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THE JOURNAL RECORD

INNOVATIVE WOMEN





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2022 POWER LIST
INNOVATIVE WOMEN

THE JOURNAL RECORD

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About The Journal Record's 2022 Power List: Innovative Women

Welcome to The Journal Record's 2022 Power List: Innovative Women. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines innovation as "a new idea, method, or device." The 33 Oklahoma women featured in this publication bring novelty and creativity to the ways they work across a variety of industries and job settings in our state. Steadfast through the pandemic, they have met challenges with determination, poise and ingenuity. These women are the problem-solvers, go-getters and thoughtful leaders that inspire us all.

Jennifer Sharpe
Special Projects Editor

SUSAN AGEL

RETIRED NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE
FORMERLY WITH POSITIVE TOMORROWS, CURRENTLY SELF-EMPLOYED



Since 1986, Susan Agel has spent her professional life working to advance the mission of nonprofit organizations. She retired from Positive Tomorrows in January 2022 after a 13-year tenure, during which the agency grew its $800,000 budget to $3.5 million and saw student enrollment capacity increase 400% thanks to a new $15 million facility.

Positive Tomorrows is a private school and social service agency in Oklahoma City that works with families experiencing homelessness to meet the individual educational needs of children while helping their families become stable and independent.

The new school helped Agel and her team keep Positive Tomorrows open during most of the pandemic so students could attend school, eat meals and have other needs met. After a short period of virtual school from mid-March to early June of 2020, the extra space helped with social distancing, and students were able to stay in small pods and enjoy art lessons, recess, school and more. While they were there, case managers worked with families to overcome personal hurdles like sudden unemployment, Agel said. Donors helped all client families stay current on their rent and other needs.

This effort was part of Agel's management style of letting her employees be creative without micro-managing them, she said.

"While at Positive Tomorrows, I focused on innovation by adding it to performance reviews for senior leaders, asking them to identify innovations put in place during the year," she said. "I believe it is important to give employees the freedom to be creative (within our mission) and accomplish tasks in the best manner possible."

In 2016 *The Journal Record* named Agel its Woman of the Year, and she was honored as an inductee into Central Christian College of Kansas' Fellow of the Academé of Achievers in 2021. She also was honored in 2011 with the FBI Director's Community Leadership Award for Oklahoma, recognized by then-FBI director Robert Mueller.

She is a past member of the Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness, and she is the current chairman of the Homeless Children and Youth subcommittee for the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

Now that Agel has retired from Positive Tomorrows, she is available for consulting and CEO mentorship with nonprofits, including the areas of CEO transition, change management, culture and vision development, administration and crisis management.

NANCY ANTHONY

PRESIDENT
OKLAHOMA CITY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



It is hard to measure the effect that the Oklahoma City Community Foundation's work has had on improving lives throughout central Oklahoma. The foundation manages about 2,000 philanthropic funds valued at $1.6 billion and distributes about $45 million each year in grants and scholarship assistance to hundreds of nonprofit organizations and students, but its reach in the community stretches beyond numbers and is widespread, long-lasting and meaningful.

More than 350 charities participate in the community foundation's Charitable Organization Endowment Program. The foundation also has scholarship programs, grant programs and its own initiatives, including Give Smart OKC, the Wellness Initiative, the Parks and Public Space Initiative and Keep Moving OKC.

For the last 36 years, Nancy Anthony, foundation president, has been one of the key faces of the organization that was founded in 1969. She joined the foundation as one of two employees in 1985 when the organization had assets of $20 million. Prior to that, Anthony was a consultant who worked in demographics and taught statistics at the college level.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the foundation worked with the Homeless Alliance and four area hospitals to establish a location for homeless COVID-19 patients to recover after leaving the hospital. The area also offered those who were sick and without a housing option a place to isolate until they were free from the virus. This innovative partnership saved central Oklahoma health care systems about $1.6 million, Anthony said.

The foundation's goals each year include working to provide convenient, efficient and effective ways for donors to contribute assets for charitable purposes; encourage donors to create funds that will benefit the community; advocate for developing endowment funds and providing a way for them to be built and wisely managed; and develop community endowments to meet the changing needs of the community. Integrity, stewardship and collaboration are part of its mission statement.

"Because we bring together both charities with needs and donors who want to help, every day we work to find solutions to problems or take advantage of opportunities to make the community better," Anthony said. "It might be one small gift or a large grant, but we help make the connection between the donor and the opportunity for impact."

KATY EVANS BOREN

PRESIDENT AND CEO
OKLAHOMA CITY INNOVATION DISTRICT



As president and CEO of Oklahoma City's Innovation District, Katy Boren spearheads the development of the emerging district and is focused on creating a vibrant, fully integrated community where people can live, work and play. Her goal is to develop collaboration between Oklahoma's diverse sectors – bioscience, aerospace, tech, energy, manufacturing and more – to foster new opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation.

After earning her bachelor's degree in mass communication from the University of Denver, Boren earned a law degree at the University of Oklahoma, then served a one-year courtship for the Arizona Superior Court. She has practiced oil and gas litigation, served as the vice president of regulatory affairs for Cox Communications for the eastern half of the country, owned her own law firm and acted as the chief of the Utilities Regulation Unit for the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office.

An Oklahoma native, Boren is passionate about supporting nonprofits in Oklahoma City. She currently serves on the Downtown Oklahoma City Partnership board of directors, the NEOKC Renaissance board of directors and the Harold Hamm Diabetes Center Advisory Board, and she is a member of Oklahoma Women in Tech and Downtown Rotary. She also volunteers with Restore OKC and Martin Luther King Jr. elementary school in northeast Oklahoma City. She has been recognized as one of Oklahoma's Ladies in the News, a Rising Star of Oklahoma and one of The Journal Record's Woman of the Year – Fifty Make a Difference honorees.

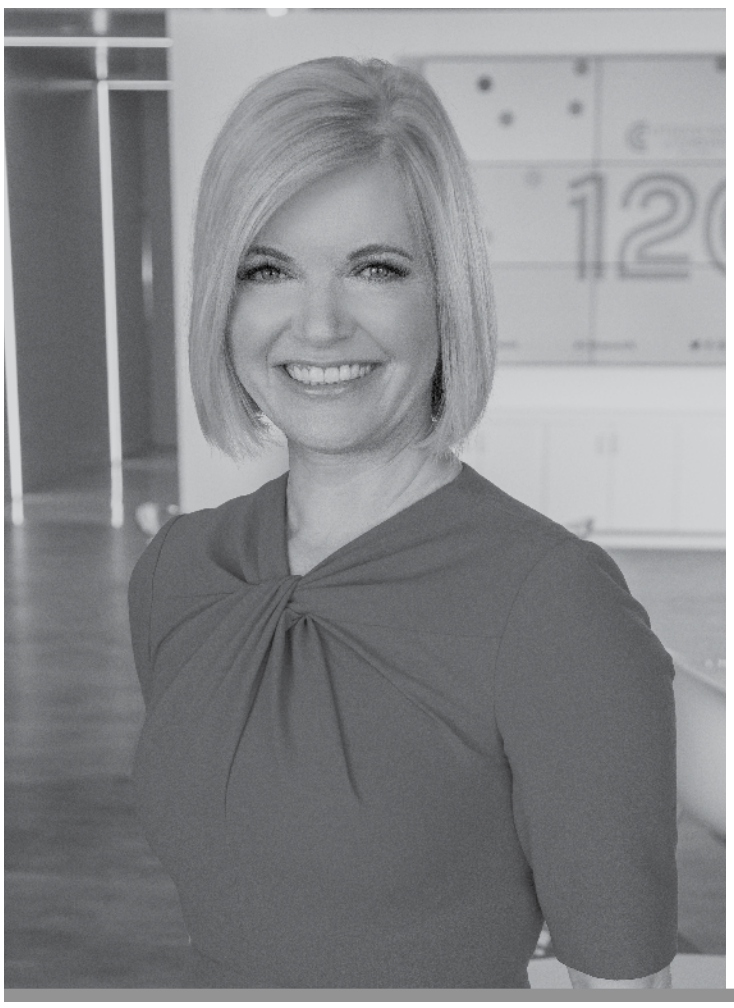
The Oklahoma City Innovation District is a 1.3-mile area in northeast Oklahoma City focused on collaboration, innovation and economic growth. It includes internationally acclaimed organizations whose work spans Oklahoma's diverse sectors. The district's work also includes resources, programming and top facilities to facilitate cross-industry collaboration and to spark new ideas as scientists, researchers, academics and industry experts converge.

During the pandemic, an Oklahoma City coalition joined forces and packaged the expertise and assets the district has as it sought federal Build Back Better funding to grow the city's life sciences and biotech cluster. The project was selected as a finalist and the district is working on submitting the application's final phase.

"There are very few innovation districts in the country, and none in Oklahoma. So, we innovate daily to imagine what our Innovation District should and could be," Boren said, noting that an Innovation Hall is underway. "Because innovation in research and technology never stops, neither can we – we must stay at the forefront."

JILL CASTILLA

PRESIDENT AND CEO
CITIZENS BANK OF EDMOND



During the pandemic, the success of a unique partnership between Citizens Bank of Edmond, Teslar Software, and venture capitalist Mark Cuban made news as it developed to help small businesses get assistance quickly.

The free website PPP.bank provided small businesses with help in navigating the U.S. Small Business Administration's application for Paycheck Protection Program forgiveness. PPP.bank allowed borrowers to get an estimate for the forgiveness of their PPP loans and generate a PDF application to provide to their lender.

"In just 10 days, PPP.bank was built and deployed out of a desire to help small businesses successfully navigate the complex PPP forgiveness application without fees or privacy concerns. Within the first three days that the site was live, it had 14,000 small business users," Castilla said.

As a result, Finovate recognized Teslar Software and Citizens Bank of Edmond as one of its five Best Fintech Partnerships in 2020. The Best Fintech Partnership Award is given to a financial institution and fintech company working together to build a new, groundbreaking product.

Cuban and Castilla first worked together when Castilla answered a tweet to ask for a lender to get badly needed funds into the hands of people waiting on stimulus checks. Cuban coached Castilla and out of that came a program to let Citizens Bank customers overdraw their accounts by $900 without penalty or interest, to be paid back by the stimulus check.

Castilla began her banking career at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City in 1998 and, while there, attended and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School of Banking. She then served on the senior management team at Grand Rapids State Bank in Minnesota. In 2009, Castilla joined Citizens Bank of Edmond, leading the turnaround of the bank. She was named CEO in 2014.

Castilla finds innovative ways to serve customers by staying in contact with them and listening to where they need help. She also looks for ways to turn weaknesses in to strengths, such as by turning the downtown Edmond flagship bank into a destination and an experience; looking for opportunities where others had not, like its Midtown Bank that helps small businesses have cash access where they are; and staying nimble in order to be ready to act quickly and decisively when the opportunity strikes.

Castilla also tries to hire a diverse team of thinkers and doers who work collaboratively with high accountability and create a culture where challenging each other is viewed positively.

"We're psychologically safe, but radically candid," she said.

ASHLEY COFFEY

PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OKLAHOMA WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY



Ashley Coffey considers herself a modern-day renaissance woman whose boundless curiosity motivates and inspires. She is eternally evolving and constantly learning, and her creativity is always at work.

Coffey is president and executive director of Oklahoma Women in Technology, a position she has held for the past year. Her involvement with the organization spans five years, and her experience has contributed to her expertise in emerging technologies.

Oklahoma Women in Technology is a nonprofit for professionals in the technology industry who volunteer their time and work to bridge the gap between genders in the science, engineering, technology and math (STEM) fields. They offer a network and support for anyone who identifies as a woman in the tech industry in Oklahoma.

Coffey, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, has more than a decade of hands-on experience in the world of technology. She believes that technology provides the world with creative solutions to everyday problems and that it can empower lives for good. No matter the level of expertise or ability, Coffey thinks a person can be excited, informed and empowered to learn how the rapidly evolving world of tech affects daily life.

An outspoken and active voice for women in STEM fields, Coffey understands the difficulty that many women face in these areas. She wants to build a legacy where women of all ages are active contributors.

In 2016, NextGen's 30 Under 30 program named Coffey as one of its STEM award recipients while she was with University of Oklahoma Information Technology. She is actively involved in the global XR Association, an advocacy group that focuses on responsibility and adoption of virtual, augmented and mixed reality.

Coffey is a sought-after speaker who makes the world of emerging tech approachable and attractive in her podcast, Coffey & Code, and during other speaking engagements such as XR Association's Limitless Future Conference and South by Southwest's (SWSW's) EDU conference.

"I'm a firm believer in thinking outside of the box in all aspects of my work and advocating for equality within all realms of tech. It's important to me to ensure that women are represented in STEM fields and celebrated for their intellect and skill," Coffey said. "We're approaching the fourth industrial revolution, which is exciting, but it also presents its own challenges for working, communicating and living our daily lives. Innovation is crucial to creating an equitable future for technology in Oklahoma."

SARA CUNNINGHAM

FOUNDER, FREE MOM HUGS AUTHOR, "HOW WE SLEEP AT NIGHT: A MOTHER'S MEMOIR"



Sara Cunningham started on the journey that led to her founding the nonprofit organization Free Mom Hugs eight years ago when her son Parker came out as gay. As a woman of faith, she started with simple acts of love and acceptance on the way "from the church to the Pride parade," as she states on the Free Mom Hugs website.

Cunningham worked as a secretary for a small architecture firm until Free Mom Hugs went viral. Thanks to a generous donation from actor Jamie Lee Curtis after the Free Mom Hugs movement, Cunningham was able to quit her job to serve the organization full time.

"Thank GOD," Cunningham said.

Today the movement has spanned the country and globe. The mission of Free Mom Hugs is to empower the world to celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community through visibility, education and conversation. The IA in LGBTQIA+ generally stands for those who are intersex and asexual.

"And yes, we still give hugs," adds the mission statement.

There are FMH chapters in every state and, keeping moms in mind, they celebrate, advocate and educate in profound and practical ways.

Beyond the hugs, the organization hopes to educate and advocate for safe and protected spaces and help society learn to affirm and celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community, the website states.

The power of social media helped keep the Free Mom Hugs community connected during the pandemic. Efforts include national pride rides, care package campaigns, a virtual tour and presentations.

"No doubt, we found ways to 'go beyond the hug,'" Cunningham said.

Cunningham said she is fortunate to have a national board, chapter leaders and volunteers who share her heart about the mission. "We are an extension of each other and together we spur each other on to do great things," she said. "We understand the assignment, and that's to stay true to our mission statement."

Cunningham's goal is to help parents and children have authentic relationships and understanding for each other using her own experience and education as a guide. She is passionate about connecting with faith, civic, and business leaders in efforts to make the world a kinder, safer place for the LGBTQIA+ family.

AMY DOWNS

PRESIDENT/CEO
ALLEGIANCE CREDIT UNION



Amy Downs was first hired as a teller for Allegiance Credit Union in 1988. Over the course of her 33-year tenure with the financial institution, she has worked in almost all areas. She was a teller for the company when it was known as Federal Employees Credit Union, located in the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. In 1995, on the fateful day in April when the Murrah Building was bombed, Downs survived after spending more than six hours trapped in the rubble. The experience of a second chance at life motivated her to go back to college, earn her degree, lose weight and become an Ironman triathlete.

Five years ago, Downs was named president and CEO of Allegiance. In her leadership role, she tries to focus on organizational health in order to breed innovation at the credit union. This effort includes a monthly meeting with supervisors and sharing information on current leadership practices around communication, conflict resolution, time management, emotional intelligence and more.

"I work to create an environment which keeps our executive team engaged and encouraged to speak their opinions, even when they differ from mine or the majority," Downs said.

"I think it's imperative to be intentional about developing the next leaders of the credit union."

Allegiance Credit Union is a full-service financial institution that has served the Oklahoma City metro area since 1963, offering auto loans, home loans, personal loans, savings and checking accounts and more. But the credit union offers more to their customers than just the basic products expected from a financial institution. Allegiance Credit Union also offers a "Second Chance Checking Account" for those who have had trouble with an account in the past.

During the pandemic, Allegiance offered almost all employees the opportunity to work from home and provided them with a laptop to do so. Through brainstorming and innovation, the team would meet to troubleshoot any problems and find solutions and ways to work around challenges for tasks that typically were performed on-site. These included a chat feature on the website and video banking services.

"Not only did this allow consumers to safely chat face-to-face with an ACU team member when applying for a loan or opening an account, it enabled certain staff the flexibility to remain working from home," Downs said.

JENNIFER ELLIS

PRESIDENT AND CEO
COSMETIC SPECIALTY LABS INC.



Cosmetic Specialty Labs Inc. innovated during the pandemic by reformulating its hand sanitizers, using unique ingredients that were not affected by pandemic shortages. The move helped keep the company in business as it was able to maintain enough of an inventory to produce its products.

The Lawton-based manufacturer of private-label, over-the counter drugs and cosmetics has been innovating since it was founded by Edna Hennessee decades ago, in 1973. The company distributes its products throughout the United States and internationally as well.

"Product innovation is key to not only our success but our clients' success as well," said Jennifer Ellis, Cosmetic Labs' president and CEO. "We understand that it is critical to provide our clients with-cutting edge formulations made with the most current ingredients available to our industry."

An innovation team is dedicated to new products, and that creative culture extends beyond the laboratory. *The Journal Record* previously has recognized the company as its Innovator of the Year.

"Innovation truly involves doing the things we do every day better than the way we did them the day before," Ellis said, adding it is critical to Cosmetic Specialty Labs' success. "We consistently take steps to innovate throughout the company on a daily basis, whether that be through developing new innovative production methods or through improving efficiency in client contacts in our sales department."

Ellis is Hennessee's granddaughter, and she has been leading the company for the last 15 years. Ellis returned to southwest Oklahoma 25 years ago after serving in the U.S. Army and started at CSL to create the quality program to support a large over-the-counter drug project. She ran production at the labs for several years before becoming executive vice president.

Ellis is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and has a Master of Business Administration degree from George Washington University. She recently stepped down as mayor of Medicine Park in Comanche County, and she is active in the community. She also has served as board chairman for the Lawton-Fort Sill Chamber of Commerce and is a fundraising volunteer, a graduate of Leadership Oklahoma Class 32 and a former board member of Girl Scouts of Western Oklahoma.

The company's awards include Workforce Oklahoma's Outstanding Business South Central Region.

MIKI FARRIS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER
INFANT CRISIS SERVICES



What started out as a Sunday School class project in 1984 has turned into a major nonprofit serving central Oklahoma with a mission of making sure no babies go hungry and without necessities. Infant Crisis Services co-founder Miki Farris was part of that Sunday School class 37 years ago. For the past 30 years, she has served as executive director.

"As a class, we wanted to assist parents of babies and toddlers who struggled to provide the necessary essentials to their little ones. As a new mom myself, I was incredibly fortunate to be able to provide for my babies," Farris said. "However, our class knew there were families out there who couldn't give their children everything they needed. Our hearts broke thinking of these families, and we knew this is who we wanted to serve."

Infant Crisis Services quickly grew out of buildings until it ended up at NE 42nd Street and Lincoln Boulevard in Oklahoma City. Since its inception, the nonprofit has helped provide dry diapers, food and hope to more than 300,000 babies and toddlers. The organization provides a week's worth of formula, diapers and other needs for ages birth to 4, serving more than 1,000 each month at its main location and through two mobile units called BabyMobiles.

The nonprofit is the only one of its kind in central Oklahoma.

"There are many reasons someone may need our services: Maybe they are living in generational poverty or were laid off from a job," Farris said. "Whatever the circumstance, we always maintain our organization's four core values of kindness, respect, compassion and love in all that we do."

When the pandemic began, Infant Crisis pivoted, and it has served clients on a drive-thru basis. Clients call ahead to make an appointment and tell staff members of their needs. The staff then brings items out when they arrive. The drive-thru has been so popular it will continue as an option. Also, the nonprofit pivoted its volunteer opportunities to take-home projects like packaging snack packs.

All the changes have required innovation and courage, but they have improved Infant Crisis' service, Farris said.

"As co-founder of the organization, it has been extremely important for me to remain innovative in my role," she said. "Even in 37 years, I know that there are still more babies who we need to reach."

The BabyMobile, implemented nine years ago, continues to grow and reach families in the metropolitan area and 16 surrounding counties, including in rural areas. "We are always growing and evolving as an organization," Farris said.

ANN FELTON GILLILAND

CHAIRMAN AND CEO
CENTRAL OKLAHOMA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



If it were not for Ann Felton Gilliland, Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity would not be the organization it is today. Her enthusiasm for the work is contagious, and staff, subcontractors and volunteers have been impressed by her passion for the organization's mission to end poverty housing in central Oklahoma.

Central Oklahoma Habitat has built more than 1,050 homes since the local chapter of the international organization started here in 1987.

Gilliland joined its board three years later and has served as chairman and CEO of the organization since 1991. When she began, there was no staff and little money, and the office was in a small room of a local Presbyterian church. Today, there are 36 full-time employees who facilitate construction and repair operations, administration and the operation of two Central Oklahoma Habitat ReStores. More than 7,000 volunteers work with the organization annually as well.

Under Gilliland's leadership, COHFH went from building two to three houses each year to an average of 35 to 40. Gilliland oversees the Critical Home Repair program, which began in 2008 and has completed nearly 600 critical home repairs for limited-income homeowners who struggle to maintain their homes due to limitations related to income, age, disability or other circumstances. Plans are underway to double the annual number of homes rehabilitated each year from 50 to 100 over the next 2.5 years.

Gilliland is most proud of the relationships she has built with families over the years as the effort is a true partnership. COHFH is a nonprofit, Christian housing ministry that believes every person should have a decent, safe and affordable place to live. The organization builds and repairs houses using volunteer labor, donations, its mortgage base and proceeds from sales at its stores. The families moving into the homes partner with Habitat to put in "sweat equity" on the home for a down payment. They purchase the new houses at cost.

This partnership with the families drives her to continue to provide limited-income families in the community with a means to homeownership so they can build a legacy of success for their families, she said.

During the pandemic, the construction services provided by COHFH were considered essential, so the organization stayed on schedule with 70 home builds the past two years. The staff has remained in place since the beginning of the pandemic.

In addition, the ReStores netted more than $500,000 in 2021, the most in the nonprofit's history. Donated furniture, appliances and building materials stocked the stores as Do-It-Yourselfers and home remodelers increased work during the pandemic.

AJ GRIFFIN

DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
PAYCOM



As director of government and community affairs for Paycom, AJ Griffin plays an integral role in government-related matters, community relations and corporate philanthropy strategy for the company. She leads the company's interactions with government and community groups across the nation and monitors policies that affect businesses and workers of all types.

Griffin came to Paycom three and a half years ago after serving as an Oklahoma state senator for six years and following a career that includes years as an educator and in management positions in the hospitality and nonprofit fields.

She is the first person to serve in this role at Paycom, allowing her to develop strategies to fit the corporate culture there and to allow employees and clients to get the maximum use from the opportunities Paycom's product provides, she said.

"Through the efforts of an amazing team, we have seen exponential growth in our ability to serve our clients better and be better corporate citizens in partnership with our clients all across the country," Griffin said.

Paycom launched in 1998 as one of the nation's first web-based human resources and payroll technology companies. It is one of the fastest-growing technology companies in the country, and its cloud-based software empowers employees to manage their own HR data. Comparably, a workplace culture and review site has named Paycom as a Best Workplace for Women, and the company has been recognized as Oklahoma's Top Workplace.

During the pandemic, Paycom quickly and decisively moved its employees to remote work to protect their health and safety. The company innovated rapidly by developing tools, methods and procedures to continue to meet the needs of clients while doing every task remotely. The company continued to grow during this challenge.

Griffin's government relations department took steps to monitor and implement the numerous pieces of legislation passed during the pandemic. It also stepped up to provide support to nonprofits across the country – standing in the gap for the less fortunate, Griffin said.

"Building a strategy for connections with government officials and communities across the country requires accessing skills, talent and knowledge from across the company" Griffin said. "At Paycom we are continually challenged to find better ways to do things and to challenge the status quo."

DEBBY HAMPTON

PRESIDENT AND CEO
UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA



Debby Hampton's name has been well-known within the Oklahoma City nonprofit community for a long time. She has been president and CEO of the United Way of Central Oklahoma for the last 12 years. Prior to that, she held the same position at the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits for four years, and she spent 16 years with the American Red Cross of Central Oklahoma, the last four as CEO. She also has been a mental health case manager at Community Counseling, now called NorthCare and a United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency.

The United Way of Central Oklahoma researches human needs and directs resources to 55 accountable health and human services agencies to meet those needs. Its mission is to improve the health, safety, education and economic well-being of its most vulnerable citizens.

To do so, the United Way adapts and adjusts programming. When behavioral health problems increased in Oklahoma City Public School District, the United Way joined the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's compact to create EmbraceOKC, a program to support schools, Hampton said. Another community initiative called the WayFinder Innovation Grant was designed to spark new and creative ideas from local nonprofits to confront difficult health and human service challenges in central Oklahoma.

"In my role as president and CEO, I have the privilege of convening with and learning from the top community leaders in Oklahoma on a near daily basis," Hampton said. "We lean on one another to find solutions to our community's most pressing challenges, whether they be identified through our own research, an emerging trend or an emergency situation."

The onset of the pandemic showed the importance of adapting, Hampton said.

"Even when the world shut down, the United Way of Central Oklahoma had to keep going – our Partner Agencies needed our funding more than ever," she said.

COVID-19 affected the United Way's annual fundraising campaign, forcing all efforts to go virtual. Despite that challenge, plus the overall financial uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the United Way exceeded its campaign goal to help its partner agencies continue their work.

"Innovation is at the heart of United Way of Central Oklahoma's mission. As I like to tell my team, it is important to be 'fluid,' especially during times of concern or uncertainty. When we can be flexible and embrace new solutions, we can forge yet another path toward a stronger, healthier and more compassionate community," Hampton said.

ALEXIS HIGGINS

CEO
TULSA AIRPORTS IMPROVEMENT TRUST



Tulsa Airports Improvement Trust leaders identified innovation as one of their key focus areas, and they continue to incorporate it into every project and strategic initiative, said Alexis Higgins, Tulsa Airport Improvement Trust CEO.

The Tulsa Airports Improvement Trust manages all operational and development aspects of Tulsa International Airport, R.L. Jones, Jr. (Riverside) Airport and Okmulgee Regional Airport.

The trust's mission is to provide "a safe, efficient, self-supporting airport system" for Tulsa and the surrounding region.

This year's business plan includes a commitment to develop innovative solutions around technology and community to improve customers' experience, Higgins said.

A graduate of the University of Tulsa, earning a bachelor's degree in marketing with minors in management and Russian language, Higgins began working at the airport 22 years ago as a marketing assistant. She also has served as chief operating officer and director of marketing and air service development. In June 2010, Higgins was designated an accredited airport executive through the American Association of Airport Executives. She was named CEO three years ago.

Higgins also is active in the community as a Reading Partners volunteer at Mitchell Elementary, on the advisory boards of Tulsa Community College's Aviation Sciences Program and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program and as a board member of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum.

"The aviation industry provides an exciting opportunity to collaborate with airport employees, customers, tenants, and the community to support strategies that drive aeronautical activity," Higgins said.

The trust's innovation efforts shined during the pandemic with a new way for people to get security badges. Because of the pandemic, the trust opened an online portal to service security badge appointments, a change that led to a big improvement. Previously, applicants were processed on a first-come, first-serve basis, so wait times were long during peak periods. The new process staggers appointments and allows tenants to schedule other onboarding activities around the badge process.

"With over 3,000 badges issued annually, this small innovation is saving our users thousands of dollars every year in lost productivity, not to mention providing a safer environment by minimizing exposure for applicants during their appointment," Higgins said.

JOY HOFMEISTER

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Joy Hofmeister leads by listening to a variety of perspectives, surrounding herself with talented people from diverse backgrounds and building a collective vision to support the 546 public school districts, 700,000 students and 80,000 employees under the Oklahoma State Department of Education's purview.

As state superintendent of public instruction, Hofmeister has done a lot of listening and collaborating since she took office in 2015.

"To make substantive changes in public education, one must find ways for people to understand the needs of our children and buy in to transformative solutions. Adults are extremely protective of any action relating to students and rightfully so," Hofmeister said. "Investment in our kids is an investment in our future; therefore, all choices related to schools are high-stakes decisions."

The Education Department directs the administration and supervision of the state's public education system. Its work includes school safety in addition to providing support for local schools for academic standards, curriculum and instruction, special education, child nutrition, assessments, accountability and more.

"Action through consensus-building and common ground is the greatest tool we have to make a difference in the world," Hofmeister said.

The Education Department's work during the pandemic has required incredible innovation to meet the immense challenges brought on by the novel virus.

When COVID-19 forced the closing of school sites in March 2020, educators had to pivot quickly to continue to serve students during the emergency, Hofmeister said. While educators generally rely heavily on years of compounding research to teach and serve students, the pandemic required a new approach.

"The uncharted waters of a modern pandemic and lack of understanding of this virus presented a stark challenge for teachers and administrators," she said.

Educators had to quickly learn about airborne diseases and determine best practices for cleaner and safer school-learning environments. At the same time, they had to figure out how to deliver distanced instruction for schoolchildren.

By May 2020 the Education Department had created an 83-page "Return to Learn" booklet to help individual districts navigate the pandemic with a layered and practical approach while prioritizing the health of students, staff members and families. Ongoing efforts include leveraging federal dollars to help mitigate spread of COVID and a statewide initiative, "Ready Together Oklahoma," to focus on responsive strategies to pandemic-related challenges. Other new initiatives include the Oklahoma Math Tutoring Corps, the Oklahoma Science of Reading Academies, the Paid Student Teacher initiative and the School Counselor Corps.

Leading the Advancement of Innovation in Oklahoma



ELIZABETH HUTT POLLARD
Oklahoma Secretary
of Science and Innovation

OKLAHOMA
Office of Science
and Innovation

OKLAHOMA.GOV/INNOVATION

Thank you for your leadership and congratulations on being recognized for your accomplishments on behalf of Oklahoma.

AMY LOFTIS-WALTON
OCAST Director,
Government Relations & Strategic Initiatives

OCAST
Center for the Advancement
of Science & Technology

OCAST.OK.GOV



CARRIE JOHNSON, PE, SE

PRINCIPAL AND BOARD CHAIR
WALLACE DESIGN COLLECTIVE PC



In her 34 years at Wallace Design Collective PC, Carrie Johnson has kept her focus on making things more efficient with projects that meet certain standards and tools that analyze their success.

Johnson is a structural engineer serving as principal and board chair for the company. She oversees a group focused primarily on retail projects throughout the country, both new buildings and adaptive reuse of existing facilities. She holds the professional engineer (PE) and professional structural engineer (SE) designations.

Another key part of Johnson's career is her involvement with national industry organizations. She is past president of the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations and the Applied Technology Council. She also has served on the board of the Eastern Oklahoma chapter of the American Institute of Architects and is the new president of Tulsa Girls Art School.

Johnson has worked at Wallace since she was a summer intern during college. The consulting firm, licensed in all 50 states, offers structural and civil engineering, landscape architecture and surveying throughout the country.

Most of its work is focused in the building industry and covers multiple sectors, including commercial, educational, entertainment, health care, hospitality, industrial and retail.

During the pandemic, the firm quickly pivoted so all employees could work virtually with minimal adjustments. Its company culture already lent itself to employees being able to work from any office or on the road. As many as 20 people were traveling on any given day since the firm has five offices in four states – Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Atlanta, Denver and Kansas City, Missouri. The firm also continued building its business, meeting deadlines and growing throughout the pandemic, Johnson said.

Beyond the pandemic, the firm is focused on providing clients with a consistent level of quality and creativity from each of its offices, which Johnson witnessed firsthand while leading a committee called One Wallace.

"Our goal is to provide a consistent work experience where all employees feel valued and understand both how they are contributing to the company and get consistent feedback regarding areas they can improve and continue to grow," Johnson said.





AMY LOFTIS-WALTON

DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
OKLAHOMA CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (OCAST)



Working at the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology for the past four years, Amy Walton is center of Oklahoma's "innovation ecosystem," as she puts it.

OCAST helps Oklahoma businesses become more competitive in the global marketplace and works with strategic partners to support concept development, prototyping and seed capital for innovative firms as they develop new products and services. It was established as the state's agency for technology economic development to grow and diversify the state's economy through new product development, technology transfer and commercialization.

As OCAST's director of government relations and strategic initiatives, Walton works to identify new technology opportunities, connect business to academic research and development and find partnerships for companies to scale and grow their business in Oklahoma. She serves as the key strategic adviser to the executive director. She also identifies opportunities to improve government through business incentives and strategic initiatives that position Oklahoma to compete for a tech hub.

"Sharing the stories of innovative technologies being developed in your backyard opens eyes to how great Oklahoma really is in advanced technology development," Walton said.

Walton has more than 20 years of business development experience, including the nonprofit sector. She has a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and her early career included overseeing international programs for health care professionals in South and Central America, Europe and the Middle East.

Walton has served on numerous statewide coalitions and boards and has won awards for her work, including Clean Cities' Legislative Advocate of the Year for her work in transportation. In 2021, she was named to Oklahoma's Hydrogen Production, Transportation and Infrastructure Task Force under the secretary of energy and to the Advanced Mobility Council under the secretary of transportation.

Both are critical to Oklahoma's economic development of innovative advanced technologies for Oklahoma and align with her work to grow the state's innovation economy, she said. "When the economy struggles you tend to see a lot of growth in the number of entrepreneurs and Oklahoma saw it firsthand. The pandemic changed every aspect of society, pushing even the most hesitant toward technology utilization," Walton said.

She noted that the state has had a significant increase in the number of companies looking to relocate to Oklahoma or start a business here recently, and OCAST is poised to help support them, whether it's to make them aware of available resources, provide in-depth knowledge across many sectors or connect them to supply chains, complementary technologies and academic institutions.

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ERIKA LUCAS

CO-FOUNDER
STITCHCREW AND VEST



After Erika Lucas reached partner level at a prominent private equity firm, she left her 10-year career in finance and economic development to start her own organization for overlooked entrepreneurs. StitchCrew democratizes access to capital, resources and networks for this group.

"Entrepreneurs build the future, grow and diversify our economy organically. But not everyone has equal leverage to get started and to scale," states StitchCrew's website in summing up its mission.

Since launching StitchCrew five years ago, Lucas has formed partnerships with organizations like the Oklahoma City Thunder, Google and others to promote programming for underserved entrepreneurs. Her TED Talk, "America's Trillion Dollar Blindspot," is well-regarded in the finance community for highlighting the wealth and funding gaps for entrepreneurs who are women and people of color.

In 2020, after recognizing the disproportionate effect the pandemic was having on women, Lucas founded VEST, an organization connecting influential women and expediting the pipeline of more women in positions of power.

"Innovation is nothing more than problem-solving, adapting and being open to change in order to improve. As entrepreneurs, we constantly have to innovate and adapt to new circumstances," Lucas said. "We can't afford to fall in love with our current product, existing processes and systems. We constantly have to optimize and add value for our customers. If we don't, our companies die. That's simple. I remind myself of that every day."

Founding members of VEST also include: Kathy Taylor, former Tulsa mayor and current dean of University of Tulsa's Collins College of Business; Claudia San Pedro, president of Sonic; Sue Ann Arnall, CEO of the Arnall Foundation; Marie Rocha, general partner at Realist Ventures; Elizabeth Frame Ellison, CEO of the Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation; and Ahniwake Rose, executive director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute.

Lucas is also the host of the VEST Her Podcast, a show exploring holding women back in the workplace and sharing stories of women building power collectively.

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LOUISA DOUGLAS MCCUNE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KIRKPATRICK FOUNDATION
EDITOR IN CHIEF AND CO-FOUNDER, ARTDESK



Louisa Douglas McCune has spent her career in magazine journalism and philanthropy. After being the editor in chief of "Oklahoma Today" for nearly 14 years, she switched careers in 2011 to join the Kirkpatrick Foundation. An Oklahoma City philanthropy, the foundation was founded in 1955 by John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick and supports nonprofits through grants in the areas of arts, culture, education, animal well-being, environmental conservation and historic preservation.

"We are here for the long-term, and that in-perpetuity horizon informs the foundation's work every single day," McCune said, adding that over its 70-year history, the foundation has figured out what works and why. "This understanding gives us the freedom to do some incredible, forward-thinking work within the framework of philanthropy. I believe that has been a contributor to the overall effectiveness of our efforts and, frankly, to our high morale."

The foundation also has launched several initiatives with a goal for social transformation. These include Safe & Humane, which is designed to make Oklahoma one of the safest and most humane places to be an animal; and ArtDesk, the foundation's contemporary arts quarterly magazine.

During the pandemic, in addition to the innovations surrounding working remotely while maintaining the intensity of its everyday work, the Kirkpatrick Foundation launched a new fund to mitigate the financial impact of disaster on nonprofits providing care for animals. To encourage donors to give to the new Disaster Fund for Animal Support at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, the foundation offered a dollar-for-dollar matching grant up to $100,000.

McCune is an ex officio member of the Kirkpatrick Foundation, advisory trustee for the Kirkpatrick Family Fund and treasurer of the Kirkpatrick Policy Group. She is treasurer of the Patrons of OKC Animal Shelter supporting the mission of OKC Animal Welfare, vice president of Oklahoma Voters United and an advisory trustee for Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center, among other community involvement that reflects her passions and her diverse interests.

"I'm something of a campaigner, a crusader for what's right, and a full-fledged animal advocate. I'm interested in eradicating loneliness, have a passion for farm-animal protection, and have an active philosophy practice," McCune said. "I am very protective of the workplace culture and the harmonious environment we have created here. We realize that our work is transformational in the social sphere and therefore little room exists for small-mindedness."

JENNY LOVE MEYER

CHIEF CULTURE OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
LOVE'S TRAVEL STOPS, THE LOVE'S FAMILY OF COMPANIES



Summing up Jenny Love Meyer's role for Love's Travel Stops and the Love's Family of Companies, it might be easy to say that she is the keeper of the company's values and workplace culture.

Meyer is the chief culture officer and executive vice president, a position she has held since 2019. She's in charge of sustaining the fast-growing company's culture and understanding and nurturing its core values that make it so special, she said.

Love's Travel Stops is the nation's leading travel stop network with more than 580 locations in 41 states. Love's strives to provide customers with 24-hour access to clean and safe places to purchase fuel, fresh coffee, restaurant offerings and more, with a slogan of providing customers with "Clean Places, Friendly Faces" at every stop. The Love's Family of Companies consists of Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores, Gemini Motor Transport, Musket, Trillium, Speedco and Love's Truck Care.

Meyer oversees public and media relations, internal communications, employee engagement and charitable giving for the entire family of companies. Her focus is to ensure a positive work experience by developing long-term strategies, integrating new initiatives, highlighting existing successes and working to attract new employees and leaders.

"Working with teams to implement new programs and technologies is important to Love's continued success," she said.

Meyer began her career with Love's in 1991, serving in business and operational management roles. She is the daughter of the Oklahoma City company's founders, Tom and Judy Love, who started it in 1964.

Throughout the pandemic, innovation has taken many forms over the last two years. The organization has more than 35,000 employees and a core business that is open around the clock year-round. Keeping its businesses open and professional truck drivers on the road was vital in the delivery of key goods across the country like food and medicine, Meyer said.

"Being innovative isn't anything new for leaders in the organization, but the pandemic forced us to think of new ways to safely and effectively keep our locations open and get customers back on the road quickly and safely," she said. "This included new cleaning procedures and expanding something we were already doing – contactless payment options."

CATHY O'CONNOR

FORMER PRESIDENT, ALLIANCE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OKLAHOMA CITY
FOUNDER/PRESIDENT, COALIGN



The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City is celebrating 10 years of helping Oklahoma City develop a strong, energetic economy by being involved in nearly every major development initiative in the past decade. Cathy O'Connor helped form the Alliance and has served as its president since inception.

She is retiring from that position in March and said she looks forward to continuing her leadership in economic development by facilitating public-private partnerships, supporting complex projects and creating incentives to help shape the direction and growth of cities. O'Connor's new consulting business, COalign, will help developers and planners create the spaces where people enjoy working, living and gathering for years to come.

In the last 10 years, the alliance that she has headed led the efforts to bring GE's global energy research facilities to the heart of Oklahoma City. It also managed Oklahoma City's Strategic Investment Program, a locally funded job creation program, and created tax increment finance districts, including the Core to Shore TIF district, now better known as the area surrounding Scissortail Park. The Alliance helped locate and incentivize the Omni Hotel next to the new Oklahoma City Convention Center.

Under O'Connor's leadership, the Alliance doubled-down on commitment to the redevelopment of distressed areas, creating a TIF district for northeast Oklahoma City in 2015 and working with a developer on EastPoint Project at 23rd Street and Rhode Island Avenue. With more than 41,000 square feet of renovated single-story retail and office space, it is now home to Centennial Health, Kindred Spirits, Spiked Coffee, Intentional Fitness, Looksee Eyecare and other businesses.

In 2017, O'Connor worked with the city of Oklahoma City to create a local funding source for affordable housing and worked with small developers and investors to encourage construction of single-family homes in neighborhoods targeted for investment. O'Connor considers one of her most significant accomplishments to be the Homeland grocery store recently opened at NE 36th and Lincoln. In what was long considered a food desert, she worked for years to find the right grocery partner, identify investors and the right lenders, acquire New Market Tax Credits and compile the acreage needed for the 30,000-square-foot grocery store.

SHARINA PERRY

FOUNDER/INVENTOR, UTOPIA PLASTIX
DEVELOPER/CREATOR/CEO, THE UTOPIA MODEL COMPANIES



In her 25 years as an entrepreneur and a business owner, Sharina Perry has embodied what some people consider a utopian approach to business. Now as an inventor, she named her company to reflect that approach – Utopia Plastix.

Her company is an industrial business-to-business brand. Its main product, Utopia Plastix, is a plant-based, powdered and compounded resin that she developed as an alternative to the petroleum used in making plastics.

Utopia Plastix, now in its third year, is her company's trademark brand. Other companies that fall under the Utopia Model Companies that she developed and created and serves as CEO include Edengrow LLC (farming); Utopia Solutions LLC (processing and manufacturing); and Utopia Genetics LLC (distribution and sales)

"As the inventor, I fully understand the product. I also developed and created the sustainable eco-system business model. Utopia is so much more than an ideal or even a product. It is a holistic approach to business through a community model of working together," Perry said.

This model includes farming, processing, manufacturing and distribution working together to go from "seed to sell," according to the website.

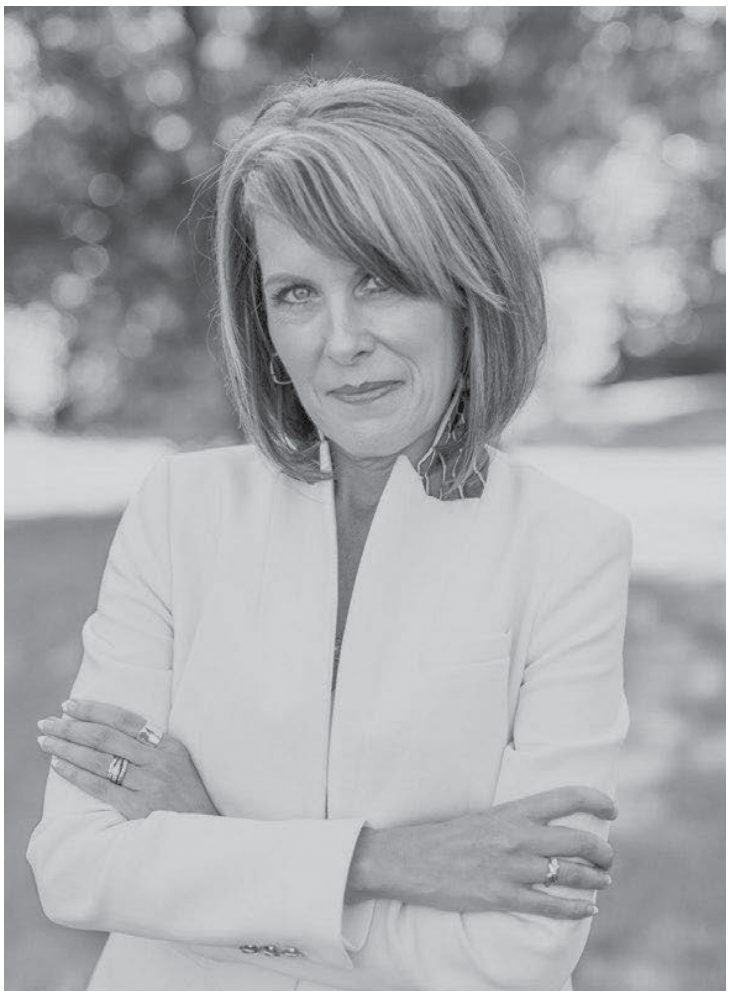
Perry spent most of her career in the cable and internet space as a retailer of products and services. She also served as a prime government contractor centrally focused on commercial installation in the public/private and multiple dwelling units/free to guest market.

She is known for her strategic business acumen that helped make small- and large-business owners profitable with executable processes and procedures. As the founder and inventor of Utopia Plastix and developer and the developer of the Utopia Model, she has built a sustainable ecosystem business model for the supply chain.

At its heart is the sustainable, plant-based compounded resin that can be used in existing manufacturing with tooling or equipment modification. Perry's invention, Utopia Plastix, created a polymer with a high plant load using fibrous crops and included a technology to combine with existing polymers to make them eco-friendly. As a result, Utopia Plastix is 100% recyclable, degradable and compostable.

ELIZABETH HUTT POLLARD

SECRETARY OF SCIENCE AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, STATE OF OKLAHOMA



Innovation is part of what Elizabeth Hutt Pollard does every day. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt appointed Pollard as secretary of science and innovation in 2020, tasking her to lead initiatives enabling science and innovation in higher education, economic development and health outcomes. Her role includes advising the governor on ways to stimulate economic growth and high-paying job creation.

Pollard's Cabinet role includes oversight of the Oklahoma Center for Science and Technology, for which she serves as chairman of its Oklahoma Science Technology, Research and Development Board. In addition, Pollard is chairman of two councils for the governor – the Science and Innovation Council and the Aerospace, Autonomous Systems and Defense Council.

Under her leadership, these councils published Oklahoma's Science and Innovation Strategic Plan for 2021-2026. Prior to her current position, Pollard was deputy secretary of science and innovation.

A key to Pollard's innovation is recruiting, empowering and collaborating with industry experts, thought leaders, pioneers, partners and others.

"Dynamic, forward-thinking ideas are not formed in a silo. It is important to empower a community of innovators to share their ideas and ensure they have the resources to implement and expand our strategic vision," Pollard said. "Oklahoma has a first-class team leading our efforts in science and innovation."

Pollard also is executive chairman of Applied Silver, a Silicon Valley-based early-stage materials science health-technology company that addresses infection control and antibiotic stewardship. She has extensive global experience scaling businesses, building commercial and academic partnerships and bringing to market specialized technology and solution for sectors that include health care, pharma, diagnostics and life science research.

Her expertise in genomic tools and test development led her serving as an adviser to the Oklahoma State Department of Health's COVID-19 testing response. Her experience has been instrumental in fostering commercial technology partnerships for the state's COVID-19 testing.

Pollard continues to lead Oklahoma's efforts in recruiting science and technology companies and professionals, advises several early-stage health care companies and has held board director roles in public, private and nonprofit organizations. She serves on the YPO's (formerly Young Presidents' Organization) Global Board of Directors.

PAT POTTS

CO-FOUNDER AND IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT/CEO
POTTS FAMILY FOUNDATION



Pat Potts has been an influential and groundbreaking leader in the Oklahoma City nonprofit sector for decades, and her work has had a long-lasting influence in the community.

She co-founded the Community Resource Development Foundation and its successor, the Potts Family Foundation. She also founded the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits and served as its president and CEO for more than 20 years. Potts was also a founder of the Oklahoma Women's Coalition.

Her innovation and entrepreneurship in the nonprofit world represent just a portion of her profound effect on nonprofit boards and civic organizations throughout the community. This includes serving as the first female president of the Oklahoma City School Board and the first woman as president of Oklahoma City Beautiful. She has also led the Oklahoma City Zoo Trust and, nationally, the Society of Fund Raising Executives. Potts has been honored with numerous awards for her service and innovation.

Potts is immediate past president and CEO of the Potts Family Foundation, which focuses on support of capacity-building in the nonprofit sector via training, consulting and multiple additional services. Another area of focus for the foundation is on increasing the early childhood system in Oklahoma to support families and communities in building a positive home environment, preventing and mitigating trauma in children before they are born through age 5.

"We are educating people across disciplines on the impact of trauma in early childhood on later health, well-being and life expectancy via film and panel discussions," Potts said. "The pandemic has created everyday trauma in the lives of most of our folks and so understanding the behavioral and physical impact is crucial," she added.

With funding from the Potts Family Foundation, the documentary film "Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope" has been shown to more than 17,012 Oklahomans within the past five years, and its work promoting resilience continues. The foundation has worked with 21 self-healing communities to help them prevent and mitigate trauma throughout the state. In addition, the foundation works with the state Human Resource Managers Organization to educate and celebrate family-positive practices in business, agencies and organizations.

VALERIE RILEY

FOUNDER
LIFESQUIRE



One of Valerie Riley's strengths on the StrengthsFinder Chart is "futuristic," and it shows in her work as an entrepreneur.

"I am always thinking five years ahead," she said. "It probably drives my team crazy, but I want to lead whatever industry I am in, not follow the trends."

Riley founded LifeSquire 12 years ago after serving as an assistant for eight years prior to that. She was executive and personal assistant to the managing partner of RCS Investment and worked in investor relations for Mucha.com.

LifeSquire outsources, places and trains assistants of all kinds, regardless of industry. It also offers franchises.

During the early days of the pandemic, the company focused more on virtual assistant offerings when assistants couldn't offer in-home or in-office support. With the return of in-person work, LifeSquire has an entire division set up solely for virtual assistant offerings.

When you visit its website, you can click to "find your executive assistant," "your personal assistant" or your virtual assistant. One of LifeSquire's key messages is "Spending Our Time Saving You Time."

The company has been named to *Entrepreneur Magazine's* best company list, as well as to the the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's Metro 50 Fastest-Growing Businesses. *The Journal Record* previously honored Riley as one of its Fifty Making a Difference and as an Innovator of the Year.

LifeSquire is the most prominent of Riley's startups, but it isn't the only one. She is a co-founder of a health care technology company called Fokes to help families manage and communicate effectively with caregivers. She is also the co-founder of Level Handyman, which provides an "elevated home repair and handyman experience," according to its website.

From 2020 to 2021, Riley served as president of the international Entrepreneurs' Organization after years on the executive committee. She also has been involved in the Women's Presidents Organization and Leadership Oklahoma City. She is on the board of advisers for the Better Business Bureau, which also awarded her with one of its Torch Award for Ethics, among other community involvement.

TIMILA ROTHER

CURRENT LITIGATION DEPARTMENT CHAIR AND IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT/CEO
CROWE & DUNLEVY P.C.



On her first day as president of Crowe & Dunlevy P.C., Timila Rother sent a message affirming the historic law firm's professionalism and ethics while maintaining collegiality among those who work there.

"Our firm has always had this mindset, but I wanted to articulate what inspired us to come to work every day and to be proud of what we accomplished and the persons with whom we accomplished it," Rother said.

Over her next five years as president and CEO of the firm founded in 1902, predating statehood, Rother emphasized that message over and over.

"We took the time to tell our clients and our colleagues 'thank you' in earnest. We embraced diversity and inclusion and we told our clients and our community how important it is to who we are," she said. "In short, we took the time and used our words to challenge any conventional notions about the practice of law and, though we indeed often do work a lot, we work with colleagues, for clients and in an inclusive community that make it a calling, not a job."

Rother has been with Crowe & Dunlevy PC since the start of her law career after graduating from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1990.

She started as an associate and was elected firm shareholder seven years later. She has held many leadership positions at Crowe & Dunlevy, including five years as a member of its five-person executive committee. In April 2021, she left her role as firm leader to focus on her legal practice. She is current chairman of the firm's litigation department.

During the pandemic, the firm moved its attorneys and staff to remote work arrangements, a transition that was nearly seamless due to technology initiatives implemented before then. But the real innovation came with the leadership team's objective to keep the firm's culture while everyone was working remotely and feeling disconnected. The firm maintained frequent and earnest messaging throughout the pandemic and redirected temptations to politicize or complain about the circumstances.

"The message was longer and transitioned to our planning efforts. However, the innovation was not the planning, though it was robust; the innovation was the reminder to everyone on our work team to continue to be their very best selves. They heard it and they have been their selves for two years – and counting," Rother said.

NATALIE SHIRLEY

PRESIDENT & CEO
NATIONAL COWBOY & WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM



Natalie Shirley has served in the cabinets of two Oklahoma governors from different political parties and has led initiatives to improve Oklahoma's education and its economy. Four years ago, Shirley became the first female president and CEO of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

For Shirley, innovation starts with infusing the entire staff with a sense of purpose and ownership in the museum's mission. Everyone from the grounds crew to housekeeping to admission staff and volunteers can provide a first impression for visitors.

"Innovation begins with the staff. With support and no penalty for honest failure of a new idea, remarkable things can happen," Shirley said.

That innovation was most visible during the pandemic, when the museum had to shut down for six weeks because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Shirley had asked her entire staff for ideas about how the museum could remain connected to key audiences remotely. The most visible of the ideas came from the marketing department's plan for a "social media takeover" by an essential staff member who worked during the shutdown. Tim Tiller, director of security and operations services, became a deputy member of the marketing team and a social media voice during that time, Shirley said.

"Thousands of home-bound people all over the world were suddenly introduced to the museum thanks to Tim's homespun jokes and learning opportunities about the West," she said.

The museum's social media presence jumped significantly; Tiller's presence earned major national news media attention, and that campaign led to a jump in visitor attendance during Memorial Day 2020 compared to the prior year. Requests for "Thanks, Tim" merchandise helped the museum's store stay on budget, even when closed. The museum also turned major events and learning opportunities into virtual ones. Some of those practices continue today.

Prior to "The Cowboy," Shirley served as president of Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City. She was Gov. Mary Fallin's Oklahoma secretary of education and workforce development. She served in the Cabinet of Oklahoma Democrat Gov. Brad Henry as Oklahoma secretary of commerce and tourism, also taking the role of executive director of the state Department of Commerce. Formerly, Shirley was president of ICI Mutual in Washington, D.C., after serving in various leadership offices in the company.

Shirley graduated from Oklahoma State University and earned a law degree from the University of Oklahoma. Shirley currently serves on several boards, including the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, United Way of Central Oklahoma, SSM Hospital, BancFirst and the University of Oklahoma's Board of Regents.

KAYSE M. SHRUM, D.O.

PRESIDENT
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY



In July 2021, Dr. Kayse M. Shrum became Oklahoma State University's 19th president and the first female to lead a research university in Oklahoma. Over the past seven months, OSU announced the Oklahoma Aerospace Institute for Research and Education and the Hamm Institute for American Energy at Oklahoma State University. OSU is a land-grant institution with more than 35,000 students across a five-campus system and more than 264,000 graduates. OSU has an extension presence in all 77 counties.

Shrum earned a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from the OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tulsa. Thanks to her commitment to serving rural and underserved populations in Oklahoma, Shrum has spent much of her career focused on innovative partnerships and historical progress. She has been provost of the OSU Center for Health Sciences and dean of the OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine and, in 2013, was named president of OSU-CHS; in those positions she was the youngest and first female president and dean of a medical school in Oklahoma.

OSU-CHS flourished during Shrum's tenure. Student enrollment more than doubled as new academic programs were established to meet health care workforce needs. Research funding has increased by 25% year over year. The center built the A.R. and Marylouise Tandy Medical Academic Building that houses a nationally recognized simulation center and established the United States' first tribally affiliated medical school, the OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine at the Cherokee Nation.

In addition, the National Center for Wellness and Recovery addressed the need for addiction research and treatment nationally. OSU-CHS also partnered with federal, state and local governments and local philanthropy to bring a new Veterans Administration Hospital to Tulsa.

Shrum gives credit to many OSU teams for their innovation during the pandemic. A partnership between Oklahoma Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine and OSU Medicine provided increased access to COVID-19 testing for Oklahomans during the pandemic's early days. This effort, which came together in 12 days thanks to OSU's medical expertise, existing equipment and volunteers, also led to better data and a better statewide COVID response.

The entire endeavor was a picture of the Cowboy Code that we live by at OSU," Shrum said. "The pandemic made it possible to see exactly what can happen when organizations remove barriers, bring individual and collective expertise together and think about problems in a new way. It expanded the boundaries of what we can accomplish for society. Anything is possible when the right minds come together with a common goal."

TAVA MALOY SOFSKY

DIRECTOR
OKLAHOMA FILM + MUSIC OFFICE



Tava Maloy Sofsky is an Okahoma Cherokee Native, visionary and trailblazer who began her film career in Los Angeles after earning a bachelor's degree in film and media studies from the University of Oklahoma.

For 15 years, she worked on major motion pictures and established a network with filmmakers and talent that included Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Anthony Hopkins, John Travolta and Robin Williams. She worked alongside companies like Sony, Paramount, Disney, 1492 Pictures and Amblin Entertainment.

Today Sofsky is director of the Oklahoma Film + Music Office, a position she has held for the last 7.5 years. She and her husband moved back to Oklahoma to raise their children near family in her home state. The opportunity to lead OF+MO brought her career full circle, back to where her passion for the film and music industry took root, she said.

Under the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the Oklahoma Film + Music Office works to promote the state as a viable hub for film, television and music production as well as further develop opportunities for workforce, business and community growth within these sectors.

During Sofsky's tenure as director of OF+MO, she has overseen Oklahoma's film industry expand its top-rate talent, crew base and infrastructure. Since 2014, the film industry has generated 2,400% growth in statewide economic impact, in part due to the state's film incentive program, with a direct fiscal impact of $170M and creating more than 11,000 career opportunities in the last year alone.

Sofsky's recruitment efforts have led to hosting a diverse filmography here with more than 200 productions, including Kingdom Story/Lionsgate's "I Can Only Imagine" and "American Underdog", Amblin's "Stillwater," Amazon's "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," A24's Academy Award-winning film "Minari," the critically acclaimed FX television series "Reservation Dogs" and Apple's upcoming "Killers of the Flower Moon."

Sofsky said she values the relationships and support from statewide industry partners, industry professionals, small businesses and state leadership along the way and "is proud to help pioneer Oklahoma into a new era of entertainment industries."

"Bringing innovation into my life each day means to empower those around me, including my team, to become better leaders and to spur on the next generation of Oklahomans working in our creative sectors to believe they can create the future where anything is possible," she added.

Sofsky serves as a member of Creative Oklahoma Advisory Board, the Oklahoma City Community College's Film Advisory Board, deadCenter's Education Advisory Committee, Metro Technology's Digital Cinema Advisory Board and the Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI).

SARAH STITT

FIRST LADY, STATE OF OKLAHOMA
CO-FOUNDER, HOPE RISING OKLAHOMA



Before Sarah Stitt's husband, Kevin Stitt, was elected Oklahoma's governor in 2018, the couple spent almost 20 years building their company, Gateway, and raising their family. She also spent time managing residential and commercial construction products during those years.

Since becoming first lady of Oklahoma, Sarah Stitt has been passionately advocating for those affected by mental health issues. She co-founded Hope Rising Oklahoma with a stated mission to "empower people, families and communities to better their lives through the science of hope," its website states.

The Hope Foundation has formed a partnership with the University of Oklahoma's Hope Research Center to make the science of hope accessible to cross-sector organizations across Oklahoma, currently focusing on rural communities, Stitt said.

The foundation partners with leaders in the community to host a "Hope Summit" for business, nonprofit, medical, civic and law enforcement leaders to attend and learn how to apply the science of hope to their organizations.

Chan Hellman, Hope Rising's co-founder and the founding director of the Hope Research Center, and his team have spent the past 15 years studying hope as one way to mitigate adverse childhood experiences, Stitt said. According to the website, both Stitt and Hellman overcame childhood adversity and trauma.

"We know that individuals with two or more (of these experiences) are more likely to experience depression, addiction, health issues and incarceration as adults," Stitt said. "Hope is not simply a wish or a feeling. It is a proven science we can measure, apply and cultivate in our communities."

More than 2,000 studies show that hope is a leading predictor of success, Stitt added.

"There are problems we all share. And in communities across our state, there are organizations, professionals and civic leaders who are committed to solving those problems. We want to understand what's working and fix what isn't working," Stitt said. "But in the midst of so much brokenness and so many challenging circumstances, making a true difference can seem impossible. Hope can change everything."

MARNIE TAYLOR

PRESIDENT AND CEO
OKLAHOMA CENTER FOR NONPROFITS



For 12 years, Marnie Taylor has been at the forefront of Oklahoma's nonprofit community, putting her decades of leadership and nonprofit experience to work as the leader of a major center with a goal of helping these organizations achive excellence.

Taylor has been president and CEO of the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits since 2011. Before she joined the center full time, she served several years as a board member, trainer and consultant for OKCNP. She is one of Oklahoma's leading governance experts and has more than 40 years of leadership in volunteerism, board service, fundraising and community engagement.

The Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits is an organization that serves nonprofits through training, mentoring, consulting, advocacy and recognition. The pandemic underscored the importance of the work it does to support the nonprofits it serves.

"The pandemic created a situation where nonprofit organizations were desperate for information on navigating relief loans, PPE distribution and other COVID-related situations while trying to stay safe and quarantine," Taylor said. "At OKCNP, we were forced to innovate to find ways to get nonprofits the critical information they needed in a manner that kept everyone healthy."

This work included buying 10 Zoom accounts for information sessions, sectorwide conference calls and trainings on everything from filling out applications to taking charity events from in-person to virtual, Taylor said.

"Nonprofits, like every other business, experience pressure to stay relevant, which requires constant innovation," Taylors said. "I try to approach every day with an open mind and fresh approach, never relying on how things have always been. I always ask myself, 'is this the best way or is there a more effective and efficient method other there?'"

Taylor currently serves on the boards of the Potts Family Foundation, ReMerge, Sunbeam Family Services, the Friends of the Governor's Mansion and as the board chair for the National Council of Nonprofits. She is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame. A native of South Bend, Indiana, she began her professional career in advertising with the Chicago Tribune and moved to Oklahoma when she married her husband, Clayton. Oklahoma has been their home for the last 39 years.

Taylor is a graduate of Leadership Oklahoma Class XXIV and Leadership Oklahoma City Class XV, SALLT Class X, founding director of Youth Leadership Exchange (YLX) and a founding member of United Way of Central Oklahoma's Women's Leadership Society. She also served for 10 years as a historic preservation commissioner for Oklahoma City, among her service roles to many other organizations.

KARI WATKINS

PRESIDENT AND CEO
OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL & MUSEUM



The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is in the storytelling business for a significant event that happened 27 years ago – the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. The story of the bombing, the people it affected and resilience of the people and the community "is more important and relevant than ever," said Kari Watkins, president and CEO. "The story we tell is not just about the event but the people it impacted and a city that collectively decided to be a city on a hill and share hope with the rest of the world."

The memorial and museum are designed to be places of comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity. Watkins' work with the organization over the last 26 years has helped tell and teach these stories in innovative ways to prevent future violence and to foster better human connections and discussions.

Watkins, a third-generation journalist, became the memorial's first staff member as communications director in 1996 and was named executive director in 1999. She oversaw the design competition of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial and the building of the Memorial Museum, working with the board and staff to raise $29 million for its construction.

In 2013, she recognized that the memorial had to adapt to maintain relevance, which led to updates and enhancements to the existing museum. For the 20th anniversary, the memorial opened the Uncover-Discover Lab, an academically oriented experience geared toward middle and high school students. For the 25th anniversary, Watkins also guided its signature program known as Better Conversations, addressing tough subjects.

COVID-19 surged at a time when Watkins' team had expected to remember the 25th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing with an in-person ceremony. Pivoting quickly, the effort turned virtual with Ackerman McQueen.

"It resulted in a powerful hour of television that became a teaching tool for hundreds of thousands sitting at home during the first 30 days of dealing with the pandemic," Watkins said. "We had so many comments from people talking about how for many this gave them the opportunity to discuss the bombing, the recovery and the resilience of those impacted and the people of OKC for the first time."

The Memorial Marathon also became a virtual race that year, with runners running in every state and sending photos of themselves in their race bibs in front of mountains, oceans and national and international landmarks. These "reminded us we had done the best we could do and still spread our mission around the world," Watkins said.

CARA COWAN WATTS, Ph.D.

CEO AND MANAGING MEMBER
TULSA PIER DRILLING LLC



Cara Cowan Watts has an ability to look at the big picture and the training as an engineer to understand the details in executing plans, both skills that are important to her running a family-owned business.

Watts is CEO and managing member of Tulsa Pier Drilling LLC, the company her husband, Doug, created in 1998. He remains president and co-owner with his wife today, but he handed day-to-day operations of the company to her in 2016.

She is a member of the Cherokee Nation, and her husband is a member of the Wyandotte Nation, making Tulsa Pier Drilling 100% Native American-owned and operated and 51% Native American woman-owned and operated.

Watts holds a doctorate in biosystems engineering, which she earned in 2015; a master's degree in telecommunications management; and a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, all from Oklahoma State University.

TPD provides commercial drilling services throughout the continental United States and is known for its ability to work on difficult, deep foundation drilling terrains and soils. It has a modern fleet of five drill rigs with both track- and truck-mounted drilling equipment and low-clearance rigs. It also has turnkey shoring systems, piling and more.

Watts oversees drilling services and manages a team of 19 full- and part-time employees and a fleet of commercial trucks and drill rigs. She estimates and bids contracts, handles business development and strategy, controls job costs, monitors safety standards, oversees legal and accounting operations and more.

At TPD, "our goal is to constantly improve our finished product of a drilled shaft and make the process as easy as possible for our customers when everyone is facing staffing issues such as staffing shortages and lack of seasoned, skilled workforce," Watts said.

Watts also is owner of Cherokee Star DBA, a company she founded 20 years ago to provide facilitation, project management, communication planning, innovative education solutions, presentation development needs and more. She also served as an elected tribal legislator for the Cherokee Nation from 2003 to 2015, representing portions of Tulsa and Rogers counties, is a fellow for the Louis Stokes National Science Foundation Fellow and is active in the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) board of directors.

During the pandemic, Tulsa Pier Drilling innovated in its efforts to make the workplace safer from employees by partnering with two locally owned small businesses to provide hand sanitizer. The two Cherokee Nation-owned businesses, Dawn's Skin Like Silk and Blue Starr Liquor, worked with TDP to create a hand sanitizer when there was none available locally.

ASHLIE WILHELM

GLOBAL HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
WILSPEC TECHNOLOGIES INC.



Working with global teams in four different countries for the last 20 years has its own set of challenges and requires a unique kind of creativity to keep employees connected and the workplace inviting.

Oklahoma City-based Wilspec Technologies has succeeded in creating such an environment where a diverse group of employees can thrive while working together, said Ashlie Wilhelm, Wilspec's global human resources manager, a position she has held for more than 17 years.

To keep everyone connected around the globe, the company holds conference calls, videoconferencing meetings, email, text, messenger chats and in-person meetings. Wilspec offers employees one of the top benefit packages in the state for a company its size, and the company has wonderful relationships with current and former employees. Whether in areas of charitable giving or learning about employees, their interests, families and nationalities, the company strives to offer a unique, positive experience and opportunity for growth.

"All of our teams have learned how to be interested and culturally sensitive to those that they entrust to work hard each and every day for one another," Wilhelm said. "We have worked extremely hard to have a transparent and honest open work environment, where ideas and collaboration are encouraged, team members are supported, no matter how long they have worked for us.

Wilspec Technologies Inc. was founded in 2000 and is a privately held company based in Oklahoma City with operations throughout North America, Europe, Asia, India and the Middle East. The company manufactures pressure switches and sensors, electrical controls and valve and line components for the heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) and refrigeration markets and for industrial markets.

The pandemic allowed Wilspec to get back to its basics and take a moment to seek clarity of what makes the company succeed and thrive, Wilhelm said.

At every location, Wilspec's employees are "competent, honest, transparent and hardworking," and because of them throughout the pandemic, the company has been able to stay open and continue hiring in all locations, Wilhelm said.

Wilspec has focused on "safety first" for each location and has cross-trained others in each department as backups for those positions.

"This has allowed our company to continue to be flexible, work in or out of the office, take care of our families, home-school in some cases and continue to work in a well-rounded environment," Wilhelm said.

Without her team, she said there was "no way" she could have continued after a family medical scare and near tragedy last May. Today, everyone is safe, and Wilhelm is thankful for dedicated, hardworking employees who rallied to help.



A Visionary LEADER

Mother. Doctor. President. Innovator.

Raising a family, leading a university and helping solve society's most pressing issues is no easy feat, but Dr. Kayse Shrum rises to meet the challenge.

When our state faces tough questions, she ensures **Orange is the Answer**. As president of Oklahoma State University, she focuses heavily on preparing the nation's future leaders to help fill high-demand jobs in engineering, health care, information technology, aerospace, energy and education.

Being the first woman to lead a public research institution in Oklahoma, Shrum understands the importance of innovation and inclusion. She is a pioneer, committed to serving the state's rural and underserved populations and pursuing strategic partnerships.

OSU

Advisory Council - Petree College of Arts & Sciences

University of Oklahoma

Adjunct Professor of Mandarin Chinese - OCCC

OCU Alumni Guest Speaker

American Cancer Society

ProjectNICU Co-Founder

Wilspec Season of Giving Founder

OKC Ballet - Dancer sponsor

National Society of Mathematics



American Heart Association

Special Olympics

March of Dimes March for Babies Chair

Paper for Water Origami Club

Salvation Army Angel Tree

OKC Beautiful

Project Alex Boxes

JDRF

OKC Chamber of Commerce

Global HR Manager

YWCA

Girl Scouts of America - STEM Board

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Oklahoma

Cure FA Soirée

Living Water International

OCU Alumni Mentor Program

American Red Cross

Heritage Hall - Gala Committee

Boys and Girls Club of Oklahoma

First United Methodist Church

Heart Research UK Supporter

OU Rover Teams

From all of us at Wilspec U.S., Wilspec Asia and Wilspec Europe, we want to congratulate Ashlie Wilhelm on being nominated for her fabulous and innovative leadership around the globe! Thank you for all that you do for us and those you continue to help every day!

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