idea to start his own PEO came when a friend who owned one in another state turned him down as a client because he didn't want to take on a long-distance client.

"But he gave me a list of people to call, and I discovered all they could do was advise me. I wanted to partner with someone who was going to take over and handle day-to-day HR responsibilities. And it dawned on me, if I was having that



"We've used Zoom and IM Slack. The fact is, we've been more communicative virtually than working in an office space. You have to be coordinated and communicate better when you work that way," he said.

He's looking forward to how the transition back to so-called normal is going to work. Cilley's thinking is that wherever employees thrive is the best place for them to work, whether at home or back at the office.

That will give him the opportunity to deal with clients while they are trying to figure out how to keep their business going. Right now, nobody knows. "I've spent the last two weeks helping employees stay paid," he said.

Idaho is a good state for employers, Cilley said. "There are states that make it much harder to do business, but Idaho is a very business-friendly state. We have clients in over half the states in the country, so we see the different regulations. There are a lot of things that can trip businesses up, and it's hard for businesses to know what they're supposed to do. For instance, take the issue of sick leave. We don't have sick leave in Idaho. I'm not saying we should, just saying we don't," he said.

Cilley does the due diligence to look at factors of going into another state with PEO services. "Then our team has to look into the matter of the state licensing issues, and to see what the start-up requirements are," he said.

Family man

Don't get the impression Cilley is all work and no play. He is very much a family man. He and his wife, Jessie, have four children: Jefferson, 17; Gavin, 16; Emily, 15; and Jaxon, 12.

“It dawned on me that if I were having that problem, that there were others who were also in the same position.”

"For recreation, as a family, we play golf and we used to ski. But my knees are the only thing about me that are 45," he said with a laugh. So he doesn't ski any more. "I read, like working outside and enjoy my family as well. Right now I'm working from home with four teenagers!"

While Cilley would like to expand his business, he'll have to put his plans on hold, like everybody else. Everything depends on the spread rate and death rate of COVID-19. As a result, governors including Gov. Brad Little have decided to move cautiously.

And Cilley understands the governor's caution. After all, being in the insurance business, he's familiar with the business of risk.

problem, others were also in the same position," he said.

And that's how Ataraxis was born. "Toward the middle of 2008, we had to make a decision: Were we going to stop or go forward with being a PEO," he said. "We moved forward, and the company grew very fast."

In fact, by 2014, Ataraxis had grown so much it catapulted to number 112 on the Inc. 5000 list. That's a big deal for a startup.

"Seen through the lens of the economic recession of 2008-09, Ataraxis came through in pretty good shape," Cilley said. "We started just when businesses were coming back out of the cellar. Paragon Claims came through the recession, but it was clear the economic crisis wasn't over."

The recession changed the claims business. "Ataraxis started picking up businesses getting back on their feet. But there was a decline in insurance-claims business. For a lot of people, it may have changed for the better; it was faster and easier to get claims handled because insurance companies were paying claims instead of investigating them," Cilley said.

While Ataraxis was growing, Paragon was declining. "My partners and I decided the best thing to do was to sell the business so we could make sure the employees had jobs. So, in 2014, we sold what we could and closed down the rest."

By 2015 he had fully turned his focus to Ataraxis.

Currently, Ataraxis is expanding and in 2018 opened an office in Austin, Texas. Why Austin? "I like Austin. It's a growing business market, and it's very up and coming and the tech sector is quite big. I thought we could expand in a city that had a similar culture to Boise — it's got the same attitude, atmosphere and independent streak," said Cilley.

Now with the Austin branch in place, his plan is to go national within five years.

Effect of COVID-19

As for the COVID-19 economy crash, most of his 32 employees are now working from home, Cilley said.

Heather Dermott

Idaho Business for the Outdoors

By Pamela Manson

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Her love of the outdoors led Heather Dermott to set up a nonprofit that gives the business sector in Idaho a powerful voice on conservation issues.

Idaho Business for the Outdoors provides education, advocacy, policy and research that support public lands and the outdoors. To Dermott, the organization's executive director, it makes sense to align businesses with these efforts.

"We come together because we believe there is an economic value in terms of jobs, innovations, revenues and health benefits associated with the preservation of our outdoors," Dermott said. "We make the business case for the value of our outdoors."

The outdoors adds to the quality of life in Idaho and is a marketing tool for companies to attract and retain employees, she said.

Since its launch in 2017, the Boise-based IBO has grown to nearly 50 members, including the state's two largest employers, Micron Technology and St. Luke's Health System. The members are diverse, ranging from small businesses to large corporations in a range of industries.

To support IBO's goals, members pay annual fees based on the number of their employees.

"Businesses are comprised of people who really want to make a difference," Dermott said.

A powerful force

The idea for the nonprofit came out of a 2017 lunch that included Dermott and State Sen. Ilana Rubel, assistant minority leader of the Idaho House of Representatives. The legislator expressed concern about the preservation of public lands with the growth in the state and said business needed to play a role.

"There was no other such business voice in the state prior to Heather creating it, and it is impossible to overstate what Heather has managed to achieve through her role in this organization," Rubel, IBO co-founder and board members, wrote in a letter nominating Dermott for the CEO of Influence honor.

Rubel added the coalition's growth and pace of achievement since its founding "defies belief, due almost entirely to Heather's unparalleled work ethic and brilliance."

"She has led IBO to become one of the most powerful forces

in Idaho conservation, with meaningful impact on policy, awareness and community engagement," Rubel wrote.

The nonpartisan IBO has two paid staffers — Dermott and Marissa Warren, an intern for the organization who works part-time — and a 14-member board of directors that includes a rancher, physicians, business executives, lawyers and entrepreneurs. In addition, about 100 volunteers are helping to preserve public lands, clean air and clean water.

Access to the outdoors

Dermott, an Idaho native who grew up in Boise, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-language literature from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon.

Right out of college, she wrote *Across Open Ground*, a historical fiction novel set in the Wood River Valley of Idaho during World War I, under her maiden name, Heather Parkinson. The publisher, Bloomsbury, describes the book as a lyrical, evocative debut novel that has "echoes of Cormac McCarthy," and Kirkus Reviews calls it "a mature, strikingly voiced portrait of the American West."

Dermott headed west with her husband, whom she met in Idaho, for graduate school. After earning a Master of Fine Arts in film production from the University of Southern California, she worked on short films and documentaries shown internationally.

The couple's two children were born in California and after nearly a decade in the Golden State, they moved back to Idaho, where the family enjoys hiking, fly fishing and biking. "I wanted my kids to have access to the outdoors that Boise offers," Dermott said.

In addition to being an author and filmmaker, Dermott has been an entrepreneur, co-founding and serving as CEO of Willoop LLC. The Boise-based company has a mobile and web platform that supported the creation and storage of advance directives, including a living will and durable power of attorney. This plan for end-of-life care was shared with family members.

Then Dermott's career entered another phase with the founding of IBO.

Highlighting water quality issues

As IBO executive director, Dermott worked with universities gathering research on the importance of Idaho's outdoor assets to workforce recruitment and retention and lobbied lawmakers on public lands and solar energy legislation.

Her landmark achievement is the monthlong Source to Snake Swim event that began Aug. 6, 2019, and highlighted water quality issues.



River in its entirety.”

A creative and passionate leader

Warren, who has been an intern with IBO since 2018, said Dermott works “24/7” and is inspiring. She described her boss as a good leader who brings creativity and passion to her job.

“If there’s anything she wants done, she’ll find a way to get it done,” Warren said.

Since she began her internship, Warren graduated from Boise State University and now has a full-time job as an energy policy analyst for the Idaho Governor’s Office of Energy and Mineral Resources. She also continues to work for IBO.

“I’m a real believer in our mission and I’ve been amazed by how much we’ve been able to do in two years,” Warren said.

Dermott is holding steady in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the struggling economy.

“In tough economic times, you keep reaching out to your members,” Dermott said. “My goal is to set a big table. People really do come together around Idaho’s outdoors.”

In a recent email message to members and supporters, Dermott notes that the Trump administration has repealed or is in the process of repealing 95 environmental rules, including one that rolls back fuel efficiency standards for automobiles. These changes ultimately put public health at risk, she wrote.

“ We make the business case for the value of our outdoors. ”

“We want people, economies and landscapes that are able to withstand and recover quickly in the face of hardship and remain competitive with their international counterparts,” Dermott’s email message said. “To this end, we appreciate all of the businesses in our state that are pursuing environmental best practices in their industry and who are working to ensure the continuance of healthy outdoors.”

Although parks are closed, Dermott said Idahoans can still find the outlets that are good for physical and mental health.

“We encourage everyone to stay home and remain vigilant in social distancing, but find time to get outside and see what ‘everyday nature’ has to offer,” Dermott said in a March 31 IBO blog post. “This is a term that has been trending lately, but it is essentially what you can take advantage of, that which might exist right in your own backyard. It may be the lawn where your kids play, the place where you walk, and empty fields, or maybe it’s a ‘sit spot’ near a tree where you go to recharge. Practice social distancing, but find your place of mental and physical solace.”

IBO brought nationally renowned swimmer Christopher Swain to Idaho to become the first person to swim the entire 102-mile length of the Boise River, starting in the Sawtooth Mountains and ending at the confluence with the Snake River. Along the way, he gathered samples from the river and shared water quality data through social media.

The swim was designed to engage the community — students, elected officials, businesses, media outlets and athletes — in supporting fishable, swimmable and drinkable waters.

To boost the effort, people could sponsor trash pickups, water testing and other actions. A free app, Boise River: Source to Snake, let users follow Swain’s progress in real time.

The swimmer stopped along the way to meet with landowners, business leaders, community members, farmers, miners, students and river recreationists. Students from a dozen schools joined Swain for Clean Water Camp, water testing workshops to gather data on the cleanliness of the river, a tour of Suez’s water drinking water facility and a river clean-up. Athletes with disabilities participated in a swim that promoted equity of access to the outdoors.

The mayors of all eight cities along the Boise River signed a proclamation in honor of the swim, and the swim got widespread coverage in the news media.

Planning the event took hours of planning by Dermott and a team she oversaw. Among many pieces, the organizers lined up a kayak support crew that tested the water along the way, set up the workshops, worked with other organizations to arrange the swim for the athletes with disabilities, found sponsors for the event and handled thousands of other details.

“I’m not sure I’ve ever seen someone work so hard and keep so many balls in the air,” Rubel wrote. “She did the work of 10 people, and the result was spectacular. It was an incredible success, thousands of children and citizens became engaged in the health of our river, and IBO gathered data that had never before been obtained regarding the cleanliness of the Boise

Lori Fascilla

Giraffe Laugh Early Learning Center

By Brooke Strickland
Special to the Idaho Business Review

Lori Fascilla always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She was born into a family of seven in Maryland, and from a young age, she knew she would best serve the world by influencing and teaching young minds. In the late 1970s, she moved here to attend the University of Idaho, where she graduated with a degree in Elementary Education. She became a mother after that and realized, after her first child was born, that she couldn't find a teaching job or adequate childcare that she and her husband could afford. So, she decided to enter the world of early childhood education, and the rest is history.

It didn't take long for Fascilla to realize that all of the magic was happening in the first five years of a child's brain development, and she wanted to do what she could to help mold and nurture kids during those years. She was invited to become the CEO of Giraffe Laugh in 1991 and she was hooked. She's never looked back, and now 29 years later, she continues to run the non-profit organization with strength, ingenuity, and passion.

Relentless champion

Fascilla has been called a "Relentless Champion of Children" by those who know her. The dedication of her time and talents for the benefit of Idaho's various communities and individual children speak to that. When she first took the reins at Giraffe Laugh, the nonprofit childcare center served 20 children and was available for parents to drop their kids off as needed. Under her guidance, it then developed into a full-time center for children aged six weeks to six years. Today, the organization serves 200 children annually in the Treasure Valley area and has expanded to include a variety of services including an onsite food pantry as well as care for homeless families and school age children during the summer months. A fourth center was opened five years ago to serve additional families on the waiting list, which still can't accommodate the amount of kids needing quality care and education. Currently, the waiting list for the organization includes over 550 children.

Among her other accomplishments — including being the mother of three children — Fascilla points to growing Giraffe Laugh's budget from \$85,000 per year to \$3 million per year.

Under Fascilla's leadership, Giraffe Laugh received a grant through the Idaho Association of Education of Young Children in 2019. This will be used to develop a coalition in Garden City to create a preschool for families in that area. The preschool, which will be called Preschool the Idaho Way, will work alongside other community partners including the Boys and Girls Club, Family Advocates and Future Public School. The school is slated to open in the fall of this year.

Children attending Giraffe Laugh are introduced to programs that build literacy and teach personal safety and child abuse prevention, as well as curriculum that aids social and emotional development. They experience socialization through three family-style meals a day and interactive play. Extracurricular field trips and lessons are also provided, including things like ballet and swimming. Fascilla ensures children have access to these activities through scholarships, as this provides an equal playing field.

Fascilla has used her education training and creativity to build a dynamic program to give young minds a well-rounded



ever. Because of the current upheaval in the world and the volatile economy, her average workdays have altered dramatically in the last month, Fascilla explained. The organization was recently forced to shut down temporarily to “shelter in place” due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Because of her heart for people and families that are being directly affected by the closure, in addition to the health care and economic crisis right now, Fascilla described that it has been an incredibly difficult time for her. She is feeling a variety of emotions — anger, uncertainty, fear — as she thinks about the future of her organization and the families she wants to continue to reach. She is honest about her struggles with the insecurities, recognizing that many other organizations and businesses are also encountering these things when looking ahead at the next few months. But no matter what, her unwavering commitment to her role as CEO and the communities in Idaho is steady.

“My heart is breaking and as a leader, I know others are looking to me for guidance,” she said. “I’m blessed to have a lifetime of experience to get me to this point, to steward my treasured people, put on the face of calm and enter the arena each day with renewed purpose and resolve to make it through this event as unscathed as possible.”

Throughout it all — the good and the bad — Fascilla is relying on solid communication with her team and her ability to focus on what can be possible within her realm of influence. She and her team are confident in her leadership style and know that it will help continue to pave the way toward success and building up others. “My goal is to build the bench,” she explained. “I want everyone to become a leader in whatever way possible. We should all be training others to take our positions someday. For the good of the organization and each individual contributor, we have to lift up our own. This means teaching others what they don’t know yet, giving opportunities to lead in meaningful ways, encouraging a climate of risk-taking and innovation, and allowing mistakes to guide our future decisions.”

She believes that even amid incredible turmoil, it is her privilege and honor to do her part in positively affecting the world through her work. And that comes by helping one child at a time. She said, “We strengthen families no matter where they are in their journey and we get to be involved from the get-go. To see them all grown up — parents and children alike — is incredibly satisfying. To know they leave us more than ready for a world beyond our doors and that their chances at a wonderful life have been increased, is the best feeling I can imagine.”

education before they enter the traditional school system as kindergartners. In her nomination form for Fascilla, Cassandra Wagner, Philanthropy Director at Giraffe Laugh, wrote, “Lori is one of the most competent leaders I have ever worked with. Her vision for the organization and leadership of the team is inspiring. She is committed to growing the organization in order to reach more children and families in the community who need quality early care and education, regardless of their ability to pay for these services. She is one of the largest promoters of early childhood education and the importance of nurturing a child from birth. Her calm and soothing demeanor are welcomed by families as they struggle with a variety of socio-economic and emotional challenges in raising children.”

Fascilla didn’t necessarily anticipate finding her life’s calling in early childhood education. “I originally thought I would be engaged with early childhood education temporarily until I realized how everything that happens in the first five years impacts the rest of a child’s life,” she said. “Every child is worthy of a wonderful life and I determined that if I could change the trajectory of their life early on, I was needed more in this field. And it would help my fellow teachers in the primary grades.”

Dealing with COVID-19

Being a CEO comes with its share of ups and downs, how-

“ The CEO of the Giraffe Laugh organization struggles with guiding her business through coronavirus. ”

Angela Hemingway

Idaho STEM Action Center

By Hutch Troyer

Special to the Idaho Business Review

While many individuals pride themselves on forging their own destinies, envisioning and following a specific path they've laid out for themselves, Angela Hemingway found her professional life taken in unexpected directions, ones that would ultimately lead her to a challenging but rewarding position as executive director of the Idaho STEM Action Center.

"The search committee approached me about the job, so that was pretty cool," she explained. "I was doing a different job at the time: I had been teaching for 14 years in public schools here: high school, and at Boise State University. And I had just moved over as Assessment and Accountability Director at the State Department of Education, and that's when the search committee started reaching out and kind of gauging interest, and they went through the interview process, and then I ended up getting appointed by the Governor."

STEM opportunities

Executive director of the Idaho STEM Action Center since 2015, Hemingway's responsibilities are broad and all-encompassing. According to its website, the organization strives to engineer innovative opportunities for educators, students, communities and industry to build a competitive Idaho workforce and economy through STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and computer science education.

Hemingway is at the center of all this: Describing herself as Idaho's "STEM-bassador," she recognizes the opportunity she has to help raise awareness of these unique disciplines in the Gem State.

"I recognize that I'm fortunate to have been selected to serve as the face and the voice of the Idaho STEM Action Center, and I never take that for granted," she said. "And in that capacity, I get to serve the amazing people of this fabulous state of Idaho.

I get to learn, I get to teach, I get to fail forward and I get to try again. And really for me, if there's individuals who consider me a role model, I truly feel honored, but for me, I want to show up ready to work every single day, and I want to lead a phenomenal STEM team as we continue to provide opportunities and awareness for our citizens, and really just work hard to improve Idaho's economy. And so that is really where my focus is."

She noted that efficiently spreading awareness of STEM requires not only integrating it into school curriculums, but also providing additional opportunities to explore STEM to those who are interested in it.

"We really are focused on providing opportunities for Idaho educators, students, communities and industries, with the goal of building a competitive Idaho workforce and economy through STEM and computer science education," she said. "What that essentially means is we have the opportunity to provide professional development and resources for educators. And when I use the term 'educators,' I'm talking about formal educators, as we think of them as teachers, our K-12 teachers, but also informal educators. Educators that work, say, at after-school programs, or libraries, Boys & Girls Clubs, or at museums or even parents. So we're providing professional development and resources, and we also have an opportunity to provide funding for student camps and competitions, and we really seek to engage industry to support our STEM-focused programming."

Empowerment through education

A veteran educator herself and the holder of numerous degrees including a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from Boise State University, a Master of Science in microbiology and a Bachelor of Science in biology and chemistry, Hemingway credits her the time others invested in her and the time she's been able to invest in others as a key part of her success in her current position.

"My philosophy has always just been that education empowers individuals," she said. "And so, for me, education does really empower them. It gives them knowledge and it gives them the ability, if they choose to, to improve their lives, their community, and I think even on a larger scale, the world around them. So for me, I've always just admired the capability that we possess as humans, and that's our ability to learn, right? We try something, we fail forward, we learn and we try it again. And that is truly, to me, the gift and power of education. It keeps an individual and it keeps our society moving forward. So for me, the power of education truly, I think, speaks for itself. And it's absolutely critical to our society today."

Praised for its integration of diverse disciplines to give stu-



“By working with businesses and writing grants, I also have the opportunity to bring additional funding into Idaho’s STEM pipeline,” she said. “So, working with my phenomenal team, we get to increase opportunities for all Idahoans so that they can access STEM education and learn about STEM careers throughout our state.”

As in any discipline, mentors and practical leadership are important in STEM. Hemingway noted that an important aspect of her position is not just to educate the students she engages with, but also to introduce them to mentors who can teach them what a STEM career is really like.

“We know that research shows when students really have the opportunity to interact with someone in a particular career, they can see themselves doing that job and that makes them more likely to decide to take more rigorous courses and perhaps to go into post-secondary in STEM and then slide into a STEM career,” she said. “So mentors and adults that are in STEM careers are really our front lines to engaging these students and helping them understand what a STEM job is — and, what a STEM job isn’t! You’re not always sitting 24/7 in front of a computer. There are many jobs out there that really help impact and change the world.”

Insight into the realities of a STEM career is crucial in getting young people interested in these careers, she explained.

“If you can’t see it, you can’t imagine yourself in that role,” she said. “So really, given the opportunity for our young people to connect with role models, to ask them questions about their job, to learn what it is they do in their job and how their job solves problems or improves society, that’s why we’ve created a number of opportunities for businesses and industry to engage with young people throughout our state.”

“ The world truly is changing, and STEM is leading that change. ”

Through it all, Hemingway is guided by her passion for STEM, and for the unique opportunity she’s been given to help young people learn about and improve the world around them.

“For me,” she said, “I think the job has been incredibly challenging and rewarding, and I get an opportunity to learn something new every single day. And that’s what excites me about the work I do. I get to be kind of the spokesperson for STEM in Idaho, highlighting that it’s so much fun: it’s engaging, it’s hands-on. You know, talking about the fact that children are born wanting to learn and wanting to explore the world around them. And STEM really uses the five senses to help us understand what’s going on around us — and, so, showing them that it’s possible to create and invent and improve the world in which we live through STEM education.”

dents a comprehensive knowledge of science and technology development, STEM already plays an important role in developing scientists and engineers. Hemingway, however, has bigger ambitions for those the Action Center engages with, envisioning a future in which STEM will play a crucial role in shaping the future of Idaho.

“From a large scale, I envision STEM as really solving the world’s problems,” she says. “From health care right now, dealing with halting the spread of the coronavirus — STEM is involved in health care. We’re involved in environmental issues: You know, how to provide clean water and food for our growing population. There’s all sorts of transportation issues that STEM can help solve, and a variety of different technology issues. So again, whether a child or a young adult chooses to go into a STEM career, some level of STEM skills are still going to be required for the world in which we live. Whether that’s the use of mathematics to computational thinking, the world truly is changing, and STEM is leading that change.”

However, there are many who are still not aware of the impact STEM could have. Educating young people about these disciplines and their value, Hemingway explains, is key, especially considering the fact that many are not aware of the many STEM-related activities available in Idaho.

“I think the first step is simply awareness of all the opportunities that exist here in Idaho. So that is our first step: raising awareness, being out at events, engaging with young people, with educators, with parents, with legislators, and kind of the community as a whole. So, again, the pitch is ‘Here’s a huge variety of STEM careers that exist in Idaho: STEM jobs that these young people could be engaged in.’”

Increasing opportunities

Another part of Hemingway’s job, in addition to finding practical ways to bring awareness of STEM opportunities to young people, is to help increase the number of opportunities that actually exist.

Bradley Huerta

Lost Rivers Medical Center

By Catie Clark

Idaho Business Review

It's not an exaggeration to say that because of Brad Huerta, several of Idaho's most isolated communities still have a local hospital.

As a brand-new CEO, Huerta kept the doors open as the Lost Rivers Medical Center in rural Arco, population 882, teetered on the brink of closing in 2013. The hospital was in its third year of bankruptcy and struggling with back taxes, penalties and \$3.5 million in debt. The facility needed numerous repairs, and its dated technology provided little value to the hospital's clinical staff.

Since then, the hospital is back in the black, has fixed its physical plant, expanded its care options and partnered with regional universities to offer a range of critical telehealth services. A new surgery center opened in 2019.

Huerta described in January what it was like to rescue a rural hospital. "I took over on April 15 of 2013," he said. "I'll never forget my very first day. I walked in ... and I looked at my boss (the chair of the hospital board), and I said, 'Hey, I know there's a lot of work to get moving on, but if you had to name the top three burning issues, what would they be?' She kinda sat back in her chair and went, 'Well, payday's on Friday. It's Monday, and we have about \$10,000 in the bank. You might want to start on that one because we don't have enough money to make payroll.'"

Huerta came to LRMC fully aware of the struggles he would be facing. He first engaged with his new employees to share his vision and an estimation of the work it would take to keep the hospital open. One of the first and hardest decisions he made was to furlough 20% of the staff. Despite the hardship, employees welcomed his honesty and supported this decision because of the hope he gave them. This allowed LRMC to operate on a shoestring budget as Huerta developed plans to turn it around.

Huerta then engaged with Butte and Custer County residents to educate them on the necessity of passing a \$5.5 million bond for the hospital's taxing district. The purpose was to keep the hospital operational. He held community meetings to answer questions about the bond and how those funds would be used. After the bond was successfully passed in November 2013 with an 80% supermajority, Huerta arranged the bond issuance with the Idaho Bond Bank Authority rather than another financial organization. That step alone saved the local taxpayers \$2 million over the life of the bond.

Telehealth Pioneer

Huerta's leadership at Lost Rivers may be the biggest turn-

around in the history of Idaho health care, but his achievement doesn't stop at just rescuing the operation financially.

Before COVID-19 and the explosion of telehealth in Idaho, Huerta became one of Idaho's genuine telehealth pioneers. He forged the first telepharmacy program in the state and installed telehealth visits with behavioral health professionals for the residents of the Lost Rivers Valley. All before the end of 2019, he also set up tele-stroke, tele-burn and tele-ER services at LRMC in partnership with the University of Utah.

Huerta's not a quitter, as the Idaho Board of Pharmacy learned. After the board rejected his telepharmacy proposal, he was back on their doorstep the next year, applying again. When partner Idaho State University opened the Bengal Pharmacy at LRMC in 2014, it was the first telepharmacy in the state.

Prior to LRMC, Huerta was director of public affairs & strategic planning for seven years at Portneuf Medical Center in Pocatello. Before that, he was a deputy district director for Rep. Diana DeGette of Colorado for six years. He has a B.S. in political science from Idaho State University and an M.P.A. from the University of Colorado-Denver. He also served in the Air Force.

In Huerta's office is a large whiteboard. Across the top of it, he wrote: "Whether you think you can or can't, you're right."

"This is a philosophy he holds to and uses to inspire others," commented Tina Atkins, one of the administrative staff at LRMC. "Without his vision and leadership, LRMC would not be open for business and continuing to save lives in the Lost Rivers Valley. That whiteboard has been hanging in his office since April 2013 and has been a tangible vision of the goals he sets each year for this organization. To Brad, while there is always change, there is always 'a vision' of greater things to come. He works hard, and shoulder-to-shoulder with his staff, to bring those visions to fruition."

"Brad uses his education, knowledge, superior communication and networking skills, as well as integrity, to competitively and successfully lead by example," Atkins added. "With every interaction, he invites suggestions and input, as well as keeping his partners informed to ensure transparency and long-term success at LRMC. The fact that LRMC has accomplished so many things before they were adopted by similar hospitals speaks to his graceful and savvy competitiveness."

Huerta has been a consistent innovator. For example, hospitals are reimbursed at a higher rate by payer organizations if designated as trauma centers. Huerta initiated and pushed LRMC through the arduous year-long process to become the first hospital in Idaho rated as a Level IV Trauma Center. This is a notable achievement because LRMC is a federally-designated critical access hospital, defined as a facility in a rural community with 25 or fewer beds and no other hospitals nearby.



More cattle than people

The Lost Rivers Valley makes other rural areas look cosmopolitan. Arco has fewer than 900 residents. All of Butte county has approximately 2,800 — the third-lowest county population in Idaho. Mackay, 30 miles to the north, is served by a LRMHC-owned clinic. It has a population of 500. Officially, there are more cattle in the Lost Rivers Valley region than people. Trauma center designations are usually associated with large urban hospitals, not small rural medical centers in the sticks.

Huerta hunted for new ways to bring in revenue streams to LRMHC. He pushed to enroll his hospital in the federal 340B pharmacy rebate program, which currently nets the hospital approximately \$300,000 annually. There was a catch: to qualify for the 340B, the hospital has to be associated with a pharmacy, but Arco didn't even have a pharmacist in town since the last one in town retired years before. This was one of the driving motivations for Huerta to establish the telepharmacy.

Huerta also created a remote reference lab program where LRMHC engages with regional participants to handle lab specimens — another first of its kind for the hospital.

In keeping with that trend, an additional innovation at LRMHC is its Medicare/Medicaid swing-bed program for long-term nursing care. “We had to fight regulations on this one too far about a year, but we’re now in the (federal) long-term swing-bed program,” Huerta said. “Butte County does not have a nursing home. When you get old, you either die in your house or you have to move away from your family. So we went to the state and said, listen, we have beds in our hospital. We have 24-hour nursing. We have all the resources, but we’re not licensed as a nursing home. Can we use some of our beds for people who would be in a nursing home to stay here in our community? We’re now the only hospital in Idaho allowed to do this because of our extreme isolation.”

Huerta has been deeply engaged with the local communities his hospital serves. He has promoted breast cancer awareness campaigns, worked at the local soup kitchen and supported the region's many annual events such as Arco's Atomic Days,

the annual Mackay's free BBQ event, and the Festival of Trees. He's a regular at local and county government meetings. He also serves on the Lost Rivers Chamber of Commerce and as a board member of Lost Rivers Economic Development.

Huerta has also opened up the hospital's meeting spaces for use by community groups, including the local chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Pretty City Committee.

“Any request for him or his staff to lend themselves to the betterment of this community is always met with a resounding, ‘Yes, what do you need?’” Atkins said,

Leading the Charge

Huerta is engaged with health care on the state level, appointed to Idaho's Time Sensitive Emergency Board and active in the Idaho Rural Health Association. “I serve on the hospital board, and you couldn't ask for a better administrator for LRMHC than Brad Huerta,” said Arco Mayor Sam Haroldsen. “He's always looking ahead, and he's always prepared for everything, even COVID-19. He does a phenomenal job.”

Huerta tackled the repair and upgrade of the hospital's physical facilities and diagnostic equipment, falling apart or obsolete in 2013. One acquisition was the 16-slice CT machine, which made the designation as a Level IV Trauma Center possible. He also brought in an electronic records system and built the surgery center, which opened in fall 2019. That surgery center saves Butte and Custer residents a 90-minute drive.

Huerta's efforts have not gone unnoticed. LRMHC received the designation as one of the country's top 20 Critical Access Hospitals from the National Rural Health Association in 2016. Huerta himself received an Idaho Rural Health Hero Award from the Idaho Rural Health Association.

“ He's always looking ahead, and he's always prepared for everything, even COVID-19. ”

Huerta's management of LRMHC could serve as a core competency case study right off the pages of the Harvard Business Review. He has a tight focus on his rural hospital's core competencies because he knows that's the path to success.

“We can't do neurosurgery, we don't do oncology, we don't do vascular surgeries,” Huerta said. “You got to focus on the 90% of what you treat. I don't need a surgical robot. I need an X-ray machine. That's what we focus on.”

He's always looking to the future. “You have to have a strategy to grow,” he said. “That's what's usually missing from the conversation for saving rural hospitals. What are you going to do to grow out? What's going to bring in revenue? You've also got to balance that against the understanding that rural hospitals can't be everything to everybody.”

Gerald Hunter

Idaho Housing and Finance Association

By Erin Banks Rusby

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Greg Blake had an accounting problem. His colleagues at the Idaho Housing and Finance Association, where he works as chief information officer and vice president of finance, had been scouring a complex accounting spreadsheet, trying to locate the source of its imbalance, to no avail. After an outside consultant failed to locate the error, Blake dedicated an entire weekend to grappling with the data and eventually found it. He met with Gerald Hunter, IHFA's president and executive director, to tell him about the ordeal.

When Hunter looked at the spreadsheet, he located the error almost immediately.

"I kid you not, he looked at the data, put his finger down, and said, 'Right there, there's your problem,'" said Blake. "And he was exactly right. This blew my mind because so many of us were trying to find it, and he found it in less than five minutes."

Great listener

That event offers a glimpse of Hunter's career with IHFA, a quasi-state agency offering affordable housing programs.

"Gerald is by far the most brilliant of all the C-level executives I've ever worked with," said Blake.

In addition to his business acumen, Hunter is an especially pleasant person to work with, said Susan Semba, IHFA's executive vice president of homeownership lending.

"He just has a very calm, thoughtful demeanor," she said. "When you go in to talk to him about anything, he's a great listener."

Growing up in Bountiful, Utah, Hunter's pathway into business leadership began in high school when he discovered

a fondness for quantitative skills. During his studies at the University of Utah, he decided to pursue a career where he could put this ability to use. He considered working in physics, electrical engineering and accounting. Ultimately, he settled on accounting for his undergraduate degree, followed by a master's degree in business administration. He worked as a certified public accountant before being recruited as chief operations officer at IHFA in 1987.

In the 1998, during organizational restructuring, the board looked to Hunter to fill the president and executive director position. It was a natural progression for Hunter, who had developed a strong understanding of IHFA in his 11 years there.

"The people that I had worked with at the organization at that time were very collaborative folks that worked with me and vice versa," said Hunter. "And as a consequence, I think it was a very accommodating change."

Navigating the recession

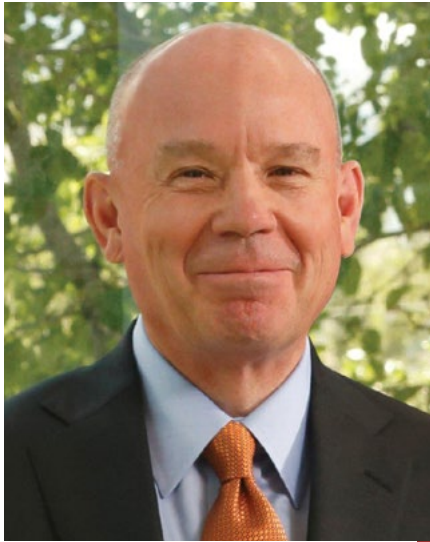
In the decades since, Hunter has worked to help the agency evolve, navigating changes in the economy and regulatory environment. From the 90s through the early 2000s, the agency primarily funded first-time homebuyer loans through tax-exempt bonds. But tax-exempt bonds are mostly limited for use on low-income and first-time homebuyer loans. And as the market reached a high point in 2005, it limited housing affordability. Hunter started looking for other options to continue offering access to housing financing for Idahoans with low and moderate incomes.

Around that same time, Fannie Mae began offering a program to housing agencies across the country in which it offered to buy loans arranged through state agencies. As an added benefit, the program was not limited to first-time homebuyers.

Hunter learned about the offering, analyzed it, and thought IHFA could reach more low- and moderate-income Idahoans by working with Fannie Mae, said Semba. Under his leadership, IHFA became one of the first housing associations in the country to participate in Fannie Mae's new program. The decision would pay off during the Great Recession of 2008. Thanks to IHFA's participation, it could continue offering affordable housing resources during that period.

"It was a very stressful time during the downturn," said Semba. "Gerald's leadership helped us through and made us stronger." Over the years, IHFA's lenders said, without that program, they would have had no lending to offer in that period, Semba added. Though it still uses tax-exempt bond financing today, Hunter's decision-making steered it toward a more diversified portfolio.

Hunter's prudence also led to innovation in loan servicing. After a loan is closed, it generally moves to another company to do the servicing — contacting the borrowers, collecting



payments and more. In the 90s, IHFA had its loans serviced by various companies across the country. But Hunter realized it could be more cost-effective to service IHFA's loans themselves and offer loan servicing for other state housing agencies.

"Gerald had the ability to see that this was a good business opportunity," said Semba. "It was going to bring money into Idaho so that we could turn around and use that for affordable housing programs," she said.

IHFA now services loans made through housing agencies in six other states — New Mexico, Iowa, South Dakota, Connecticut, Texas and Washington.

Model organization

Over the years, Hunter's counterparts at other housing and finance associations noticed IHFA's successes. Two years ago, during a meeting of the National Council of State Housing Agencies, a CEO shared his admiration for Hunter out loud.

"One of the CEOs stands up and says, 'We're here, and we're all striving to be like Idaho and Gerald,'" said Blake. "That's a great testament to Gerald that the housing agencies are striving to be like us."

Blake called Hunter a "visionary" for seeing needs within their agency and making them a reality. One of his favorite qualities about Hunter is his ability to prognosticate about new technology and the direction of their industry. He recalled how about 10 years ago, Hunter expressed a desire to go paperless — he foresaw the transition to robotic process automation, which enables computers to read data off of scanned documents, before it was widely available. As a result, IHFA became one of the first mortgage servicers to go paperless.

"We've been a leader on the technology side, and I think that is what's made us very successful," said Blake.

When asked about his decision-making ability, Hunter said that it's partially making an effort to understand the industry and market and partially asking for feedback that allow him to take the company in helpful directions. They ask customers, focus groups and partners for feedback about how they would

like to communicate with IHFA and plan accordingly, he said. An example is having a functional mobile platform — it's the kind of investment that comes with security risks but is worthwhile in order to stay current in the business, Hunter said.

One challenge that has proved especially difficult to tackle is housing affordability. Idaho has been "discovered" as a desirable place to live, Hunter said, which has led to rapid price appreciation in housing. This in turn has driven an increase in construction costs, making it difficult to build affordable housing, including rental units.

"How do we build enough housing?" Hunter said, identifying one of the most pressing questions affecting his industry. "Idaho needs more rental housing, and how do we build that and make it affordable?"

Idaho has seen incomes rise in recent years, but there is a widening gap between earnings and the housing prices. Some affordable housing has been built, but not enough for demand.

Though there is no easy answer, Hunter thinks addressing the housing crunch will take a combination of factors: a strong economy that continues to lift wages, negotiation about housing density, and mobilization at every level of government to fund the construction of affordable housing.

In the meantime, under Hunter's leadership, IHFA has facilitated a fundraising campaign each December, called Avenues for Hope, to help fundraise for organizations that help people without housing around the state.

“ Idaho needs more rental housing, and how do we build that and make it affordable? ”

"There has always been a struggle for resources to support organizations that help the homeless," he said.

Many such organizations receive federal funding, but it is still not enough. Avenues for Hope gives these organizations a platform to share their work, whether it's providing shelter, temporary housing or other resources and services people without housing may need.

Amidst his accomplishments in a changing world, Hunter has much to be proud of. Yet he is quick to laud the efforts of his colleagues that shape and mold IHFA.

"I'm really proud of the dedication of our staff and management team, all of the contributions they make, as well as our board," said Hunter.

The board of commissioners has trusted staff, he said, which has allowed staff to be innovative and reach new goals.

"There is a really strong team spirit, and I'm just really proud to be associated with the group of people that are involved with IHFA."

Rebecca Hupp

Boise Airport

By Steve Sinovic

Special to the Idaho Business Review

As airlines began slashing or scaling back flights amid the coronavirus pandemic, airport directors like Rebecca Hupp had been seeing record-breaking passenger numbers and announcing new flights leading up the outbreak.

A U.S. economy on fire that took a nosedive because of a pneumonia-causing pathogen that's had millions sheltering in place is a sudden and unexpected turn of events that could test the mettle of any airport executive. In the role, it's critical to stay ahead of, manage and deal with any number of setbacks.

Hupp, heading the Boise Airport for eight years, is stepping up. Those who know her through business and civic associations said the region is well-served with her at the helm.

Strong growth trends

No one really knows what the course of the outbreak will be — especially its effect on air travel and the willingness of passengers to buy tickets to Boise, which has become an attractive destination for vacationers and business travelers alike.

The city gains direct revenue from airport-related business and activity, including hotel taxes, sales taxes and parking.

The Boise Airport set a record for passenger traffic in 2019 with over 4.1 million passengers traveling through the facility. Passenger traffic grew 6% over 2018 and was growing at a faster pace than the national average.

Before the current crisis, airlines had announced several new flights coming in 2020 for the Boise Airport, most notably, Delta Airlines beginning a daily flight to Atlanta starting in July.

The airport in 2019 was ranked the second-best airport in the U.S. for on-time flights and as one of the “most relaxing.”

In terms of business as usual, that's another question. Public health fears nationwide have to abate before travelers feel comfortable to fly again in the numbers they once did, said Hupp.

But the current situation — “hopefully a short-term crisis,” said Hupp — isn't new territory for her and other airport administrators around the country who've had to weather past ups and downs. They've been on the front lines for events such as the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks when planes stopped flying for a week and passenger traffic tanked. Hupp saw this impact first-hand while running an

airport in Bangor, Maine.

Another challenging episode while working at the Bangor International Airport: dealing with the pain wreaked by the Great Recession, which saw airlines whipsawed by plummeting passenger numbers, rising energy costs and bankruptcies.

Running an airport — tied to the fortunes of airlines and relies on the landing fees and other services they purchase — is clearly not a profession for the faint of heart.

After leading Boise Airport through a period of unprecedented growth — a 50% passenger increase in six years — Hupp said it was too early to tell what long-term impact COVID-19 would have on the airport's passenger traffic, revenue and perception of air travel, but said she was hopeful that as the situation improves, passenger numbers will rebound.

One thing's for certain: for the first time in many years, Hupp was forecasting that the facility would not be seeing any year-over-year growth in terms of passengers with people avoiding non-essential travel after being ordered or encouraged to shelter in place by authorities.

“(Earlier this year), I would have given you a completely different answer as to how things were going so far in 2020,” Hupp said of the current situation.

A 25-year industry veteran, Hupp said the Boise airport, where she leads 125 full-time employees, was experiencing a nice uptick in traffic and was bracing for more activity with the advent of spring break.

Airports are ever-changing and affected by global events frequently. This can make formulating a strategy that works for the airport, its partners, airlines and their employees, and wider community challenging, Hupp said.

Reasons for optimism

Things have not come to a screeching halt. She said the airport was still seeing somewhat regular activity of commercial flights, some of which are not flying full; corporate, private, air medical and cargo operations, and its tenant businesses are operational, including car rental agencies and aviation support services. Retailers and food vendors were closed for a while.

“We have 200 tenants on airport property, ranging from a private pilot leasing a small hangar to a large aviation maintenance facility employing over 100 people,” Hupp noted. “Our financials are strong.”

What isn't on pause is a \$200 million capital development program to expand airport's facilities to meet increased passenger demand. Projects include a new employee parking lot, increasing terminal capacities and enhancing passenger experience to meet projected traffic growth, Hupp said. When a new concourse is built, the airport will also look at



new concession operators, Hupp added.

"I'm focused on a five-year horizon," Hupp said, which also includes expanding air service. That means making the case to airlines to add Boise to their route maps.

Networking to find solutions

With a team to support her, Hupp said she's in contact with the airline executive fraternity for input, including sharing tips and best practices "that address all the moving parts" of the airports they run, Hupp said. She served as president of the Northwest American Association of Airport Executives in 2019.

"One of the great things about the airport executive network is that it's a tight-knit community," Hupp shared. "We are a very cooperative and collaborative group. I had eight emails this morning on how airports are working to withstand the early impact of COVID-10 on travel."

It's a juggling act Hupp agrees, but it's a career, even with all the challenges, that suits her to a tee.

Aviation dreams

Hupp, who grew up in the Boston area as the daughter of a high school teacher father and engineer mother who worked from home, said she wanted a career where she could travel. Aviation seemed to be the ticket, but she didn't want to be a pilot, focusing instead on the management side of the industry.

The youngest of three children funded her way through college by serving as an officer in the Reserve Officer Training Corps. That let her attend the Florida Institute of Technology, where she received a bachelor of science degree in aviation management in 1992. "It's one of the top schools in the country in terms of an aviation-related degree," Hupp said.

Within a year, she landed at Kansas City International Airport, serving in several positions for a facility serving 11 million passengers annually.

She also continued to serve as an officer in the Army Reserves for 12 years. Hupp was a company commander, overseeing an ordnance group and a drill sergeant unit — the

folks in charge of basic training. "My military background was incredibly beneficial," she remembered. "It taught me some important lessons related to leading teams, strategic planning and communication."

At Kansas City International, Hupp moved up as an operations assistant, market analyst and property and contract administrator. She also earned an MBA at Webster University.

When the chance came to lead a team of her own in South Dakota as airport manager of Aberdeen Regional Airport, Hupp said her time in Kansas City had prepared her well. It was in Aberdeen that she first saw how vital an airport is not only to the traveling public, but to other agencies, such as the convention and visitors' bureau, and the business community.

In addition to her work at Boise Airport, Hupp also enjoys her affiliation with the Chamber and her involvement with the Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau and several charities.

Bill Connors, president and CEO of the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce, has worked closely with Hupp since she arrived in Idaho eight years ago. "Rebecca came to be the Boise Airport's director when our air service was in decline, and the airport was struggling with an image that was isolated from the broader community," he said.

She has brought nonstop routes, and also has led the charge to make the airport a hub of economic development, such as SkyWest building an aircraft maintenance facility, a crew base adding 100 air crew members, expansion of cargo operations and tailoring concessions that reflect Idaho's unique tastes, products and businesses.

"Rebecca's efforts make her one of the most effective economic development leaders in our state," Connors added.

“I’ve been known to take pictures of things I like and send them back to my staff.”

Hupp said the Chamber sees the value air service brings, and she can ask its leaders and members when she needs advice.

While she's staying very close to home these days, in normal times, Hupp is an ardent traveler. "I like to go everywhere," she said. She joins husband Joe and their two teenagers on trips around Idaho, hiking and camping in the Grand Canyon and flying back to Massachusetts to see family and friends.

And whenever she travels, she scopes out how other facilities operate. "I can't help geeking out," laughed Hupp. "I look at everything: the fixtures in the bathrooms, the ease of getting through TSA, finding a rental car, the Wi-Fi, the mix of vendors in the concourses, and the type artwork on the walls. I've been known to take pictures of things that I like and send them back to my staff."

Jay Larsen

Idaho Technology Council

By Sharon Fisher
Idaho Business Review

Idaho, particularly Boise, has been showing up on “best-of” lists for some time, but the tone has changed: It’s now showing up on lists like “best place to start a business” and “most innovative metro.”

What has created Idaho and Boise’s reputation as a tech mecca? To many people, it’s Jay Larsen, founder and president of the Idaho Technology Council.

“In the mid-2000s, Idaho’s technology industry was fractured and without a voice to advocate for favorable policy initiatives on behalf of its many stakeholders,” said Idaho serial entrepreneur Faisal Shah, co-founder of AppDetex. “Larsen galvanized these diverse players and brought a unifying voice to our technology industry. His efforts through sound legislation and educational initiatives resulted in, among other things, a thriving start-up culture and one of the fastest growing software industries in the nation. And, in so doing, Jay did something of vital importance — he elevated the significance that technology plays in Idaho’s economy and our everyday life.”

Building an ecosystem

An important part of a technology community is not simply a few major companies, or even a lot of them, but a whole ecosystem of them, from small to large, that function together.

“Under Jay’s leadership, the ITC helped form and shape an ecosystem 10 years ago that is today’s bedrock of Boise’s startup ecosystem,” said Tiam Rastegar, executive director of Trailhead, a Boise-based startup incubator. “Jay evangelized and recruited ecosystem builders, like me, by educating others and instilling excitement around the idea of growing Idaho through leadership in technology. Ecosystem building takes immense energy, a ton of grit and an abundance of belief in order to convene, align and lead stakeholders on a common mission. I can appreciate that now and compliment Jay for having mastered those traits.”

When Rastegar first met Larsen, he was working for PKG User Interface Solutions, in Meridian. At that time, the ITC was advocating for a “medical corridor” of companies in that geographic area, all working in medical technology, he said.

“Back in those days, Jay used to gather us around a poster called the Tech Boise Universe and use it to passionately il-

lustrate his vision for the medical corridor by pointing at the many Boise businesses featured on this poster,” Rastegar said. “The poster depicts the evolution of technology-based startups and businesses in Boise, which spun out of the gravitational centers like Micron Technology, Simplot, Hewlett Packard and others. The poster, and Jay’s enthusiasm for it, resonated with me for some reason, and even though I did not realize this 10 years ago, the idea behind Tech Boise Universe was ‘ecosystem building’ which has become my personal passion and profession at Trailhead.”

Larsen first saw the value of a tech ecosystem when he was working in Utah during the early 2000s, as a director and sales manager for Qwest Communications.

“What was really unique is a lot of my friends were C-level people who worked for companies and early-stage companies,” Larsen said. “It had a vibe that was just amazing, I saw the development of a tech ecosystem.”

Ironically, at the time, Mike Leavitt, then the governor of Utah, was looking at Idaho for leadership.

“When he found out I was from Boise, he said he liked what was happening with Idaho,” with major companies such as Micron, Hewlett-Packard and Idaho National Laboratory setting up shop and Albertsons expanding, Larsen said. “You guys have all these things,” he related.

In response, Leavitt hired a tech czar to expand Utah’s technology sector and invested millions in technology industries. During the Great Recession, people started paying attention.

“What I saw down there is that they had this whole evolution when people said they didn’t want to invest in Silicon Valley,” Larsen said. “They looked at other places. The benefactor was Salt Lake City. Four or five years ago, there were 16 ‘unicorn’ companies in the U.S. — eight of which were out of that Utah area.” (A “unicorn” is a startup with \$1 billion valuation.)

And yet, when Larsen came back to Idaho, he didn’t see the same things. “I didn’t see the same fervor,” he said. “We had a recession in the early 1990s. Idaho powered through it because of what was going on with Micron and technology. HP was hot and still doing manufacturing here. Idaho was in a better spot in the early 1990s than Utah was. The issue was we didn’t do enough organically to grow the next generation.”

Finding the path

Born in Boise, Larsen attended Boise High School, then went to Brigham Young University, where he got his bachelor’s degree in organizational development, followed by an MBA at Boise State University. He went on to teach organizational development at BYU Hawaii before returning to the mainland to



work in industry for the next 22 years.

During that time, Larsen worked for then-Congressman Bill Sali, where he saw the role government could play in Idaho. “My job was to see how government could help the industry grow and thrive in Idaho,” he said. “There needed to be a coalescing voice in industry.”

Unfortunately, one of Idaho’s biggest strengths was also one of its biggest weaknesses. “Idaho is a fiercely independent state,” Larsen said. “It’s a double-edged sword.” Its independence leads business people to tell government to get out of the way and have the industry go forward, he said. “But because it’s so independent, it doesn’t coalesce enough.”

Larsen started out with Idaho’s biggest tech company, Micron. While then-Gov. Dirk Kempthorne had created an Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Commerce, the organization couldn’t be a state agency, Larsen said.

“If it’s connected to the state, then you have to be beholden to what the state does,” he said. “What you needed was a voice from industry that had free rein to go out and say, ‘These are the things we need to do.’”

To begin with, Larsen held about 20 focus groups throughout the state where he met with C-level business leaders to find their pain points. There were three main issues: Talent, access to capital and getting tech to the marketplace.

“Capital is a great measurement to see how strong your economy is,” said Larsen, who helps produce the annual Deal Flow report of investment in Idaho technology companies. And getting technology to the marketplace needs to be an ongoing process, he said, citing Clayton Christensen, the author of the Innovator’s Dilemma.

“You have to meet your customer’s expectations and needs today, but you have to anticipate what they’re going to be in the future.”

From those discussions, the ITC was born. Now, the organi-

zation has a staff of five, performing much of its work through boards, committees and other alliances, Larsen said. Much of the work is around events that give the tech community an opportunity to get together, share information, and make connections.

Filling the pipeline

One of Larsen’s major efforts in helping build a tech community in Idaho is through science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education, from the public school level through higher education.

“In order for us to be successful, we have to have organic growth in K-12 in computing skills,” as well as in higher education and alternative education pathways, he said. “It’s how you stay ahead and generate the next iteration of products and services.”

“Jay is a visionary and a strong leader for the tech community throughout Idaho,” said Angela Hemingway, executive director of the Idaho STEM Action Center, in an email message. “Because of Jay’s desire to put Idaho on the map as a national tech hub, he is striving to ensure that we have not only the businesses in Idaho to ensure economic expansion, but also the talent pipeline that these companies need.”

Idaho has been recognized by code.org as one of the top three states to implement computer science, but Larsen wants more.

“What needs to take place is a requirement that all high school students need to take an exploring computer science class,” he said. “It will open up vistas that will be extraordinary — new ideas about how to do things and get introduced to topics they didn’t know before.”

“ You have to meet customer expectations and needs today, but you have to anticipate what they’re going to be in the future. ”

Education will help create a virtuous cycle that will help Idaho’s entrepreneurial community thrive, Larsen said.

“We need to generate the next iteration of talent and workforce, and that will help us show the value of how we’re doing more research and development, and that will spin to have more taxes to build more schools,” he said. “The entrepreneurial community will give the money back in the long run when they’re successful. It helps us do these things because the tax base will be larger and broader. We need to look for innovation, and bring connecting points.”

Garrett Lofto

J.R. Simplot Company

By Ryan Lowery

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Garrett Lofto has been working for the J.R. Simplot Company for more than 28 years. In fact, it's the only company he's ever worked for.

His lengthy, and ongoing, career with the private family-owned company began in his native Canada in 1992, and he and his family relocated from Manitoba to Idaho in 2001. Though Lofto has held many roles within the company in the past three decades, he has been president and CEO since 2018, managing a worldwide workforce of around 13,000 full-time employees while helping grow the company's revenue to \$7 billion in annual sales. But Lofto says these accomplishments belong to the Simplot family and everyone at the company.

"We've got tremendous commitment from the Simplot family, as well as our employee base," he said. "It takes a lot of work by our people to do that, and we've got great customers."

Taking down barriers

Lofto said there's a big difference between management and leadership, and he experienced a fundamental shift in the way he approached his job when he started getting more satisfaction from seeing those around him succeed than he did from his own accomplishments.

"I believe in servant leadership, which is about taking down barriers for our employees," he said. "My job is to understand what their needs are so that I can help them accomplish what they need to do, because they're the ones that actually make it happen every day. When you can take down barriers for employees, and make sure they've got the resources they need, that's where we're successful."

Lofto said it's important for leaders to understand the influence they have on people in their work lives as well as their personal lives. Showing compassion for those around you builds passion for tasks at hand, he said. Lofto also attributes some of Simplot's success to that compassion and passion. "When we have the commitment of the Simplot family

matched with the commitment of our employee base, we've got a powerful thing."

Be a sponge

Lofto was trusted with responsibilities early on in his career with Simplot, which meant that while he was in his 20s and 30s, employees much older than he was reported to him. Lofto says he used that as an opportunity to learn more about the business from those around him.

"Ultimately, it meant that I had all of these people with all of this knowledge. I asked them to teach me the areas of their business, and they were willing to," he said.

Learning became a fundamental part of his job, but he said you can only learn when you're willing to absorb what others have to teach you.

"I always say to younger people, 'be a sponge.' It keeps you vibrant to learn, and it will ultimately allow you to make better decisions," he said. "Utilize the knowledge and listen to the people around you. If you listen, you will be so much more successful."

The importance of family

Growing up in the Canadian province of Manitoba, Lofto learned the value of family early in life.

"We didn't grow up wealthy in money, but we grew up wealthy in love," he said. "Having family is absolutely critical, and the family I have — my wife Carol and our three boys — have given me support through my entire career."

Though Lofto has only worked for one company in his lengthy career, he has held a number of positions in the company, and in 2001, he and his family relocated from Manitoba to Idaho. Lofto says it was the toughest decision he and his wife had ever had to make. And while they miss friends and family in Canada, Lofto says they love Boise and all of Idaho, and that he considers himself lucky.

"We're blessed to have lived in two of the best countries in the world," he said.

He's also lucky to live in Idaho, he said, where he and his family are able to enjoy the varied outdoor activities the state has to offer.



“We love the outdoors,” he said. “Our family loves being on water. We love water skiing and water sports, and being outdoors hiking and biking, enjoying everything Idaho has to offer. And I love to do it with my family.”

A family-owned company

The importance of family extends to Lofto’s work life as well, as the J.R. Simplot Company is still family-owned, and five members of the Simplot family serve on the board of directors.

The company traces its roots back to the 1920s when a 14-year-old John Richard Simplot started building what would eventually become the J.R. Simplot Company.

Simplot, a native of Dubuque, Iowa, first moved to a farm near Declo, Idaho, when he was just two years old. But at 14, he left school with the vision of starting his own business. In 1929, Simplot started a produce company, and by 1941, he was processing dehydrated potatoes and onions at a plant near Caldwell.

During World War II, Simplot supplied 33 million pounds of dehydrated potatoes to the U.S. Armed Forces. By 1944, the company had opened a fertilizer manufacturing plant in Pocatello, which allowed it to provide fertilizer to farmers who were struggling during World War II.

Perhaps the most famous accomplishment of Simplot’s was his agreement with McDonald’s founder Ray Kroc. Simplot pioneered the development of the frozen french fry, and it all started with a handshake between Simplot and Kroc in 1967. Simplot agreed to provide frozen french fries to the restaurant chain, which led to the expanding of Simplot’s potato processing operations.

Today, the J.R. Simplot Company is one of the largest privately held food and agribusiness companies in the nation, and it operates globally in a variety of agriculture industries, like farming, ranching, cattle production, food processing, retail food brands, phosphate mining and fertilizer production.

“We start at the very beginning of the agricultural system, and we go all the way through to the end of the food system,” Lofto said. “We go from the very beginning, which is the mining of key materials that go into crop nutrition products, all the way through to the consumer’s plate.”

Prior to being named president and CEO, Lofto held a number of leadership roles with the company, including being the president of Simplot AgriBusiness and the vice president of Wholesale & Specialty Sales within Simplot AgriBusiness.

Diversification and learning

Lofto said what he loves most about his role as president and CEO is that his days are always different. Even throughout the day, his tasks and conversations change due to the diversity of the company’s operations: From discussing a food brand in Australia, to discussing farming, to talking about silica sand and glassmaking.

“It’s always, always unique. Every single minute is different,” Lofto said. “The diversity of our company allows every day to be an intriguing day, and every day, I get to learn something new.”

“ I believe in servant leadership, which is about taking down barriers for our employees. ”

Mark Maxfield

The Cottages Senior Living

By Ryan Lowery

Special to the Idaho Business Review

The Cottages Assisted Living and Memory Care began on a piece of land that once belonged to Mark Maxfield's grandparents. They had called the land home for 50 years, and raised their children there.

"In December of 2001, we opened the very first building in Emmett," Maxfield said. "They always wanted to do something like this, something for seniors."

While the concept of assisted living may not have existed then, Maxfield said his grandparents would have appreciated the Cottages. "It was nice to be able to make that dream come true for my grandparents," he said.

Maxfield and his father launched the company in 2000, and from the start, Maxfield has handled operations while his father acted as the developer. His father has since retired, and today, Maxfield continues what they built as the CEO.

Developing leaders

Maxfield sees a distinction between being a manager and a leader. "People don't want to be managed. They don't really want or need a boss," he said. "My style is to develop leaders."

And the Cottages need a lot of leaders. Each building at the company's 10 locations has its own administrator who's in charge of a staff of their own, typically 12 to 15 employees. While Maxfield and others in the main office provide oversight and support, and handle tasks like billing and payroll, he said his real job is to develop other leaders to oversee each facility.

Kathleen Little, chief experience officer for Idaho Senior Healthcare Consulting, said that working with Maxfield is a pleasure, and credits him with helping advance her career.

"The day I met Mark, I was a burnt-out social worker looking for change and upward mobility," she said. "Mark took a chance on me and gave me a building to oversee. He helped me through obtaining my administrator's license, and eventually, a seven-year-and-counting tenure at our corporate office."

Maxfield said for many years, he focused his attention on the Cottages residents, but began to feel it was misleading to say they were his first concern because he wasn't helping them

shower or cooking meals for them — his staff members were. The realization shifted his focus from his residents to his staff.

"My job now is to take care of my staff, the employees," he said. "My staff are number one to me, and they in turn will give number one care to my residents."

Maxfield said many of his administrators started with the company as part-time employees in areas like housekeeping, and that most never envisioned someday running a facility.

"Many don't have college degrees, and that's not necessary to be smart or to be good at your job," he said. "Now they're helping me run the company. That has been so awesome to watch."

Coming home

While studying business administration at both Boise State University and Utah Valley University, Maxfield held jobs focused on the care of others.

"I worked at the penitentiary for a few years. I finished school while running group homes for delinquent youth out of state," he said. "I enjoyed that, and it was fun, but I had the opportunity to come home in 2001, and that's when we started (the Cottages)."

Stacy Gunnerson, owner of Grannie on the Move, a company that advises seniors, said she often refers clients to the Cottages because she knows Maxfield and his team will give them the best care possible, and they'll be provided with great programs.

"One of my favorite programs offered at the Cottages is the Never Too Old to Dream program," she said. "A few years ago, Mark fulfilled 90-year-old Carol's dream to go on her first date. Mark showed up one day at lunch in a limo wearing a suit and tie, got down on one knee with a corsage, and asked Carol if she would go on a date with him."

Gunnerson said, aside from his compassion and excellent leadership, Maxfield is also a humble man.

"You would never know he is the big boss as he is the first one to jump in and get his hands dirty to lend a hand," she said. "Mark is the kind of leader that, once people start working for him, they never leave. He treats his staff like gold. His assisted living facilities have some of the best administrators in the state, and most of them have been with him for many years."

Leading crazy band of awesome people

Robert Vende Merwe, executive director for Idaho Health Care Association, called Maxfield an extraordinary leader who has created an amazing culture within his company.

"Mark is very knowledgeable, creative, hard working, passionate and well-spoken," he said. "He cares deeply about the



Yes, you're capable, but you're not everything. There's no way I could bootstrap this whole company by myself."

An athlete and competitor for most of his life, Maxfield said he naturally feels nothing he does is ever good enough, but he's constantly striving to do better.

"I'm still trying to achieve personal fulfillments, but along the way, I've managed to rack up some success," he said. "I attribute that to, of course, hard work, but primarily to training people right and surrounding myself with good people."

Taking a break

Although he attributes his success to hard work, Maxfield admitted that, for many years, he felt he had to work hard all day long. He said he still sees the value of hard work, but lately, he's been focusing on unplugging from work a little.

"I've been slowing down a little more and taking care of myself. I'll take a Friday off here and there," Maxfield said. "I'll go up into the mountains with my RZR (off-road vehicle) and ride around. And my dad, bless his heart, he's turning 77 and he still tears it up on his RZR. We'll hook up every once in a while and go riding."

Maxfield also takes some personal time each morning, usually from about 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., to exercise.

"I'll lift weights, I do jiu-jitsu, or go for a walk," he said. "When I hit my desk, I'm showered and dressed for the day, and I completely switch hats. I take off my physical activity hat and I put on my work hat. I work hard until whenever I go home, and then I put on my family hat, and I try not to think about any of the other hats. I'm there with my family, I'm having dinner, or sometimes helping with homework."

Getting out of the way

Seeing people develop is the best part of his job, Maxfield said. He admits he doesn't have all the answers for effective leadership, but said putting people in positions for growth and success allows them to see their own potential.

"My job is to help them see that potential, and once they see it, and have confidence in themselves, miracles happen. That's probably the funnest thing for me, to lead this company with people who ordinarily wouldn't consider themselves a leader," he said. "I spend my time developing people, making sure they have what they need. I don't micromanage them. I hire good people, people smarter than myself, and I get out of their way. If you do that, they'll make you look good."

individuals whom he cares for as well as the staff."

Little said Maxfield constantly works to better himself on a personal level, and always seeks new information. "He is a reader and consumer of industry knowledge and information," she said. "He is very well regarded and widely known in the health care industry and has been for 20 years."

She said Maxfield has also created a corporate culture that promotes teamwork and makes it easy to succeed. "He prefers we all call it the 'Home Office' as corporate can feel overbearing," she said. "Mark is the type of leader that challenges our thinking and insists that we do not think small."

Maxfield said he sees developing the culture of the company as one of his top duties, and stresses the importance of his staff.

"I have an incredible team, so if I've done anything right, it's that I am able to pick the right people to sit at my table," he said. "They bring executional ability and skills — skills that I don't have — so that we're very well rounded. And I guess I'm the leader of that crazy band."

Maxfield said being able to run the Cottages is his best professional accomplishment, but he admitted he couldn't do it without the "awesome" people around him.

"If I had a room filled with leaders in front of me right now, I'd tell them to get over themselves," he said with a chuckle. "In order to make it big and be the CEO of a company, you have to have some degree of confidence and some degree of belief in yourself. I get that, but I think it needs to be carefully balanced.

“ People don't want to be managed.
They don't really want or need a boss. ”

Mindy Plumlee

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho

By Ryan Lowery

Special to the Idaho Business Review

For more than two decades, Mindy Plumlee has worked for Ronald McDonald House Charities.

“I have always worked for a nonprofit or government entities, so I’ve never worked in a corporate setting,” Plumlee said. “At my core, I’m a very service-driven person. I believe we’re all put on the Earth to help one another, so I’m pretty lucky that I’ve been able to do that my entire career.”

After studying recreation administration at Texas A&M, Plumlee took on internships with hotels and the National Parks Service, but while working for a retirement community in her mid-20s, Plumlee had the opportunity to join a new Ronald McDonald House in Texas. Twenty-one years later, she’s executive director at Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho.

Empathy and understanding

Plumlee says she was drawn to Ronald McDonald House Charities because of its commitment to helping families. Her own son experienced some complications when he was born, spending a few days in the neonatal intensive care unit. The experience provided Plumlee first-hand knowledge of what parents experience when their children need hospital care.

“The reality of how little control you really have over the health and wellbeing of your kids sometimes is humbling,” she said.

Equally humbling is the strength found in families who come to the Ronald McDonald House, she said.

“We always talk about how we want to make the Ronald McDonald House the absolute best place that you never want to come to,” she said. “The people who do end up here — the parents, the kids — they have so much grace and the ability to deal with things on a day-to-day basis that it makes it a very easy place to be.”

House expansion

The mission of Ronald McDonald House Charities is to keep families together while they help a sick child fight illness. Oftentimes, the family must travel far from home to a hospital with specialized treatment, often spending weeks or even months away from home. A Ronald McDonald House provides families a place to call home while staying near a hospitalized

child, and it’s provided to the family at little to no cost.

But by the start of 2019, the charity had outgrown its existing Ronald McDonald House in Boise.

“We’d gotten to the point where we were turning away so many families, and it was challenging for us as an organization,” Plumlee said. “One year we were at 40 (families), the next year 80, and the next year a couple hundred.”

Plumlee and her team set their sights on opening a new, larger Ronald McDonald House. And earlier this year, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho opened a 47-room Ronald McDonald House in Boise, near St. Luke’s Children’s Hospital.

Ground was broken on Feb. 1, 2019, and Plumlee cut the ribbon on Feb. 1, 2020. She attributes the quick opening to commitment from the architect and builders. The new 14,000-square-foot Ronald McDonald House can accommodate twice as many families as before.

“We’d been planning for quite some time ... (but) there were a few things that needed to fall into place,” Plumlee said.

One key need was land to build on, which had to be big enough to accommodate a larger Ronald McDonald House and close to St. Luke’s Children’s Hospital because a number of families receive treatment there.

“It was also very important for us to own the land we built on,” Plumlee said. “We consider ourselves an independent community resource and wanted to remain that way. But there’s not a lot of spare land just lying around downtown Boise.”

The solution was a land swap with St. Luke’s. As part of the deal, St. Luke’s took ownership of the existing Ronald McDonald House and its land, and in return, the charity received land across the street from the hospital to build the new Ronald McDonald House.

“In the first 30 days we were open, we served 85 families, which was phenomenal,” she said. “One day, we had 32 families in the House, basically twice what we were able to do at our old facility. It was very exciting.”

Other visions accomplished

Though perhaps best known for Ronald McDonald Houses, the organization offers help to families in other ways, like its Ronald McDonald Family Rooms — smaller versions of its flagship Houses that are built inside hospitals.

After years of planning, Plumlee’s vision of a Family Room inside Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center finally came to



“It’s safe to say that RMHC of Idaho would not be what it is today if it weren’t for Mindy,” he said. “When I first met Mindy Plumlee while interviewing for my current position with Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho, I knew I’d hit the jackpot.”

Plumlee described her approach to management as servant leadership, and said it’s the people she works with — employees, volunteers, kids and their families that utilize Ronald McDonald House Charities’ services — that make her job rewarding.

“Having always worked for nonprofits, we tend to have fewer resources, fewer people — a lot of excellent volunteers. But some days you just dig in and you’re the one taking out the trash,” she said. “In some ways, it can be a really good opportunity because you come together as a team, and people are excited to work for a team when they know everyone has their back.”

Munson said what he admires most about Plumlee is her humility.

“Mindy doesn’t seek recognition in anything she does, as that is not why she does it. She does it so she can see others benefit from her work” he said.

Plumlee admitted she’s uncomfortable in the spotlight.

“I’m not particularly great at individual accolades, but I feel grateful to be able to work with people who are as passionate about what they do every day as I am,” she said.

“ We always talk about how we want to make the Ronald McDonald House the absolute best place that you never want to come to. ”

A love for Idaho

Though Plumlee loves the work she does for Ronald McDonald House Charities, for more than 21 years now, she has also loved taking in everything Idaho has to offer.

“I enjoy hiking and backpacking,” she said. My husband and I spend time in the backcountry when we can.”

She also likes to run. For distance, not speed.

“I’m not particularly fast, but I do like to go far,” she said. “

She said she loves “anything that allows me to engage with the beauty of what we have here in Idaho.”

fruition. But Plumlee refuses to take all the credit.

“We had two capital projects last year that ran on opposite sides of the state,” Plumlee said. “Thanks to the generosity of all the communities, we were very successful in meeting the financial goals for both. We were able to come in on time and under budget for both.”

At around 3,000 square feet, the Family Room at Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center is considerably smaller than the Ronald McDonald House, but it still serves families in a similar way. It has four sleep rooms, two bathrooms with showers, a laundry room, a kitchen and a dining room.

“Any family that has a pediatric patient in that hospital is able to utilize the room,” Plumlee explained. “It could be that they’re going to take a nap, or that they’re going to be there for an extended period of time and need a sleep room.”

More ways to serve the community

Plumlee was also instrumental in getting a Happy Wheels Hospitality Cart placed in St. Luke’s Magic Valley Medical Center in Twin Falls. Volunteers push the brightly-colored carts throughout the halls, providing children and their families more ways to feel comfortable while at the hospital.

“Families that aren’t staying at the House are able to get a little bit of caring, love and support,” Plumlee said. “A toy, or a book or magazine, snacks.”

Plumlee says many of the families that utilize the Boise Ronald McDonald House come from the Magic Valley, so it’s great to provide Magic Valley families with a program as well.

A servant leader

Taylor Munson, communications manager for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho, credited much of the charity’s success to Plumlee.

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Mark Priddy

Happy Day Brands

By Brooke Strickland
Special to the Idaho Business Review

Mark Priddy, CEO of Happy Day Brands, was born to be an entrepreneur. He describes himself as a tinkerer — even as a young boy — and someone who learned the art of seeing a need and finding a solution for it.

Priddy watched and learned a lot from his hard-working parents who were both entrepreneurs. When he was around 9 years old, he and his brothers would travel around the neighborhood and paint house addresses on the curbs for money.

“Most of the homes didn’t have an address on the house or they were covered by trees,” he said. “So we went to work, created a solution and developed our early entrepreneurial skills. We put together the tools we needed, bought the supplies and hustled. I distinctly remember when it started to grow from just a few houses a day on a weekend to working all day long. We came up with a pre-sale service and hired our own person to follow behind us as we went house to house collecting the money in advance with our team behind us painting the curbs.”

When they ran out of curbs to address, they pivoted to start thinking of other business ideas. One of these included digging a hole in their backyard, covering it with plastic, filling it with water from the hose, then charging friends to use the “pool.”

Big impacts

Those creative beginnings blossomed into a lifetime of business ventures, and now Priddy is a strategic and visionary leader who is making a big impact — both in the local community and worldwide. In the late 1990s, he worked as founder and CEO of Boise-based Richardson Labs. It grew to be one of the most successful nutritional supplement companies in the country, selling products to over 55,000 retail stores around the world. Priddy was responsible for the development of its global

strategy and helped grow the company to more than 200 employees with \$50 million in annual sales.

The success of that company led to a merger with Rexall-Sundown in 1998, a public NASDAQ 100 company. While he explained that this was a major professional accomplishment that he is proud of, it isn’t what inspired him the most in life.

Priddy said that his biggest accomplishment has been to help and empower others. He did this by launching a nonprofit called Full Circle Exchange.

“What has inspired me the most, what has made me a better human being, and what I personally believe is my biggest professional accomplishment is the work I did on the ground locally and globally to help create systems and frameworks that empowered underserved women to rise above poverty,” he said. “This was done by providing stepping stones to help move them from dependency to self-sufficiency by coming alongside of their creative capacity and watching them rise.”

Some of the things that he learned in the nonprofit sector translated to the development of his current company, Happy Day Brands, where he serves as the CEO. This business operates on a for-profit, social enterprise model and produces all-natural, non-GMO organic products such as coffee, chocolate, tea, gifts and healthy snacks.

The company, which is currently in the process of becoming a certified B-Corp, was founded by Priddy and his wife in 2017. They began with just four employees who managed to get distribution to 25 locations in the first year. Ever since then, it has grown exponentially. In 2018, they had a team of six and distribution to 75 locations, which increased sales by 21%. That same year, the company adopted the innovative Buy-One, Give-One business model, which allowed them to donate 5,000 meals to the Idaho Food Bank in the first year of giving.

In 2019, Happy Day Brands had nine employees, a 350% increase in sales, and distribution to 500 locations. This allowed them to give nearly 200,000 meals to Idaho and Utah food banks. This year, the company expects to continue this trajectory of growth and expansion and aims to commit to donating at least 2 million meals to food banks across the western United States. To date, Happy Day Brands has helped train and empower over 100,000 at-risk women around the world.



Throughout every business venture, Priddy has kept one quote close to his mind and heart.

“Marianne Williamson’s quote has always been a driving force for good in every business I have started: ‘In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.’”

He has been able to take those words and implement them into every facet of his work and continues to do this as a leader of Happy Brands.

Priddy explained that for him, leadership is not about style.

“Rather, it’s about building places of authentic community and empowerment...creating a culture where we think about others and feel like we all have an instrument to play...that we are creating beautiful music together, a symphony for the sake of the world. This is where a sense of belonging is embedded in the core of the DNA of the company,” he said.

Priddy works hard to create a space where people can feel heard and where honesty, kindness, compassion and creativity are fostered.

“I guess my style could fall under the category of gardener, coach, mentor, friend and learner...making sure that each one of us is being empowered and pushed to be our truest self, not afraid to think out of the box and to fail forward,” Priddy shared.

Priddy — a father of six who has been married to his wife, Jeanette, for 30 years — humbly pointed out that his personal and professional accomplishments were never achieved alone.

“Accomplishments are not an individual sport, but rather a collective effort of many who have come alongside you in your life. I believe our accomplishments, though we work hard for them, are leveraged by the ladders we walk up and are held firm by so many.”

Doing the most good

Priddy’s philosophy has been to keep the community at the heart of the mission of Happy Day Brands. He has aimed to use his business for good and do his part in actively helping to end hunger, which can be an overlooked, but prevalent issue.

In addition to matching donations for every product sold, he and his team are dedicated to being an authentic part of the community whenever possible. They regularly host packing parties at local food banks to help manage the massive intake of donations. During these well-attended events, Priddy and his team work alongside other volunteers to package and prepare oatmeal for families and other food bank customers.

“ I guess my style could fall under the category of gardener, coach, mentor, friend, and learner... making sure that each one of us is being empowered and pushed to be our truest self, not afraid to think out of the box and to fail forward, ”

Jessi Roberts

Cheekys

By Brooke Strickland
Special to the Idaho Business Review

Jessi Roberts, CEO of Cheekys, has overcome more than many, persevering through incredibly difficult years as a child and young adult. Neglected and abused, she was often homeless or had to move frequently.

Despite not feeling worthy, she continued to dream about a better life, where she could use her story to help encourage and build other people up. She would have loved to have had the opportunity to attend college or university, but it simply was not in the cards for her. But she hasn't let any of it hold her back, even though some may consider her an unlikely entrepreneur. Roberts takes strength from knowing she is not alone in how she persevered and got to where she is today. She believes that the path that led her here and her proven track record of hard work and success will continue to change the world around her.

Roberts cut her teeth working in the automotive industry, and in 2005, she and her husband started an industrial coatings business.

Cheekys began in 2011 after Roberts and her husband lost their business during the Great Recession. They decided to take what they had and start Cheekys in the tiny rural town of New Plymouth, population 1,400.

From their humble beginnings in a 900-square-foot shop, Roberts built her rural lifestyle apparel and jewelry business into one of the top five boutiques in the world. In 2018, the company was awarded Inc. 500 status. Cheekys currently employs 30 staff in a bustling retail e-commerce and wholesale manufacturing operation that supplies more than 3,500 stores worldwide.

"Many people have a vision board with all these amazing things on it," Roberts said. "My first one had a grocery receipt on it. I had four kids to feed and didn't have the luxury of failure. We now have a thriving family-operated business that employs women all over the U.S. However, the real spe-

cial sauce to Cheekys is the following that we have. We have created an online community that rivals the engagement of companies like Cabela's and Wrangler. We have almost a half a million women who come together online to support each other and lift one another up. There is a sisterhood that we have created for women to feel safe and that they are enough."

Despite not going to college, Roberts attended the Hollins University women's leadership program and has taught continuing education courses at Boise State University. She is a member of The Boutique Hub International and was a past member of the Boise Chamber of Commerce and a liaison to the Women's Business Center for the Chamber.

'The right fit'

Roberts shared that much of her motivation comes from being told throughout her life that she would not measure up or that she was not good enough.

"There were many times that I didn't fit in and was told I wasn't enough," she said. "I wasn't country enough, I didn't go to college, so I wasn't going to be respected. I wasn't city enough because I wore boots. ... The list goes on and on...but it goes on for everyone. Cheekys is a place where women can be enough. They can post a photo, they can get a compliment, they can afford the products and they fit. They fit their body and their lifestyle."

Roberts is many things, but above all, she is a lover of people.

"I want others to know that I am passionate about rural business and that I am pro-human. I work with people all over the world. I care more about the type of person and who I do business with than where they are. I love smiles and being the person that people need. I am so blessed to be in Idaho, to have this company and that God chose me to be in each of these people's lives. To know that I am trusted with that is such an honor," she shared.

And even though the business began out of a need to survive and provide, Roberts explained that she loves leading people and being a part of helping them fulfill their dreams. To have her business do that for them is something she is incredibly proud of.

Mabel Dobbs, coordinator of Angel Wings, which helps rural cancer survivors, reiterated in a letter of recommendation that Roberts has an ability to make each person feel known and recognized.



is possible to overcome...that if someone like me could do it and have a chance to change lives, they could too, even if the life they changed was just their own,” she said.

Writing and publishing her first book was one of the longest and most difficult experiences in her career. As her business book turned into a memoir, she learned to be unabashedly transparent and not afraid to share secrets, which helped liberate her and truly give her a sense of accomplishment.

Roberts explained that the women of the world, especially the self-starters, influence and inspire her to keep going.

“I share my story for the mom-and-pops scrapping the money to open tomorrow,” she said. “The owners working 15 hours a day, six days a week to put food on the table. The women running companies out of their bedrooms to keep their families afloat. The moms working double-shifts and selling cosmetics on the side. The factory workers, the mail carriers. The people living on the backroads, and I don’t just mean in rural areas, I mean any place that is overlooked and discounted, where the hustle is harder, and each dollar means more.”

Like any mom, she is most proud of her children. She’s proud that her family has grown a successful business that supports other hardworking families. She believes that one of the greatest accomplishments she’s had as a CEO is seeing employees buy their first home, get a new car, or have their child go to a school that their parents paid for.

When asked her favorite motto, she says there are a lot out there that resonate with her. She’s known for the phrase ‘Be Pretty’ and her company motto: “Creating authentic connections.” But her favorite thought is, “If you designed your life, how would you live it?” Roberts knows that many people don’t get the opportunity to jumpstart their dreams, which is why she is inspired to help others step out and embrace their ideas and go with it, even if they don’t have savings, big investors, outside help or even emotional support. She counts it an honor and blessing to have had the first-hand opportunity to help other women achieve their goals and realize their dreams.

“I was thinking about when I first met Jessi and her Cheeky’s business. It is like I have known her forever, because she makes folks feel that way. Her heart for family, friends, community, her employees and all those she helps is huge,” says Dobbs.

Telling her story

When Roberts was approached by a book agent to write about her dramatic rise from poverty, she thought it might be a scam until she got her first check from it. “Backroads Boss Lady,” co-written with New York Times bestselling author Bret Witter, came out last year. The book tells Roberts’ story of rural entrepreneurship, overcoming her traumatic childhood, and what it took to build her multi-million-dollar business.

“As I wrote the book with my co-writer, I started to realize there were so many people out there that were just as unlikely of an entrepreneur as me – others who needed to know that it

“ Many people have a vision board with all these amazing things on it. My first one had a grocery receipt on it. I had four kids to feed and didn’t have the luxury of failure. ”

Liza Roeser

FiftyFlowers

By Steve Sinovic

Special to the Idaho Business Review

By the first of the year, Liza Roeser, president and CEO of FiftyFlowers.com, typically has booked business stretching into the fall.

This year, however, is shaping up to be anything but typical for the wedding industry, the company's lifeblood.

As the coronavirus pandemic kept much of the nation indefinitely shuttered in spring 2020, countless couples wondered if their big days needed to be changed.

"So much of our business revenue is tied to weddings," said Roeser. "There has been a shift, where normally we're expecting in certain months...and that's not happening."

Finding other sources of income to tide the business over has become job one, said Roeser.

Roeser is used to fielding curve balls when the economy takes a turn downward. Cutting its teeth during the Great Recession, the company pioneered the way for wholesale bulk flowers to be shipped from farm to door within days of being ordered, creating a direct alternative for fresh-cut flowers.

The online company, founded 22 years ago, serves DIY couples, event planners and florists who like the company for its variety of products, dependability and affordability. FiftyFlowers proudly states that it has delivered fresh-cut blooms for over 100,000 events since its inception.

More recently, the flower industry was only one of many across the country facing daunting challenges as economies stagnated from the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic came at a particularly bad time for the flower industry. Spring is busy for all kinds of floral providers, and they depend on the revenue coming in from Valentine's Day, Easter, weddings and especially Mother's Day to cushion the slower summer months that follow.

FiftyFlowers had to pivot to keep the business moving.

Interviewed in early April, Roeser was hopeful about a good number of potential sales for the Easter and Mother's Day holidays and a resurgence come fall.

"Somebody's going to be thinking about mom and grandma (on Mother's Day), especially in this time of crisis and being physically apart," said Roeser.

As a personal gesture to strangers, other customers called in orders to be sent to the doors of nursing homes or to emergency room doctors and nurses and EMS workers.

Roeser had to make some tough decisions because the company is so event-dependent. She anticipated a hit in sales, but not a closure given the online nature of the business, which includes shipping partners, such as FedEx and UPS. Roeser and her team also launched some innovative ways to keep the "top-quality" flowers flowing to customers.

One recent initiative to generate business was a classic example of plucking roses from a thorny situation.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the flower farm industry, blooms that weren't being shipped as of early April were either rotting or being plowed under. To assist farm owners and workers, FiftyFlowers made it a priority to work with growers from all over the world to ship fresh flowers at a significantly reduced cost to customers affected by the coronavirus.

During tough times, smart business owners are able to cultivate some valuable lessons.

That's the message from Roeser, the dynamic, plain-spoken and thoughtful leader, who's been through an economic crisis before and had the good sense to reinvent her business model and ultimately prosper.

"People went from lavish to nothing," said the plucky CEO, reflecting on the Great Recession, which made everyone more cautious with their dollars.

"That's when the 'budget bride' focus kicked in," Roeser said. "We had the technology, the operating procedures, the fulfillment side was there and we were highly aligned with our growing partners."

Then and now, brides especially want a more hands-on experience with flowers, either having a say in the floral creations themselves or tasking someone like a mom or sister with the job. That fits entirely with the FiftyFlowers ethos.

FiftyFlowers.com employs 60 people, half of them in Boise and half in Quito, Ecuador. In Boise, Roeser either scaled back the hours of some employees who are now working remotely or furloughed others through May 31.

During the outbreak, brick-and-mortar businesses with regular flower orders shuttered because of the coronavirus crisis, but that wasn't the case for FiftyFlowers, which has been posting annual double-digit sales growth.

Adventure of a lifetime

Roeser's experience with all things floral started in Ecuador



"We were the first dotcom to sell specifically to the wedding industry," Roeser said.

Constant evolution

In terms of her clients' preferences, roses are still a popular choice for those getting hitched, but peonies are now the "most sought-out" flower out there.

"Today, one of the biggest trends is eucalyptus, perhaps with a sprinkling of lilacs and white baby's-breath," Roeser said.

About 80% of all flowers sold in the U.S. are imported.

She said the time in the South American country taught her resiliency and adaptability, lessons that have served her well in her executive position.

Her time in Boise has also been a good move. Why Boise? "Because the outdoor environment is here," said Roeser, who loves spending time in the mountains, be it skiing or hiking. "I have two amazing daughters, and wanted them to grow up in a community that wasn't vast and impersonal and all about keeping up with the Joneses.

"They are the source of my most amazing moments; they teach me so much about slowing down to appreciate the present," Roeser said of Alex, 14 and Eloise, 9.

where she was a Peace Corps volunteer working in small business development, focusing on teaching artisans how to position their products for export.

"The flower industry found me," said Roeser, who grew up in Dallas and attended Texas A & M University.

The daughter of educators --- Roeser's father was a professor at a medical school and her mother taught fourth grade --- the CEO said she had entrepreneurial roots. Her dad owned a clinic and her parents invested in rental properties. As a pre-teen, Roeser sold Avon door-to-door to buy a pair of Gloria Vanderbilt jeans.

She studied recreation and tourism science at A&M. A playground manufacturing company in New Orleans offered her an "insane job" (money-wise), but she was moved to consider the Peace Corps after attending a recruiting session. "I was so grateful to end up in Ecuador," said Roeser, who has stories aplenty from her two-year stint. "It really is the toughest job you'll ever love," Roeser said, referring to the organization's recruitment tagline.

She lingered in the country after her assignment ended.

Roeser started out working for a flower export company specializing in roses in Colombia and Ecuador. After 12 years, she wanted to branch out beyond the rose business.

Her passion blossomed into what eventually became FiftyFlowers, a direct-to-consumer business that buys directly from 400 growers around the globe, including Ecuador, Colombia and New Zealand, and from around the U.S.

"We ship year-round," Roeser said, adding that it's always growing season somewhere, but not without its own challenges, beginning with Mother Nature, who brings . wet seasons and drought. That affects the supply chain and the prices, which is why she works with so many growers.

Powered by a unique technology platform, Roeser describes her business as "a disrupter" in a conventional brick-and-mortar landscape, that was pretty cut-and-dried.

“As her industry struggled with the impact of the coronavirus, the owner of FiftyFlowers looks for business eventually to bloom again.”

In terms of FiftyFlowers, her "other baby," Roeser said she wants to nurture the firm so it keeps the personal scale it's famous for. She said the business is self-funded, "although that makes it longer to get things done." She wants to keep the company as closely held as possible, but isn't averse to strategic partnerships that might lead to taking on more funding.

"There are benefits and drawbacks," she said of taking on investors.

Roeser believes the company will continue its expansion in Idaho and she looks forward to resurgence in business as the current crisis gets sorted out. Fall, she notes, has become a popular time of the year for those getting married.

"October has become a strong wedding month," Roeser said.

Despite the uncertainty, Roeser said she feels lucky to do work that brings people joy.

Heidi Rogers

Northwest Council for Computer Education

By Brooke Strickland

Special to the Idaho Business Review

Heidi Rogers is a teacher at heart and has taken her passion for education into every facet of her role as CEO of Northwest Council for Computer Education. Her teaching career began 34 years ago in Oklahoma, where she was born and raised. A small-town ranch girl, she learned a lot about hard work and community during her childhood. Rogers believes that it has made her a better person, and the principles she learned, even cleaning up stalls, building fences, and mowing for hours on end, are all things that she uses today to help accomplish her goals.

Rogers was born and raised on a large Quarter Horse and cattle ranch in the Oklahoma panhandle. After high school, she went on to Oklahoma State University where she received a Doctor of Education degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in information communication and educational technology. She also holds a Master of Science degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in secondary education. Her bachelor's degree is in biology.

Rogers went on to become the youngest elected president at the International Society of Technology. She explained that when she stepped into this position, it was a turning point for her personally and professionally.

In the early 1990s, Rogers was hired by the University of Idaho Coeur d'Alene to create the first model high-technology classroom for K-12 educators in the Northwest. After working in that role for many years, she started as the first full-time CEO at NCCE in 2002. From day one, she has worked diligently to establish an innovative technology organization for members across Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and beyond.

Investing in her community through hands-on involvement is one of her biggest priorities and passions — and it is no small task.

In her role at NCCE, Rogers oversees 10 employees, an eight-member board of directors, over 4,000 members and more than 67 contracted professional learning specialists around the country. Under her direct leadership, she has built NCCE into one of the most effective technology education organizations in the world. NCCE has been named Microsoft's largest training partner for professional development, which has allowed it to make a positive global impact. In just a few years, the organization has generated over \$10 million in new revenue for schools and districts around the Pacific Northwest.

Always serving

"I am certainly not an 8-to-5 type of leader," she said. "A typical day for me is up at 5:30 a.m. and lights out at 10:30 p.m. Checking emails and meeting with corporate partners and school districts, then planning with the team, are intertwined with community meetings and events throughout the day and evening. I have a strong belief that everyone's time is just as valuable as mine."

Even though Rogers stays busy as a CEO, she is regularly seen after hours volunteering for a variety of organizations locally, statewide and nationally. She is past president of seven nonprofit organizations and currently serves as the chair of the Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. She is also actively serving on the Idaho Community Foundation Board, Kootenai Health Foundation Board and with the Coeur



“As CEO of NCCE, I have been fortunate to expand our services so that we can make a difference for those on the front line of education and students all over the world,” Rogers said. “We are part of the mission to empower the teachers of today to create the world of tomorrow with their students.”

Building NCCE as the premier and largest education training partner for Microsoft education was a huge milestone for Rogers. She said it set the organization on a path to expand services to empower educators and students to unlock limitless learning anywhere, at any time.

In the last three months, her team of professional learning specialists has trained and supported educators in 31 states as well as England, Canada and Brussels, Belgium.

In 2015, she received the Microsoft Global Heroes in Education award. Rogers was also one of the first Apple Distinguished Educators.

A true ‘clock builder’

When she is not working at her day job, she enjoys heading out to the golf course to play 18 holes while enjoying the Idaho scenery. She can also be found boating on Lake Coeur d’Alene and loves spending time with her son, Weston, and his wife. Rogers said that she is fortunate to have a wide variety of friends around the United States.

“Relationships are important to me and now more than ever,” she said. “I value and cherish the time I spend with my tribe.”

Moreover, Rogers is also a 28-year survivor of colon cancer. After being diagnosed when her only son was 8 months old, she counts it a blessing to be a part of his life and see him grow up and get married.

Her motto reflects her value of time. It comes from Dr. Jack Dawson, a friend and mentor from the University of Idaho Coeur d’Alene: “Be a clock builder, not a clock watcher.”

Rogers explained that as she approaches her 60th birthday, she is looking inward at her leadership style and wants it to honor and reflect the strengths of her team. She believes by doing this, she will be able to empower each person and their own leadership roles at the organization.

“Moving forward as a leader, I want to be sure to emphasize my appreciation and give words of encouragement to individuals who show dedication and service to our organization,” she said. “As a team, we believe in working hard and playing hard together.”

d’Alene Rotary Foundation. Further, she has participated on the Coeur d’Alene Library Foundation Board, the EXCEL Foundation, Coeur d’Irish, Coeur d’Alene Summer Theater and Hospice of North Idaho, just to name a few.

“Heidi is always working; she doesn’t take a day off whether from NCCE or the local cause for which she is crusading,” said NCCE Director of Operations Bobby Myers, in his nomination letter for Rogers.

He noted that she brings the same leadership skills that have grown NCCE to her roles with various nonprofits. Her fundraising skills are exceptional, he said, and her social network becomes invested in her causes through her passion.

“If one were to summarize Dr. Heidi Rogers’ successful career as a CEO leadership style, it is her innate sense of people,” he wrote. “Dr. Rogers is a leader that truly role models The Golden Rule. She believes in treating others the way she would want to be treated. As CEO of NCCE, she has created an environment of having partners and teammates, not just customers or clients. She values partnerships and relationships.”

No matter what, Rogers keeps creative ingenuity at the forefront of all operations, often seeing a need before the organization even realizes it. She is also dedicated to supporting her team and giving them the resources they need to expand services across the board. Because of her leadership, NCCE is seeing growth in all areas.

“ While her focus is on training computer education, she also teaches the value of time. ”

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