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Athena Pinnacle Scholarship Winners 2018

**Shae Galli  I  Santa Fe Christian**

Shae Galli has had an inatitable passion for Science for as long as she can remember. When she was four years old she asked for a microscope for Christmas and discovered the wonders of protozoa and her profound love of biology. This love of biology led her to a summer program at UCSD’s Rosetta Institute’s Educational Cancer Research program where she focused on the molecular biology of cancer. Last summer, Shae was selected for an internship at Scintillon Institute for Biomedical and Boenergy Research and spent time in the lab under her mentor, Dr. Murat Digiaylioglu, who inspired her to major in biomedical engineering and pursue collaborations on cutting-edge research at institutions like Harvard, MIT and Stanford. Her ultimate goal is to pioneer the next paradigm shift in tissue engineering. Rose Hong, a National Merit Commended Scholar ranked in the top 5.6% of women for the American Mathematics Competition. In addition to her love of science, she is an artist and musician. She combines her love of music with her fascination with neuroscience by conducting research on how music affects the brain for her AP Chemistry class. Rose hopes to attend Harvard, Duke, USC or other schools to pursue her passions in science. She says she’s only scratched the surface of her love for biology and plans to continue her education after college in either graduate or medical school.

**Alma Rincongallardo  I  Hilltop High School**

A freshman year school trip to the Salk Institute opened up a new world for Alma Rincongallardo. Just three years later she obtained her first research internship at that very institution. Her interest in biology began in high school and led Alma to take Advanced Placement Biology in her sophomore year. Motivated by her success on the AP exam, she started volunteering at the Living Coast Discovery Center where she learned about ecology while giving back to the community. Through her strong network she began volunteering at a UCSD Biology Lab under the supervision of professor Justin Meyer. A strong proponent of teamwork in life and in science, she committed 2 hours by bus daily for the opportunity to shadow college students and work in the lab. Leveraging her network further, she was accepted to the Salk Institute’s Heithoff-Brody Scholars Program where she contributed to the research of stem cells. Hilltop High School’s AP Biology teacher, Jessica Nascimento, calls Alma a natural leader with tenacity she has not seen in many students. Alma was determined to succeed in high school despite transportation obstacles and a lack of home internet at access. At her community’s summer camp program, Alma is committed to giving others the same spark of hope and show them everything they are capable of. The first in her family to attend college, Alma has applied to UC schools and aims to fully immerse herself in her college studies as she pursues either biology or neuroscience.

**Ritika Shrivastava  I  Del Norte High School**

For Ritika Shrivastava, working as an electrical engineer also means being a magician. From the time she was little, she found her brother’s Legos and building blocks far more intriguing than her birthday gifts of jewelry and gift cards. Identifying herself as an ‘innovative builder’ she would open his gifts, read the manuals and construct the projects. Over time, her pursuits became more meaningful like setting up a water filtration system in her family’s yard. At Del Norte High School, Ritika took rigorous STEM courses and participated in Science Olympiad, Technovation Challenge and Raspberry Pi, where she explored her interest in IoT (the Internet of Things). IoT represents the integration of all things technology and Ritika sees herself mastering the art of teaching beds and walls to communicate one day. Her passionate pursuit of sparking magic in advanced technology will take her to Berkeley, MIT, Stanford, Harvey-Mudd or Caltech where she expects to gain the technical knowledge and real-life experience she needs to create the magic she envisions. Del Norte academic counselor, Kathleen Marron, describes Ritika as being on a mission of academic excellence and community involvement. She tackled fifteen AP courses and additional college-level courses while maintaining a 4.47 GPA and has been recognized as the 2017 Distinguished Young Woman of San Diego. Her volunteer work and internship at organizations like Kaiser Permanente and Calasia Pharma helped further cement her deep commitment to STEM and to giving back by cultivating a love of science in younger students. Ritika’s persistence carries over to her love of dance where she achieved mastery at the Arangetram level in Bharatanatyam classical Indian dance.

**Veronica Tang  I  The Bishop’s School**

Veronica Tang loves math and computers more than jewelry. So, she co-founded the All Girls STEM Society for girls in grades 3-8 who feel the same way. Born an only child, Veronica now says she has hundreds of little sisters and together they program dancing robots, crush strawberries for their DNA and aim to become trailblazers intent on breaking all limits. Inasema Triana, Computer Science Department Chair at Veronica’s high school notes that Veronica’s organization has helped teach over 2,500 young women from 230 schools and 24 school districts how to do math, use Scribblers, and code using Python, App Inventor, Scratch, along with instructing them on several other STEM related applications during her monthly workshops. Veronica participates in Programming Club and plays a leadership role with Math Field Day, an all-girls math tournament in San Diego. It’s a natural fit for someone who’s pursued competitive math since middle school and participates in the MIT Math Prize for Girls contest, a competition for the top 300 girls in mathematics from the United States and Canada. She credits her love of STEM for giving her adventures and allowing her to travel. Veronica’s next step in changing the world will take her to Harvard, MIT or Stanford where she’ll live and breathe the technological advancements affording her the opportunity to influence technology trends and societal trends. She views the STEM field as the future and knows women not only need a voice in it but also need the recognition they deserve based on their accomplishments.
When Francie Barron speaks to young women, she mentions the high school biology teacher who connected her to laboratory work that led to a semifinalist spot in the Intel Science Talent Search. This relationship with her first women science teacher shaped how she mentors young women today. Benefiting from strong women as academic mentors, Francie understands how her role shapes the young women she mentors. She’s rewarded in seeing those she leads get jobs in higher roles, pointing out that mentors want their mentees to do more and use what they’ve learned to make greater strides in new areas. Francie uses the term “nerdy delight” to describe that giddy feeling you get by uncovering something that drives you to work nonstop on problem-solving. She believes it’s a mentor’s job to facilitate finding this “nerdy delight” in young peers by offering opportunities to wear different scientific hats and explore solving problems that may even challenge the way we think.

Dawn Barry is the Co-founder and President of Luna DNA, a genomic and medical research database powered by blockchain and owned by the individuals that contribute their DNA and health information. Luna DNA was a featured company in the 2018 Precision Medicine World Congress in Silicon Valley. In ten years at Illumina, she was a leader in the Company’s Women’s Leadership Network providing networks and support to grow future women leaders. Dawn won the 2016 Illumina Leadership Pillar Award winner for Inspiration, a peer-nominated award and the highest recognition for leaders supporting Illumina’s core leadership values. Dawn regularly lends her voice and experiences in forums for the advancement of women in technology. She’s been featured at Women in Bio’s SoCal Chapter, International Food Information Council Foundation’s promotion of 2018 International Day of Women and Girls in Science, and the University of Vermont’s Inventions 2 Venture conference where she spoke on genomics and the journey of women leaders in technology.

Denise Bevers oversees KindredBio’s departments and functions including human resources, IT, clinical operations, data management, program management, pharmaceutical development, commercial, and operations. As co-founder, she is responsible for building and mentoring a team with over 60 percent women. The animal health and pet pharmaceutical industry is a new and growing segment in biotech in which Denise is considered a pioneer since raising over $150 million. Denise is focused on creating individualized mentoring programs for her team, focusing on dialogue and collaboration. Denise is an active member of the UCSD Chancellor’s Associates program and serves as a mentor and expert to UCSD’s student incubator program, The Basement. She shares advice on fundraising support, coaches in pitch prep and provides introductions to investors. She provides mentoring support to women student entrepreneurs and shares her unique experience as a woman in biotech who co-founded a company and took her company public.
2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Life Sciences

Kara Bortone, Head of JLABS San Diego | Johnson & Johnson Innovation, JLABS

As Head of Johnson & Johnson Innovation, JLABS San Diego, Kara Bortone catalyzes and supports the translation of science and technology into valuable solutions for patients and consumers across the pharmaceutical, medical device and consumer healthcare sectors. Responsible for JLABS’ external engagement, portfolio management, operational excellence and mentoring, Kara has built a community where innovation thrives. One of the first members of the JLABS team, she enabled the growth of Johnson & Johnson’s external innovation strategy over the past five years. By helping shape JLABS into an organization with over 330 portfolio companies across 11 locations, where 25% of the JLABS resident companies are led by women CEOs, Empowered by a supportive environment for women to succeed under the leadership of Kara and the JLABS team, she is an active leader in the Johnson & Johnson WiSTEM2D Scholars Program which supports women pursuing research in STEM2D.

Lisa Freeman-Cook, Vice President, Assay Development | GenMark Diagnostics

Throughout her career, Lisa Freeman-Cook has empowered and promoted women in her sphere. Lisa seeks out highly skilled women to join her team, looking for members who are smart and produce good results. She has a keen eye for identifying these attributes in women. Lisa creates an environment where empowered women can thrive. Lisa seeks to address pay inequity at GenMark. She was instrumental in developing clear titles and job requirements, ensuring that those with the same skill level and responsibilities are paid equally. Lisa assists others, particularly women, in realizing their full leadership potential by recognizing employees for their contributions in team meetings.

Ciara Kennedy, President & CEO | Amplyx

Amplyx’s C-Suite and more than 50 percent of its management team are women, under Ciara Kennedy. Ciara accomplished this by creating a corporate culture that’s appealing to women and by rewarding productivity. Ciara is active with several key initiatives in Southern California to help other women succeed in life sciences. She speaks to women’s groups and mentors women at the UCSD Rady School of Management and is a frequent panelist/speaker on both gender diversity and drug development topics at Bank and Investor panels, and at the UCSD Rady School of Management. Ciara is a founding member and continuous supporter of the “San Diego Women Give” donor circle, which grants money to organizations that support women and girls in San Diego. Due to her efforts to highlight women’s research, Ciara was on the program steering committee for the “Women Innovating Together in Healthcare Bench to Bedside” symposium with The Salk Institute.

Christina Lim, Director, Employee Communications & Citizenship | Illumina, Inc.

A driving force behind many of Illumina’s corporate philanthropy initiatives, Christina Lim manages a team of 7 women and influences a company of 7000+ employees globally. She partnered with Illumina’s executive team to develop the Illumina in the community program with pillars including STEM education, oncology, genetic disease and community engagement. Christina is a strong champion for the next generation of scientists, encouraging students to create an environment of diversity of thought and experiences. She was instrumental in the creation of Illumina’s high school immersion that gave over 1200 students exposure to genomics and career paths in STEM. Christina and her team are creating a genomics teacher workshop in collaboration with other scientists and engineers to equip and inspire high school teachers to teach genomics discovery education. Though she comes from a non-STEM background, her passion for the sciences motivates her to creatively engage the support of those in STEM.

Alyssa Master, Director of Science and Applications | Nucleus Biologics

As the only woman in management meetings, Alyssa Master made a concerted effort to hire a team of strong, exceptional women at Nucleus Biologics, furthering her commitment to mentor women in life sciences. Alyssa joined Nucleus Biologics less than two years ago as the third employee, initially holding the dual role of sales representative and lead scientist. She was recently promoted to Director of Science and Applications at Nucleus. In March 2017, Alyssa was named Chair of the Southern California Women In Bio Chapter – promoting careers, leadership and entrepreneurship of women in life sciences. While Chair of Women In Bio, the chapter developed and launched a peer mentorship program called Mentors, Advisors, and Peers, targeting women in all careers and at any stage, with a focus on interacting and learning from each other in a safe, supportive environment. She also works on programs for high school girls (Young Women In Bio) to encourage young women to pursue careers in STEM fields.
2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Life Sciences

Vatsala Naageshwaran, Vice President Corporate Development | Absorption Systems

As Vice President of Corporate Development, Vatsala Naageshwaran creates an environment where women are mentored and empowered to succeed personally and professionally. Vatsala values each employee and has an open-door policy to help understand industry trends, and improvements in employee roles. She continuously supports the next generation of innovators with a commitment to Biocom, UCSD, CalPoly and PIMA student internship programs, and Torrey Pines High School’s Synthetic Biology Club. She works to shatter the glass ceiling with her involvement in the San Diego Chamber of Commerce and the San Diego Women of Influence. Through these programs Vatsala stands out as a leader, expressing care for colleagues, customers, students and industry. Vatsala values a commitment to science and is always looking for an opportunity to teach, learn from, and challenge those around her for a better tomorrow.

Meredith Perry, Director of Pharmaceutics | Catalent San Diego

During her 15 years in the drug development field, Meredith Perry contributed to the development of novel medicines in the oncology, mental health, insomnia, and digital medicine fields. She helped build one of the largest internship programs in San Diego. She works to bring women to STEM in many ways: recruiting on college campuses, development and training of interns, mentoring employees and developing managers. In a field dominated by men, more than half of Meredith’s team are women. That trend continues into management as 6 of her 11 team members are women. Meredith climbed the scientific corporate ladder and reached back to create positions for women within her organization.

2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Life Sciences

Thermo Fisher Scientific is a proud sponsor of Athena. As the world leader in serving science, we share Athena’s commitment to the advancement of women in STEM.

Irit Rappley, Protein Homeostasis Lead, Neuroscience & Imaging Department | Celgene Corporation

In an industry typically dominated at the highest level by men, Dr. Irit Rappley has taken steps to mentor and guide women in the industry. Recognizing a tendency among female scientists to shy away from taking credit for their accomplishments, Dr. Rappley set out to encourage women scientists to ensure they get the recognition they deserve. She often mentors younger women in the industry to help them appreciate the importance of networking for career growth. Dr. Rappley has been active in the Association for Women in Science, reaching out to the business community to help raise funds to support AWIS’s activities and goals. She also volunteers to mentor women students at UCSD through its mentoring program for women in science. To demystify science for younger children, Dr. Rappley routinely speaks at school events, helping kids learn about careers in science, teaching them to think critically, and answering science-related questions.

Stella Sarraf, Ph.D., CEO & Founder | Amydis & Spinogenix

As a former researcher and venture capitalist, Stella Sarraf entered entrepreneurship and created two companies. Stella serves as an exemplary model for women in life sciences. A personal experience with Alzheimer’s led to the founding of Amydis in 2013. Its mission is to develop a non-invasive ophthalmic test to identify patients who are at risk for amyloid-associated diseases before irreversible brain damage occurs. In 2016, Stella founded Spinogenix to develop neuro-restorative therapeutics for traumatic brain injury and neurological diseases with synaptic dysfunction. Despite being a woman in a male-dominated industry, Stella continues to be a visionary leader. Asked to share her secret for success, she commented, “You need grit”. Stella holds six patents and seven publications. She’s a member of Biocom, The American Association for the Advancement of Science and The American Chemical Society.

Sara Zaknoen, President | ZED Strategic Consulting

As Chief Medical Officer for several San Diego companies, Dr. Sara Zaknoen consistently hired, trained, mentored and promoted women. She hired and mentored all-women teams leading to successful initiation and completion of First-In-Man studies of cancer drugs. While at Novartis Pharmaceuticals, she served as an Industry member of the Friends of Cancer Research Foundation working towards the inclusion of women and minorities in clinical cancer trials. An active member of Athena since 2009, she also serves on the Athena Foundation Board, which provides scholarships to young women pursuing undergraduate studies in STEM. As an active participant in Board activities, she serves as a role model annually for Athena scholarship winners. She is also a member of the San Diego Opera Board, providing leadership for fundraising activities that support the Opera’s Educational programs that reach more than 7,500 students in San Diego annually.
Michelle Bunn is a driving force in increasing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) opportunities for women in the community. Michelle revived Girls Day Out in San Diego in 2013. She continues to partner with the Society of Women Engineers at SDSU and local STEM community partners to provide one hundred middle school and high school girls and parents with STEM resources, each year. She hosted presentations about increasing affordable STEM events for girls at national conferences and at the CDE’s STEM/STEAM Symposium. Additionally, she is an active member of the STEM Ecosystem’s Women in STEM working group. As the Director of SDSU’s College of Engineering Femineer Program, Michelle Bunn is committed to significantly increasing opportunities for high school and middle school women students to explore STEM. As the Affiliate Director of Project Lead The Way (PLTW) at SDSU, Michelle oversees and directs the organization and management of the teacher training and professional development programs and other locations in the PLTW California network.

Rommie Amaro is co-founder and director of the Drug Design Data Resource, co-director of the UCSD Center for Translational Drug Discovery, co-director for the Visible Molecular Cell Consortium, and director of the National Biomedical Computation Resource. She’s graduated two women graduate students and supported many aspiring women scientists in the pursuit of their careers. Rommie started a high school outreach program aimed at educating the next generation of women scientists in computational chemistry, called the BioChemCore program. Rommie also started a company called Actavalon, producing drugs to target a p53 cancer mutation.

Stacey Brydges, Associate Teaching Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry | University of California, San Diego

An Associate Teaching Professor in Chemistry and Biochemistry at UCSD, Dr. Stacey Brydges merged her interests in chemical research and education at graduate, undergraduate and pre-college levels by focusing on curriculum development, pedagogical reform, and K-21 programming. She is dedicated to issues of access to and retention in STEM education and careers, particularly for women and URMs. At UCSD, she served as a member and Chair of the Diversity and Outreach Committee in Chemistry and was appointed to the Task Force for the Status of Women in the Physical Sciences. She secured federal funding for, and leads programs aimed at recruiting, training, and retaining underrepresented groups in STEM. As a member of Expanding Your Horizons San Diego, Stacey worked with other women scientists and educators to plan and host an annual conference, engaging five hundred girls in grades 6-10 from SD County in workshops with local STEM professionals. This included bilingual programs for parents, guardians and teachers with information about supporting student’s journeys through college and a STEM career.

Michelle Bunn, Affiliate Director | San Diego State University PLTW & Femineer Program

Joylyn Darnell, Executive Director, Institute for Leadership Synergy | National University

Joylyn Darnell is co-founder and Chief Instigation Officer for the Institute for Leadership Synergy at National University, which launched in January 2018. The Institute’s mission is to train one million women in the next five years to be effective SMART Power leaders. It seeks to recruit an equal number of males to be advocates, sponsors and champions for inclusive, SMART Power leadership by providing worldwide access to research, education, training, and community. Joylyn’s unique talent of forging new paths with whatever-it-takes determination allowed her to develop a business case for the Institute to bring SMART power leadership to a global audience through National University’s well established online learning platform. Joylyn is a 2007 Graduate of LEAD San Diego. Through this program, Joylyn developed a business and marketing plan for transcender Youth Arts Project, a non-profit working with multi-racial, inner-city youth.

Katherine Kantardjieff, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics | California State University, San Marcos

Dr. Katherine Kantardjieff is the founding dean of the College of Science and Mathematics at California State University San Marcos. Nationally, only 16% of science deans are women. Trailblazers like Katherine help move the needle forward and ensure greater gender parity in this important field. Under her leadership, CSM increased 131% in size, and the college continues to develop innovative programs in biotechnology, cybersecurity, EngiBeering™, and most recently, engineering. From
concept to degree she brought an engineering program to CSUSM in less than four years. To help create pathways for women in engineering, she partnered with Dr. Anna Woodcock, an adjunct professor of psychology whose research focuses on the contextual factors that promote and reinforce social disparities of women in STEM. She joined Athena's Board of Directors in 2018. She’s committed to understanding the needs of the region to ensure colleges continually graduate talented students who are workforce ready.

Debra Kimberling, STEM Career Advocate & Speaker | Society of Women Engineers

Throughout her career, Debra Kimberling has devoted herself as a “STEMinist Advocate” to empower the San Diego community. She’s a Fellow of the Society of Women Engineers and a past president of SWE San Diego, as well as a mechanical engineer who paved the way for women engineers throughout her 35-year career in industry, government and academia. A member of the San Diego STEM Ecosystem, she championed the adoption of a STEM role model database through the “Women in STEM” workgroup. She was one of the first woman Navy civilian certified divers conducting government work and one of the few women faculty in the School of Engineering Technology at Purdue University. Debra made substantial contributions towards advancing women engineers within Solar Turbines and, through SWE, in the engineering community. She was tireless in promoting SWE and its initiatives to educate women engineers in the workplace.

Sandra Lebron, Education Manager | San Diego Coastkeeper

In 8th grade, Sandra Lebron made up her mind to become a biologist, despite family pressure to choose a career more suitable for a woman. Sandra obtained a BS in Coastal Marine Biology and later realized instructing future generations of scientists was her passion, so she committed herself to STEM education. In 2011, Sandra moved to San Diego and became an education instructor for Birch Aquarium, then joined San Diego Coastkeeper. Her tenacious, passionate approach to education reinvigorated Project SWELL, the organization’s K-6 science curriculum. As Coastkeeper’s education manager, Sandra educated thousands of young San Diegans, trained hundreds of teachers, and directly mentored 18 young women through an environmental education internship. These interns are empowered to develop lessons and take ownership of their projects. Sandra also sits on the education committee of the San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative. It works to connect children with nature and environmental education, with a goal of promoting STEM and environmental stewardship.

Kris Mooney, Director of Education | Fleet Science Center

Kris Mooney is an exemplary leader in the field of informal science education, particularly in the advancement of women in science. In the last five years Kris has grown the education team to represent women. She advocates representation of women and people of color in the Fleet’s marketing and educational materials, understanding that visual representation is integral in how the organization embodies a culture of valuing these groups. Kris is an enthusiastic supporter of the San Diego STEM Ecosystem, and specifically the Women in STEM working group. Under her leadership the Fleet Science Center has become a source for educational programs geared specifically towards young women. The BE WISE program engages women scientists as mentors with over 500 young women with opportunities to encourage these women in the sciences and allow women scientists to give back to their community.

Dr. Youwen Ouyang, Professor, Computer Science | California State University San Marcos

Dr. Ouyang initiated CSUSM’s 12 hour bi-annual Women’s Hackathon in 2014. It has served over 350 young women from over 25 high schools and colleges in southern California. Dr. Ouyang serves as a mentor for students through their research, design, and development of their solutions. Dr. Ouyang served on the program committee for the SoCal Celebration of Women in Computing since 2014 and was the program co-chair for its 2016 conference. She also served on the committee for the Consortium for Computing Science in Colleges Southwest Region since 2010 and hosted the 2013 regional conference at CSUSM. Dr. Ouyang led multiple projects focusing on STEM teaching and learning in elementary and middle schools by providing professional development for over 150 teachers in Southern California as well as hosting student summer camps for over 400 students from underserved populations. She has supported women STEM majors, especially those with a focus on computer science, through meetings, mentoring, and supervising their Masters’ programs.

Shira Robbins, MD, Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology | University of California, San Diego

As the Educational Director of Pediatric Ophthalmology, Dr. Robbins leads 90 educational events every year with medical students, residents and fellows serving as a STEM catalyst for the San Diego community. She is a role model for women, both through her own career path, as well as through inspiring, mentoring and leading by example for women within medicine and ophthalmic surgery. After joining the faculty at the University of California San Diego in 2004, she rose to Full Professorship where she is one of 3 women clinical faculty out of a department of 35. Over the past 5 years, Dr. Robbins personally educated 135 physicians (51 of them women medical students, residents, fellows) in hands-on training at the UCSD clinic. Dr. Robbins is a sought-after mentor for women in many fields of medicine and as one of the few women Ophthalmologists at UCSD, she is often the first contact a women medical student makes with her department to explore interest in ophthalmology.
2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Service

Inge Bear, Chief Development Officer | Scientist.com

Inge Bear’s philosophy is, “If there is a problem, there is also a solution.” As a woman executive responsible for hiring over 100 women during her career, Inge embraces being a role model at work and in the community. Inge builds diverse teams with empathy being a core leadership value. She continually seeks to mentor and intimately understand each team member. Inge champions an inclusive work environment and mentors men and women to create a space built on trust and mutual respect. Inge is the Co-founder and Chair of the UC San Diego Patient & Family Advisory Council, Women & Infant Services. Created in 2011 with Susie Guidi, Director of UCSD’s OB/GYN services, its 40 members work to improve the safety, quality and overall care experience for women and their families at UCSD Health. Inge volunteers on the Patient Safety Committee, serving as the voice of the patient regarding quality and safety.

Amy Bergen, Vice President, Business Development | The Leadership Edge

Amy Bergen has dedicated the last decade of her career to supporting women leaders in life sciences and tech sectors. During her 7-year tenure as Executive Director of Athena, she was instrumental in the organization’s transition under UCSD’s Extension to an independent nonprofit organization while growing its membership portfolio by over 54 percent in the first 2 years. She recruited over 300 executives to lead voluntary roles for the organization including the Board of Directors, committee chairs and members, mentors, facilitators and speakers. Now at The Leadership Edge, Amy connects life science organizations with professional development resources for their teams. Amy helped create a new program, Leadership EDGE for Women, designed to create a more robust pipeline of women leaders and support gender diversity at executive and board levels. She also founded the North County Women’s Leadership Network and has been a speaker for Women in Bio, Illumina Women’s Network Group and others with a focus on developing women leaders in the life sciences sector.

Alisa Beyer, CEO & Founder | LemonTree Partners

Since starting her first business at the age of 29, Alisa Beyer built and sold five companies, committing to employing, mentoring and inspiring hundreds of women employees. Alisa has published many articles on life as an entrepreneur that shares the good, bad, ugly and brilliance of it all. She writes a monthly column for The Huffington Post on the world of entrepreneurship as a woman, a wife and mother of three. Six months ago, Megan O’Meara published an article on a pivotal role that Alisa played in inspiring and mentoring her as a young woman in business. Alisa speaks, writes and mentors women regularly. She serves on the Advisory Board of Global Cosmetic Industry and the Women Entrepreneurs Exchange Network. Alisa shares how to build and grow companies, while supporting women.

Brandy Bullen, CEO | Sequoia Consulting Group

As founder and CEO of Sequoia, Brandy has built a stable and profitable business from 2 to 100 employees in less than 5 years. Roughly 50 percent of the organization and 6 out of 7 of its top leaders are women. Brandy seeks out strong and capable individuals without bias. She aims to understand the strengths of her team to help foster their career success. Brandy offers a platform for experts in their fields to learn, grow, and demonstrate their expertise throughout the sector. She encourages career development and fosters personal growth company-wide. Brandy organizes events and promotes connection within the life sciences industry. In addition, Brandy is organizing and sponsoring a fundraising event through the Sequoia Gives Back program, to raise money for childhood oncology initiatives.

Debbie Chelberg, Director of Human Resources | Marsh & McLennan Agency

As Director of Human Resources for MMA’s West region, Debbie Chelberg oversees the HR function for over 700 employees across five offices. Her interactions with MMA colleagues makes Debbie a stand out. Her empathetic and thoughtful style inspires many, and she directly supports the advancement of women. Leveraging her 20+ year career, she advocates for and mentors more colleagues than almost anyone else in the company. In 2018, Debbie became the Chair of MMA’s GROW (Growth in Relationships & Opportunities for Women) Program. GROW provides MMA’s women equal opportunities through empowerment and education. Debbie’s passion for creating mentorship opportunities is an invaluable quality that impacts everyone at MMA. She’s also active in one of GROW’s subcommittees, the Mentoring Program, which helps mentees develop skills and abilities, create self-awareness, and identify future goals and opportunities for advancement. Many previous women mentees are now mentors, providing their own advice and demonstrating leadership.

Denise Hummel, Chief Innovation Officer | Lead Inclusively, Inc.

When she decided to begin a new company, Lead Inclusively, Inc., Denise Pirrotti Hummel, J.D. determined that she wanted to involve more women, so she sought out and recruited an executive team comprised of 75 percent women to lead the company. The company’s focus is helping companies to institutionalize the human resources processes and practices that ensure a higher percentage of hires are women and a higher percentage of women are advancing into executive leadership. Denise and her team assist clients in the life sciences and high-tech sectors to create processes supporting a mandate of gender-diverse candidate slates and interviewing panels for all positions. Actively including women in executive succession planning and training the entire workforce to be more inclusive of women and diverse individuals is also a featured service. Denise is a San Diego chapter board member of the Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association and the National Diversity Council, serving on the educational steering committees for both to influence local programming on critical issues relating to women and diversity particularly in healthcare and STEM.

In Memoriam – Will Marré, Founder | The Leadership Smart Power Academy

Will Marré had a passion that revolved around women’s leadership advocacy, gender-based strengths, igniting innovation and speaking. Will dedicated his time, energy and focus to advancing women in leadership, developing women leaders through his SMART Power Academy workshops and through the creation of the Institute for Leadership Synergy at National University. Will often said, “We insist on women’s leadership parity because it is the only proven path to sustainable prosperity. One woman at a time, A Million SMART WOMEN we will change the future for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. Indeed, the future is women. If it isn’t, we have no future.”

Sadly, Will passed away recently.
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2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Service

Taylor Moyer, CEO | ManagedLab Services

Women business leaders in the biotech industry are not yet as prevalent as we would like. However, CEOs like Taylor Moyer are helping to shift that trend. Taylor’s path from a lab tech to a successful entrepreneur has given her the experience to provide guidance and mentorship. As CEO of ManagedLab Services, Taylor has hired and continues to provide opportunities to many women. Her leadership is evident in the women lab managers she employs. She is passionate about, “creating careers and not just jobs for women.” Taylor demonstrates leadership in the Southern California community as President of the San Diego Entrepreneur Exchange. She’s also the CEO and Founder of the 501(c)(3) Boots in Bio, which is committed to helping veterans get jobs in biotech and pharma.

Stephanie Seidman, Partner | Dentons US LLP

Stephanie Seidman hires, promotes and mentors talented women, empowering them in a practice area dominated by men. At any given time, at least half of her technology specialists are women and currently all her technology specialists are women. Stephanie has built one of the largest bio-pharma patent prosecution practices in the region and trained many San Diego-based patent professionals. For more than twenty-nine years, she has been instrumental in nurturing the careers of dozens of women. Stephanie has been a long-standing member and contributor to the Athena scholarships for graduating high school seniors. In recent years, she has been actively engaged with the local chapter of Women in Bioscience (WIB), often sponsoring or hosting their events. She has addressed attendees at five BIO conventions, and is an author and often-quoted speaker on public policy and health issues.

Tali Tuchin, Special Counsel | Mintz Levin

Tali Tuchin made a conscious commitment to advise and mentor women attorneys through a mentorship program within Mintz Levin and get them up to know junior women attorneys to provide them with opportunities, experience, training and advice. She was the first person in the corporate department of her prior employers to work part-time after having children and created a model for women to do the same. She advises women at Mintz Levin seeking to make similar work-family choices. Tali is involved in the Lawyers Club of San Diego, a local organization that promotes women in the law, and has been an Athena member, including a member of a Forum for Executive Women group, for 8 years. Tali is also involved in informal networks for women attorneys that seek to advance women in the industry.

Carla Vallone, President | Girls Inc. of San Diego County

Carla Vallone serves as a champion for women and girls in her professional life and through her service to San Diego’s non-profit community. Carla is the President of Portavove PR, a public relations firm she founded in 2011 to serve business-to-business clients. As a team leader, Carla empowers her employees to grow in their professional roles by investing time and energy to push them beyond their boundaries and increasing their responsibilities. Carla is an excellent influence and serves as a mentor to the women she employs. She serves as the President of the Board of Trustees and Acting Executive Director for Girls, Inc. of San Diego County. Under Carla’s leadership, the organization has increased enrollment to serve more than 400 girls annually and increased annual program hours by more than 50%. Carla’s work and dedication to women and girls in San Diego County has been recognized in many publications.

Amy Wood, Partner | Cooley

Amy Wood serves as an inspiration to women in pursuit of leadership within American Lawyer 100 top ranked firms. Amy has mentored women associates and staff by providing an example of leadership and excellence at her craft. She has served as a speaker at 35+ events nationally and launched a webcast series, known as “Comp Talks” for women associates at Cooley to showcase their expertise. Amy encourages junior women associates to proactively seek out business development and speaking opportunities that contribute to the growth of the practice and more women associates spearheading new client development. This resulted in one mentee making partner. Amy helped establish a collaborative culture, encouraging both men and women to take part in business development to advance their careers.
2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Technology

Michiko Araki Kelley, Vice President, New Business Group | Sony Electronics

Michiko Kelley proactively engages her team within the San Diego, Escondido and Culver City Unified School district through pilot programs that introduce Sony’s products in after school programs. She serves on the Board of Directors of Classroom of the Future Foundation. Michiko is responsible for the creation, initiation and leadership of the Sony Team of Enterprise Parents, a working parent network group. In addition, Michiko is a mentor to many women, from departments she’s led and in cross-functional areas. She’s a frequent guest speaker for Sony’s women’s networking group sharing her career path and lessons learned. She is an advocate for her women colleagues, nominating several to participate in the Women Unlimited Leadership Program. Michiko is generous with her time and talents, encouraging an open and safe environment for employees and their managers to discuss career development and action plans.

Alex Balazs, Chief Architect | Intuit, Inc.

Alex Balazs is Chief Architect of Intuit and a member of the Executive Advisory Board of Tech Women at Intuit (TWI). TWI’s primary goal is to make Intuit the #1 choice for women technologists while creating an environment where women are empowered and diversity is embraced. Within the last five years, he increased the number of women promoted to software architects by 2x. In addition, he set hiring goals that ensured diversity in Intuit teams. Alex is involved with Girl Develop It SD. He works with Intuit members of the GDISD leadership team to host and sponsor events at Intuit’s campus. Alex encourages other Intuit senior level leaders to get involved in shaping computer science curriculums and programs by being part of the CS advisory board at RIT, Rochester Institute of Technology.

Kimbra Brookstein, Sr. Program Manager, Tech Women at Intuit | Intuit, Inc.

Kimbra Brookstein focuses on mentoring and partnering opportunities in the tech community with a goal of creating pathways for underrepresented groups, especially women. Kimbra is a co-founding member and the Community Marketing Manager for DBC, an 18-week coding boot camp for career changers. She works with organizations like Girl Develop It, GeekGirl, PyLadies, Django Girls, Rails Bridge, EvoNexus, the San Diego Regional EDC, San Diego Startup Week and Startup San Diego to provide avenues for education and mentorship by creating safe spaces for women to learn how to code. In 2017, Kimbra was co-captain of San Diego Startup Week’s Developer Track. As the Senior Program Manager of Tech Women @ Intuit, Kimbra creates strategy and programming to attract, retain and advance women technologists. She is not only responsible for building community on campus, but she leads local programs like Lean in Circles, custom development workshops and on-site events.

Ioana Diana Broome, Senior Test Engineer | General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc.

Ioana Diana Broome’s community involvement featured serving on different engineering councils and fostering professional relationships to mentor high school girls and young women. With a B.S. in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering and an M.S. in Aerospace Engineering, Ioana was the first woman engineer at Finite Element Analysis. Ioana serves as Chair of the San Diego section of the AIAA, and as a Board member on WIN@GA, an Employee Resource Group. Ioana believes that being a strong woman who follows her goals is one of the most important services she can do for her daughter, young girls and all the women who paved the road before us. Throughout her career, she’s always believed in giving back and paying it forward as a way to advance society.

Aliza Carpio, Tech Evangelist | Intuit, Inc.

Aliza Carpio is a Technology Evangelist at Intuit and she was recently given the title of “Tech Whisperer” in San Diego Magazine’s January 2018 issue. Aliza believes that to create the change she wants to see in the tech community, she needs to be a role model in the SD tech community. She is the sole female board member at EvoNexus, a San Diego startup incubator, where she hopes to continue to influence its board and members to build a diverse leadership team. At Intuit San Diego, she created the following: an established speaker bureau of technologists consisting of 50% women in tech; a mentoring program that matches female Computer Science candidates with senior level female software engineers; and the Intuit SD apprentice software engineer program with a goal to increase diversity in SWE teams at Intuit. In its first year, 75% of the Intuit SD apprentice team members were women.
Rashmi Char, Vice President, Engineering | Qualcomm Technologies, Inc.

Athena Board Member Rashmi Char uses insights from her 20-year career at Qualcomm to help others achieve their career goals. She leads a global team of 500+ engineers while simultaneously mentoring women STEM talent and promoting women in the workplace. She hosts a speakership group for women, providing a safe environment where they refine presentation skills, capitalize on networking opportunities and work with mentors on career advice. Rashmi provides her group with highly visible opportunities and encourages them to break their own “internal glass ceiling”. Both women and men in Rashmi’s organization appreciate opportunities to lead prime projects with visibility and scope, along with personal support from Rashmi. She was one of 8 women selected across Qualcomm to be a member of the Women’s Leadership Council. Rashmi represents Qualcomm at conferences, speaking on panels around strategies for women in technology and sharing her personal journey. Rashmi recognizes she’s in a unique leadership position in the tech industry and cares deeply about sharing her own path to success.

Jaye Connolly-LaBelle, Chairman & CEO | RippleNami, Inc.

Jaye Connolly-LaBelle is a speaker and mentor for college and graduate students headed into the workforce. She engages in mentorship through programs at USD, San Diego State, Claremont McKenna and UCSD. Jaye has a passion for business and a pursuit for making a difference. She built a 30-year career dedicated to finance, M&A and taking companies to the next level through operational acumen, team building and leadership. Jaye is well respected by her peers and employees and brings a focused and creative management approach to scaling companies. Through inspiring candor, humor and business savvy, Jaye fosters an open, honest and frank workplace. Her employees thrive from the leadership examples that she sets. As CEO of RippleNami, this marks the fourth turnaround she’s spearheaded. Jaye holds leadership roles spanning the technology and healthcare sectors.

Kelly Davis, Vice President of Corporate Strategy, Planning & Control | Sony Electronics

Kelly Davis is a finance and marketing leader with more than 20 years of experience in the consumer electronics industry. She is an active participant in Sony’s Women of Action, Vision and Empowerment (WAVE) group. It aspires to encourage opportunities for professional growth through leadership development, mentoring and networking for Women at Sony. As a result of Kelly’s leadership and passion, Sony Electronics is recognized locally and nationally as a “Best Place to Work.” Kelly continues to provide her team with support to develop programs to make Sony an even better place to work, particularly in the areas of development, inclusion and innovation. Kelly sponsors the development effort that focuses on leadership skills, business acumen, training, and management 101.

Eiling Ferdaws, Program Manager | Qualcomm Technologies, Inc.

Eiling served as a role model for women by delivering the latest and greatest invention and in sharing the daily habits that make a difference. She mentors, inspires and empowers women by setting up quarterly meet-ups to promote collaboration among women in her department, and discussing challenges women face in the workplace and how to solve them. When she started her career she quickly realized that having a woman role model in a male-dominated field would be highly beneficial to her success. One of her goals is to launch a non-profit organization, Tech Gals, that aims to serve as a mentor and role model for young girls, and expose them to STEM careers.

Kathy Herring Hayashi, Senior Staff Engineer | Qualcomm Incorporated

Throughout her career in the semiconductor software industry, Kathy Herring Hayashi supports women in engineering by teaching, mentoring, presenting and planning events. Kathy contributes to the advancement of women in STEM as a leader in the IEEE Women in Engineering organization, a judge at UCSD and San Marcos hackathons, and a speaker at women’s leadership events. Kathy is the IEEE Women in Engineering (WIE) Region 6 Coordinator which represents all Women in Engineering Affinity groups in the western United States. She travels to Warsaw, Poland, Sydney, Australia, and Alaska representing

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Brittany Emal Hurd, Sr. Regional Consultant for North America and Latin America, Oracle Women's Leadership | Oracle

Brittany Emal Hurd is responsible for driving the Oracle Women's Leadership (OWL) program throughout North America and Latin America. She provides guidance to OWL community leaders and participants, champions the OWL initiative throughout Oracle in North America and Latin America and fosters partnerships with organizations focused on gender equity. OWL Communities aim to develop, engage and empower leaders to foster an inclusive and innovative workforce. Brittany touches thousands of women at Oracle with relevant content, advice and guidance. Prior to joining Oracle, Brittany worked in consulting and partnered with Fortune 500 corporations, as well as non-profits, including Genentech, Cisco, Toyota, Wells Fargo, The Walt Disney Company, Stanford University, and The Environmental Defense Fund. She recently completed a term of service on the Board of Directors for SparkSF, an organization dedicated to advancing the human rights of women and girls around the globe.

Tania Hurt, Vice President, Finance | Sony Electronics

As VP of Finance and a member of the Executive Leadership Team for Sony North America, Tania Hurt is a role model for Sony’s women employees. She built a reputation as a solid performer and as a center of excellence for her professionalism and leadership. Tania champions Sony women, nominating colleagues to participate in Sony’s Global Leadership Accounting Program, as well as creating opportunities for younger colleagues in new roles. In addition, Tania gives back to the community by pursuing her passions in education, healthy living and elder care. Every week, Tania volunteers to read to more than 390 students in the Poway School District. These sessions go far beyond reading a story, as they create life-long readers and learners. She also participates with the Meals-on-Wheels program through Sony. As part of the Executive Leadership Team, Tania leverages the opportunity to demonstrate work-life-balance, community service and mentorship.

Virginia Jacobs, Senior Financial Analyst | Intuit, Inc.

Virginia Jacobs serves as co-chair of the Intuit Women’s Network (IWN) whose mission is to foster Intuit women through advancing capabilities, building confidence, and enabling connectedness in communities. Virginia manages the planning, coordinating, and organization of on-campus IWN events and volunteer initiatives to benefit women in the community. She also facilitates partnerships with key organizations to access programming and networking in the broader community. Virginia seeks out women in the community who are making bold decisions and creating thriving careers in male-dominated arenas to speak at benchmark IWN events for International Women’s Day and “Week of Service”. Virginia is working towards creating more programming that will help women reach the next step of their careers.

Neal Manowitz, Vice President, Sales & Marketing, Digital Imaging Division | Sony Electronics

Supporting community outreach, employee network groups and his business division, Neal Manowitz helps to support Sony's national partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of America. Neal provides his team with support by developing programs around areas of development, inclusion and innovation. Sony is committed to developing future leaders, and Neal is a part of this effort. In 2017, Neal volunteered to serve as an executive sponsor in Sony's Talent and Organizational Development initiative, called Fast Forward. Fast Forward is an employee driven and management supported business initiative focused on talent development. Sony recently launched a Leadership Education and Development program, for which Neal nominated a woman colleague on his team. Piloted by 16 employees, the program is specifically designed for managers who would benefit from leadership training.

Rocio Montes, Staff Engineer | Intuit, Inc.

In her role as staff software engineer, Rocio Montes mentors early career software engineers at Intuit and leads the company's recruitment strategy with various universities. The recruitment team's efforts have led to a 16% increase in women tech hires since 2014.

She is a member of the Tech Women @ Intuit (TWI) core team, a mentor in the TWI mentorship program and one of the drivers of Intuit's apprenticeship program. She is a mentor to women in tech college students at Rochester Institute of Technology, Women in Computing Science. Rocio is an active mentor for UCSD SHPEtinas (Society of Hispanic Professional engineers) where she partners to provide workshops on preparing for tech interviews,
2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Technology

Saura Naderi, Staff Government Affairs Analyst | Qualcomm Incorporated

Saura Naderi serves as a role model, connecting peers to design a thoughtful yet cost conscience space for kids and engineers that break engineering stereotypes. At Qualcomm, Saura implemented a program like UCSD’s myLab Program, known as Thinkabit Lab™. She paves the way for women in STEM by planting seeds early in the pipeline, strategically sharing the Thinkabit Lab framework as a vital resource to diversify and empower future engineers. She leads educational programs like First Robotics, where over 30,000 San Diego elementary kids join teams to learn healthy values like mindfulness and communication. From 2014 to 2016, Saura served as mentor at WeTech Q-Camps, with 30 girls to participate in an intensive summer STEM camp. By introducing technologies and careers they might not have been aware of, Saura believes that engineering is a medium to create.

Karla Pinckes, Associate General Counsel, Assistant Corporate Secretary | WD-40

Throughout her career, Karla Pinckes demonstrates a strong passion to mentor women in the legal field. Leadership and positive influence are key drivers of her success and daily focus. She received the 2016 Women in Wealth Award for Transactions Attorney of the Year by Wealth and Finance Magazine, a publication recognizing women at the top of their field. She consistently supports the growth of her team through education and peer discussions. Karla is driven by meaningful, innovative and challenging work and her dedication to excellence has inspired others to be their best. Since 2011, Karla has served on the Board of Directors for The New Childrens Museum, which seeks to inspire creativity and innovation in children and encourages basic STEM concepts via play-based activities. Karla is committed to instilling leadership in her team and mentoring women in and outside of the legal profession.

Susan Poser, Senior Director, Insight & Customer Strategy | Oracle

Susan Poser serves as Oracle’s Sr. Director, Insight Global Operations and Program Office as well as the co-leader of Oracle’s Women’s Leadership Initiative in San Diego. As a global initiative, the mission of Oracle Women’s Leadership is to develop, engage, and empower generations of Oracle women to foster an inclusive and innovative workforce. Susan is also one of the co-founders and Co-Chair of Oracle’s Professional Asian Leadership (OPAL) Community and executive sponsor for OPAL Santa Monica. With over 25 years of experience in high tech companies, Susan’s areas of expertise include women's leadership development, performance improvement, organization development, leadership, strategic planning, diversity and inclusion, mentoring and change management. As a champion of collaborative workplace behavior, Susan has mentored dozens of students in Oracle’s College Intern Program. Susan has also mentored dozens of San Diego State University undergraduate students.

Kimberly Rinder, Director, Contracts & Procurement Operations | General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc.

Kimberly Rinder is a role model for women in the Aerospace and Defense industry, specifically Supply Chain and Contracts. She began her career as a buyer for General Dynamics Convair Division in 1991, and 27 years later serves as the Director, Contracts & Procurement Operations, at General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. Kimberly’s leadership and management of GA-ASI’s small business and competition advocacy programs has increased contracts awarded to woman-owned small businesses. Additionally, she is a strong advocate for small businesses, including woman-owned entities, and is an active contributor as both a participant and speaker in government-sponsored Industry Day conferences. Kimberly has been a member of Toastmasters where she learned the art of public speaking and the National Contracts Management Association where she uses her speaking skills to inspire and inform others and shares knowledge and experience in her field.

Sree Santosh, Senior Manager, Online Technology | Sony Online Entertainment

As the Senior Manager of Online Technology at Sony Online Entertainment, Sree Santosh has a demanding role leading a talented team of engineers at Sony’s PlayStation Network. In addition, Sree launched the Women in Tech at Sony (WITS) chapter in Sony's Sorrento Valley office. WITS is an employee-resource group aimed at bringing together women and their allies in the workplace and offering development, mentorship, networking and outreach opportunities. Sree also launched the Women Who Code San Diego chapter in November of 2017. Women Who Code’s mission is to inspire women to excel in technology careers. She continues to drive that effort as a Director for Women Who Code where she helps lead strategy for coding resources, networking, and leadership development.

Tony Schwarz, Senior Vice President, Engineering | Qualcomm Technologies, Inc.

As the SVP of SW Engineering for Qualcomm, Tony Schwarz has been a champion and mentor for women in his organization. He emphasizes the importance of actively hiring women engineers, providing equal opportunities and empowering them to grow into strong leaders. Tony empowers women with their unique talents, passions and leadership and selects them to lead Qualcomm’s largest, most important software projects. Tony proactively kickstarted workshops and training for women to empower them to develop their careers. He attended the Grace Hopper Celebration in 2017—the world’s largest gathering of women technologists—where he spent most of his time with Qualcomm women attendees allowing them to share their concerns and career growth. Tony is involved in multiple local community boards, most notably Helen’s Closet, and the San Diego Food Bank. In addition to reflecting his compassion and humanity, it shows that a successful leader at a large company can succeed while balancing priorities of work, family and civic duty.

Did you know? Athena empowers women-led startups by facilitating partnerships with seasoned executive mentors.
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Kylie Taitano, Software Engineer 2 | Intuit, Inc.

As a core member of Tech Women at Intuit, Kylie Taitano inspires women to pursue education in STEM fields by driving Intuit’s relationship with the Girl Scouts of SD. Through that partnership, Kylie launched a mentorship program for young women called the Technovation Challenge which includes building an app, creating a business plan and creating a pitch video. Kylie presents tech talks, participates in assessing talent and provides guidance to WICS (Women in Computing Science). She has participated in Intuit’s mentorship program of UCSD WICS, where she mentors young women to make the same transition from STEM education to industry. Kylie is a software engineer at Intuit, year-round mentor to San Diego high-school students, and a founding board member of UCSD’s CSE (Computer Science Engineering) Women in Computing Board. She also participated in Hour of Code during Computer Science Week to introduce over 50 Girl Scouts to STEM.

Sara Vaz, MA, Community Relations Manager | Nordson

Sara Vaz creates a place for the women of Nordson to build a community of professional development and support. She designed and implemented the Women’s Internal Network at Nordson, the first ever employee resource group in Nordson’s 65-year history. This network has expanded across the country thanks to Sara’s leadership and advocacy. Sara has led the Women Give San Diego Membership Committee, a local philanthropy circle founded on the principles of bringing women and girls in San Diego County to economic self-sufficiency. She serves on the Board of San Diego Grantmakers, the Board of Directors of the North County Philanthropy Council and has been a long-time Board Member of the Any Body Can Youth Foundation. Sara is the only woman board member of this organization and advocates for young girls in underserved neighborhoods in Southeast San Diego. In addition, Sara is a consummate mentor through volunteerism and board leadership.

San Diego Business Journal

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2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Company of the Year

**AbacusNext**

Since Alessandra Lazama became CEO four years ago, the number of women employees increased 10x, from less than ten to more than 100. AbacusNext emphasizes gender diversity at all levels of the organization. Starting with its recruiting efforts to drive high-performing teams of women in management positions in tech support, software development, automation engineering, sales and marketing, Alessandra shares her vision at company meetings and local community events on the importance of nurturing a collegial and equitable workplace. Her focus on the financial performance and cultural advantages that come with gender diversity are driven by Gallup research showing an average of 52% higher net profits than single-gender, less-engaged teams.

**Alta Environmental**

Alta has increased women in leadership roles from by 43 percent since 2013. As a result, revenues increased by 84 percent and profitability increased by over 400 percent. Alta is an environmental consulting firm that’s experienced rapid growth, expanding from 23 employees in 2013 to 45 at the end of 2017 with plans to add 5 employees by the end of 2018. When President Lisa Kay took over daily operations, she sought out top women leaders to grow the team. Through that approach and mentoring the number of women in management, the number of women in staff consulting roles have also increased. In addition to technical conferences, Alta sponsored the “Women in Green Forum” in Los Angeles. Active referral recruitment is encouraged and rewarded with a $1000 bonus and fostered women recruiting women. Both the President and Director of Business Development mentor women in the organization, providing frequent support.

**Career Sparks**

Career Sparks is a woman-owned business and 75 percent of its team are women. It aims to create leadership opportunities for all team members by setting quarterly goals based on achievable metrics, celebrating successes and discussing areas for improvement. Women leadership opportunities include business development, client management, training & employee leadership. The team understands that the opportunities for leadership and professional growth within the business model are not limited. All employees have their own personlized professional growth plan, based on their individual goals in business development, client management, training and employee leadership. There are quarterly check-ins and promotions to celebrate success and foster leadership. Weekly groups, as well as one-on-one trainings for employees help the team grow and reach their goals more quickly. Inspirational and leadership-related books are provided and discussed as a group, in addition to encouraging other career enhancement avenues.

**Intuit**

Intuit believes a diverse workforce brings a broader range of ideas to the company. Intuit fosters a culture of innovation and uses design thinking in all aspects of its business. Intuit implemented a strategic initiative, Tech Women @ Intuit because of its belief in diversity. Senior leaders launched this initiative to increase the percentage of women technologists within the company and support them as they advance into leadership positions. Women represent almost 40 percent of senior leaders, and the C-suite includes a chief diversity officer. Intuit’s technology workforce includes women holding almost 30 percent of its U.S. engineering positions and women representing 40 percent of its board. External, Intuit builds relationships with local organizations promoting leadership opportunities for women. Its partners include Athena, Girl Develop It SD, Girls Scouts of SD, Girls In Tech SD, Girls Who Code, AnitaB.org and NCWIT.

**Oracle Corporation**

Oracle Women’s Leadership (OWL) is a global initiative running for over ten years. As part of Oracle’s overall diversity & inclusion and leadership development strategy, OWL seeks to: strengthen the leadership capability of employees, increase employee engagement and retention, strengthen relationships within and across lines of business, build stronger customer relationships and give back to the local and global communities. This initiative began in 2006, when a group of senior women leaders met to discuss the advantages of having a special interest group of women dedicated to improving the leadership skills of women throughout the business. Quickly the word spread that this group had formed and many other women from other lines of business joined in. There are now more than 94 Oracle Women’s Leadership Communities across the globe. Community leaders further develop their leadership skills through development programs, designed to support both genders.

**Point Loma Nazarene University**

At Point Loma Nazarene University, women chair all STEM related departments. This includes the Departments of Biology, Chemistry, Mathematical, Information, Computer Sciences, and Physics and Engineering. Leadership and development opportunities for female students, faculty, and staff at PLNU abound - this is especially evident in the STEM disciplines at the university. As a Christian university this intentionality is rooted in a theology that supports the empowerment of women leaders. Since 1998, PLNU has hosted Perspectives on Science, a monthly seminar series for middle and high school science teachers. PLNU also hosts an annual Science Honors Weekend for high-achieving high school seniors, designed to encourage students to pursue their scientific interests and gifts. For the last three years, more than half the attendees were female. Fostering inclusivity, implementing family friendly work policies, providing strong female role models and mentors and creating meaningful programs encourages all students to consider and pursue STEM careers.

**Sony Electronics**

Sony offers a strong supportive culture that promotes trust, rewards employees’ efforts, and ensures meaningful work. Designated programs to support women include WISE, WITTS, Women Unlimited, and Women of Action, Vision and Empowerment. Each encourages opportunities for professional growth through leadership development, mentoring and networking. Sony is a sponsor of North County Chamber Women’s Week and has been a partner for nine years. They educate their employees on the importance of women in leadership through the Growth@sony leadership development program. These are trainings and webinars offered throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. Sony participated in the Human Rights campaign for 11 years and has won awards during the last three years. Sony’s president and COO drives diversity and inclusion as a business imperative and drives the message that this is key to ROI.

**UC San Diego Center for Research on Educational Excellence, Assessment & Teaching Excellence (CREATE) CREATE STEM Initiative**

The CREATE STEM Success Initiative (CSSI) launched to connect UCSD’s STEM expertise and resources with the community to improve the K-20 STEM education pipeline. Founded in 1997 and after Proposition 209 gutted affirmative action in California, CREATE connects university resources to historically under-served K-12 San Diego education communities. The CSSI’s collective energy focuses on key areas of regional need, as young people - particularly students of color and girls - “leak” out of the pipeline to degrees and jobs in STEM. CSSI team members and school district liaisons identify K-12 STEM learning opportunities, then unleash the energies of UCSD faculty, students and staff to co-create new learning opportunities for thousands of underrepresented students and educators. The result: development and support of a wide range of outreach activities for thousands of students and professional development support to hundreds of teachers who serve hundreds of high-need students in STEM. The CSSI team has created a successful model for connecting on- and off-campus colleagues across boundaries of income, race, gender and job title to support the highest need schools, educators, students, and community programs in the region.

**Viasat**

Viasat is committed to gender diversity and developing the next generation of women leaders starting in early education. For 6 years, Viasat hosts a field trip for 120 women entering 7th grade who show an aptitude for STEM to the Viasat campus, showcasing careers in STEM and women working at Viasat. For the past 3 years, Viasat has been a Gold sponsor of Grace Hopper, the world’s largest gathering of women technologists, featuring women leaders, recruiting interns and graduates. Viasat hired 14 women at the intern & graduate level from this conference and these women have gone on to be coached within Viasat, and to lead Women in Technology initiatives internally. Several Viasat women executives sit in traditionally-male roles, fostering development of women leaders. In 2017, Viasat introduced its first woman board member.
Join us as we honor up-and-coming leaders under the age of 40 at our first San Diego Next Top Business Leaders Under 40 reception and awards presentation. The San Diego Business Journal will honor 40 young professionals — leaders, change makers and innovators — who are making waves, creating impact and leaving a positive mark on the San Diego community. We’re looking for the next generation of key executives and entrepreneurs.

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Daré Bioscience, Inc.

Daré Bioscience recruits top women talent to lead the company in a strategic fashion that promotes visibility of women leaders in biotech. In an industry with only 20.9% of women holding executive positions at large companies and 13.9% at small-medium sized companies, Daré employs a predominantly women-led team. With a woman CEO and CFO, and women in key clinical development and medical roles, it executes its vision as a biotech by women, for women. As Daré expands options and improves outcomes in women’s reproductive health, its corporate culture promotes work-life balance and enables women innovators to thrive. Daré removed the requirement of prior public company board service from its board search requirements so that women who otherwise have an appropriate background to contribute meaningfully on the board won’t be disqualified from the candidate pool, as is often the case in public company board searches.

NotesFirst, Inc.

NotesFirst+ is a woman-led start-up company, NotesFirst recognizes the importance of having a diverse team by hiring women in leadership roles for their board and their executive sales team. By providing employees avenues, like conferences, events and seminars to learn more about women leaders, as well as celebrating women team members who champion other women, NotesFirst creates an environment that encourages and gives importance to women leaders. The NotesFirst leadership team is always seeking to learn more from women in leadership roles through its network of advisors, investors and community contacts. NotesFirst’s team consists of 20% of women, including the CEO, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sales Engineer and Product - UI Design Lead. It continues to seek more opportunities to increase diversity in the team via hiring, continuing education and networking events.

Trial.ai Inc.

Co-Founder Kim Walpole encourages women to step up and take leadership roles in areas in which they are most passionate. She has spoken on several panels at universities and at various conferences and is a strong advocate for budding women leaders. She has also served as an advisor to several local startups. At Trial.ai, the focus on the importance of women in leadership is not just an education piece. The concept of equality is integral to its culture. Kim spent 12 years of her career in leadership development and is highly focused on that element within Trials.ai. Trial.ai makes a diligent effort to make sure women are encouraged to step up and take on leadership opportunities. Their first intern in 2017 was a woman artificial intelligence major at Stanford who turned down an internship at SpaceX because she felt the leadership and training opportunities at Trials.ai were superior to those at SpaceX. In 2018, 3 out of 4 of Trials.ai’s interns are women.

Formalloy Additive Manufacturing Technologies

Formalloy transitioned to a Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) in Jan 2018, promoting the Co-Founder Melanie Lang to Managing Director. Formalloy includes women hiring practices as part of its business strategy to support and encourage a diverse workforce. Melanie’s active participation in organizations such as Women in 3D Printing and local career fairs provide a venue for networking and recruitment of other talented women. Formalloy encourages and supports leadership and training opportunities for women employees through conferences, speaking opportunities, and partnerships with organizations such as California Manufacturing Technology Consulting (CMTC) and Women in 3D Printing. Formalloy contributes to the next generation of women leaders by leading and participating in educational events hosted by the Society of Mechanical Engineers (SME) and Association for Manufacturing Technology (AMT), including the upcoming 2018 Smartforce Student Summit. Formalloy’s Co-Founder, Melanie Lang, attends at least 4 educational conferences each year and is authoring a technical paper for publication for the Additive Manufacturing and Powder Metalurgy (AMPM) conference.

Aquasend

Aquasend is the President and CEO of Precision Measurement Engineering, as well as Aquasend Inc, which was established in 2016. There are 3 women in their team of twelve people, and Elliott takes every opportunity to mentor aspiring potential employees in science and technology. As a woman leader, Elliott prioritizes continuing education and professional development for her team, particularly her women employees. She overcame stereotypes when coming into her leadership position after her father retired and felt like she had to work twice as hard as anyone else to earn her place. Elliott takes opportunities to nurture her women employees, particularly because of the male-dominated industries their companies serve. She is always on the lookout for talent, especially women, through Entrepreneurs Organization and Cal State San Marcos’ budding internship program, and Elliott always ensures an equal male-female interview pool.

2018 Athena Pinnacle Awards — Life Science/Technology Startup of the Year

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At Qualcomm, inventing world-changing technology is just one of the ways we change lives.

If you want to improve lives everywhere, and create technological breakthroughs, you need as many brilliant ideas as possible. That’s why we support talented women in every profession and at every level at Qualcomm — and why we’re proud of all of our 2018 Athena Pinnacle Award nominees. Congratulations and thank you for helping us make the world better, and smarter.

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