



U.S. Small Business
Administration

National Small Business Week

April 28-May 4, 2024

2024 State Small Business Person of the Year Award Winners

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Alabama Small Business Person of the Year

Shanna L. Ullmann, *Managing Partner, Owner*
Transformation Partners LLC. Tuscaloosa, AL

Shanna Ullmann, Ph.D., is the founding partner of Transformation Partners LLC, offering consulting, employee learning and development programs empowering higher education, federal government, U.S. military, and corporate clients. Transformation Partners, LLC began in 2000, as a statewide training provider. With the support of managing partners Timothy T. Ullmann and Robert K. Prescott, it now provides training across multiple states. Over the years, the firm transformed themselves from a small one room office to a full-scale office facility for planning and training implementation.

In 2020, COVID-19 significantly impacted the firm's client commitment leading to decreased net sales. The firm was able to receive a \$50,000 SBA EIDL loan which allowed them to remain operational during 2020. This allowed them to secure and implement several Department of Defense, and higher education contracts. Additionally, they pivoted strategies by offering gratis advisement, and reduced training fees. These strategies realized positive results post-pandemic with increased client engagement, sales, and expansion of new clients by 63%.

Alaska Small Business Person of the Year

Kali C. Bennett, *Owner*
Samsara LLC dba The Waterworks, Anchorage, AK

Hot water has run in Kali Bennett's blood as a young girl. Growing up in the ski hamlet of Girdwood, Alaska, she came of age downhill skiing while learning about the hot tubs in her family business, The Waterworks. Kali's natural entrepreneurship spirit was evident in her high school years where she started a chapter of the Rotary Interact and a small business cleaning tub.

Now in its 47th year, The Waterworks has expanded locations, grown the team and spearheaded the path to digitally – enabled sales and services. Kali credits her SBA 7a loan that allowed her to purchase a building and expand retail floor space.

Arizona Small Business Person of the Year

Austin J. Tsosie, Chief Executive Officer

Daniel V. Riggs, Chief Strategy Officer

Diné Development Corporation, Scottsdale, AZ

Diné Development Corporation (DDC) was created in 2004 to generate economic prosperity for the Navajo Nation by providing government agencies and commercial firms with high-quality IT, professional, environmental, research, and development services. Through expansion, the corporation has grown to over 700 employees and encompasses a portfolio of companies that offer a wide range of capabilities.

Austin Tsosie has shaped the organization's culture, building operations, fueling business development, and enhancing tribal relations. Dan Riggs possesses over 20 years of portfolio management and leadership experience in the federal contracting industry, bringing success in business development and growth sectors.

DDC received support from the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) and the SBA Arizona District Office's 8(a) team, where they participated in the SBA's 8(a) program.

Austin is an active contributor to the Navajo community, devoting time as a baseball coach for children, mentoring aspiring Navajo professionals, and serving as Board Chairman of the US Business Federal Contractors Association.

Arkansas Small Business Person of the Year

Lynette West, Owner

HealthWear Corp., Jonesboro, AR

Lynette West owns HealthWear Inc., a medical uniform and accessories boutique in Jonesboro, Arkansas. HealthWear Inc. was opened in 2013. In 2015, Lynette became the new Managing Partner, turning the store into a successful business with the help of three employees.

Lynette worked with the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center to obtain advising related to business management. During the pandemic, Lynette received an SBA Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan and an Arkansas Ready for Business Grant, allowing the store to remain open and keep employees on board.

Lynette is a graduate of the 2021 SBA Emerging Leaders program, which taught her how to manage and grow her business. In 2022, Lynette and her husband Kent purchased the business and employed seven people. Lynette frequently cross-promotes with small businesses in the area and encourages local and small business shopping.

California Small Business Person of the Year

Carrie A. Schmidt Poyner, *President/CEO*
BC Schmidt Construction, Inc., Colusa, CA

Ms. Carrie Schmidt Poyner holds licenses in general construction, general engineering, concrete, electrical, demolition, and modular construction. She has owned and managed her own business for 25 years.

She founded BC Energy LLC, inventing an Off-Grid Electric Vehicle Solution—a relocatable containerized system with a 120kW battery, 11 kW solar, and 200 amps power, supplying 2 level-2 chargers. Awarded a GSA Zone D MACC contract for infrastructure improvements across the 14 western states, incorporating electrification.

COVID adversely affected BCS, decreasing sales, net income, and equity. It took years to bounce back, addressing supply chain issues, labor problems, cost escalations, access to capital, and remote work. BCS retained all employees. Today, BCS sees an increase in sales, net profit, and employees.

Carrie actively contributes to professional organizations like the Society of Military Engineers and the Associate of General Contractors. She is also an engaged member of Women Construction Owners and Executives.

BC Schmidt Construction, Inc. has participated in SBA's 7j training program, PTAC, SBDC, Federal Technology Center, and Women's Business Center trainings. Carrie's leadership and commitment to excellence have been instrumental in the company's growth and success.

Colorado Small Business Person of the Year

Christine and Alan Herron, *Owners/Founders*
Achieve Sports Center, Aurora, CO

The Herron family started Achieve Sports Center in 2013, providing a safe, and welcoming environment to challenge youth through athletic development and competition.

Utilizing SBA lending resources through a CDFI, the Herron's acquired less than desirable commercial space, transforming their facilities into community assets, which provide activity programs to urban youth. Achieve Sports Center promotes health, fun, and fitness for everyone, by providing gymnastics, ninja, court sports, fitness instruction, and open play for children, adults, and seniors.

Over the past 11 years, the Herron family has created and sustained over 30 jobs, growing to a current staff of 123 employees. Despite a COVID-19 shutdown, Achieve Sports Center showed resilience, finding ways to continue services despite limitations from health mandates.

The Herron family gives back to the community through volunteer and financial support to several organizations that support children with disabilities, and by serving as Council Chairperson for the Colorado Development Disabilities Council.

Connecticut Small Business Person of the Year

Maria Christina Miranda, *Chief Creative Officer*
Miranda Creative, Inc., Norwichtown, CT 06360

Maria Miranda started Miranda Creative 35 years ago in a two-bedroom apartment with one employee, herself.

A Woman and Minority-Owned business, Miranda Creative, now a community of 30, is a brand management agency. Teams (called cohorts) deliver innovative design solutions, strategic brand management, and digital services to empower organizations to achieve their goals.

The SBA's PPP and EIDL funding were vital in helping the business remain stable during the pandemic and allowed the agency to grow between 2020 and 2023. The pandemic also allowed many employees to work remotely, making the proximity to the office less important and led to the expansion of their geographic footprint with employees working from Boston, Charleston, and Milwaukee.

Miranda Creative supports community re-investment, supporting conferences, and purchasing pallets of pet food for local food banks so families are not choosing who to feed in their households. In addition to financial support, Miranda Creative provides pro-bono hours to non-profits, to ensure

fundraising efforts, job retention and overall operations.

Delaware Small Business Person of the Year

Amy Lord Hughes, Owner

Lord's Landscaping Inc., Millville, DE

In 2016, Amy Hughes assumed control of the family business Lord's Landscaping. Immersing herself in the company, she was determined to focus on survival. Under her leadership, the business experienced growth, including a 400% increase in revenue. In 2019, she bought the business outright and now has seven distinct business lines: the Garden Center, The Merc Luxury Home and Gifts, landscaping/hardscaping design, irrigation/maintenance, and events.

Amy attributes her success to a strong work ethic, her dedicated/loyal staff, SBA funding, mentorship from local SCORE Chapter, and keeping the mission of the business – *"Growing for Good: use the property for a purpose, create better lives for employees and the community"* -- front and center.

Lords commitment to the mission is notable. One event, Whimsical Woods, has raised over \$100,000.00 for Ball4All Foundation. Amy is also one of the founders of the Fund for Women and a local benefactor for Women of Will.

Washington, DC Small Business Person of the Year

Manuel Calin Cosme, President & CEO

CFO Services Group Incorporated, Washington, DC

Manuel (Manny) Cosme is President and CEO of CFO Services Group Inc., an accounting firm in the nation's Capital since 2012.

With more than 20 years' experience in the business, Manny started CFO Services to "fill the gap" for new, small, and growing organizations with accounting expertise and services beyond tax preparation and bookkeeping.

Since its inception, CFO Services has grown to 27 employees, and made major leaps in total sales and net profits.

In addition to benefiting from the SBA's COVID EIDL program, CFO Services conducted pro bono

Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) workshops assisting more than 700 business. Manny is also involved with the Association of Latino Professionals - DC Chapter, and LULAC, the largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the U.S. advancing the economic and educational condition of Hispanic Americans.

Florida Small Business Person of the Year

Yanet Herrero, *Chief Executive Officer*

Kings Service Solutions, Orlando, FL

Yanet Rodriguez, a Cuban American entrepreneur, ignited Kings Service Solutions in 2007, spurred by her family's legacy. From a modest start with six full-time and thirty-seven part-time employees, Yanet expanded her commercial cleaning business, now spanning three states with 87 full-time and 162 part-time staff.

Her leadership earned national accolades, including Prospera's Success Story of the Year and the Don Quijote Award for Hispanic Business of the Year. Collaborating with the Florida SBDC at UCF and PTAC, Yanet was able to grow her business and secure contracts with industry giants like Lockheed Martin and Walt Disney World.

Yanet leveraged vital SBA assistance for business continuity and staff retention during the pandemic. She also secured an SBA 504 loan.

Georgia Small Business Person of the Year

Eric Williams, President and CEO

Unified Defense | Prince Service & Manufacturing, Byron, Georgia

Eric Williams is the President and CEO of Unified Defense | Prince Service & Manufacturing, two manufacturing companies in Middle Georgia that provide metal components to defense and commercial sectors. Eric founded Unified Defense in 2016 and acquired Prince Service & Manufacturing in 2022. He operates the two organizations as a single entity.

Eric has been an SBDC client since 2017 and has received \$2.2 million in SBA loans to help finance and expand his organization. Unified Defense added 80 full-time positions in 8 years and expanded a

10,000 square-foot facility to almost 500,000 square feet today. SBA lending helped Eric expand his overall operation with the purchase of Prince Service & Manufacturing, ultimately creating more jobs in Middle Georgia.

Eric grew up in Northeast Ohio in a family of manufacturers and entrepreneurs. His goal is to operate an organization where customers, employees, and partners work collaboratively to create a great place to live and be successful.

Guam Small Business Person of the Year

Jessica Leon Guerrero, *President*
M80 Systems, Inc., *Asan, GU*

Jessica Leon Guerrero, President and Owner of M80 Systems, Inc., leads a woman-owned business that has evolved since its inception in 1994. Initially focused on office systems furniture, M80 Systems now offers a diverse range of services, including warehousing, distribution, inventory management, office product solutions, sourcing, custom carpentry, flooring, and product and contract management. With over two decades of experience in government contracting, M80 Systems has made a strong impact as a federal contractor.

Jessica has utilized resources offered by the Guam SBA's Office, Small Business Development Center, and the Procurement Technical Assistance Center. Additionally, M80 Systems benefited from an Economic Injury Disaster Loan during the pandemic. The company has facilities in Guam and Hawaii.

Jessica actively supports local charity events, including the American Cancer Society for Life, Guam Children's Museum and Women Rising.

Hawaii Small Business Person of the Year

Ronald Panzo,
Holomua Maui LLC DBA Nalu's South Shore Grill, *Kihei, HI*

Ronald Panzo opened his first restaurant at Lulu's, in Kihei in 2003 as a junior partner. He expanded to Lahaina and Waikiki. In 2015, he sold Lulu's in Lahaina and opened up Lulu's in South Shore Grill. In 2019, Ronald opened another restaurant, Ekolu's Kitchen1279 in Kihei.

The pandemic affected restaurants, but with SBA PPP, EIDL loans and local clientele, they rebounded. He currently employs 58.

Ron's compassion for those affected by tragedy led him to co-found the Lei of Aloha for World Peace, a tradition of weaving a mile-long lei to gift to communities struck by tragedy. In 2009, he founded Tools for Schools, giving school supplies to children in Hawaii.

In 2023, a wildfire devastated Lahaina, Maui. He launched Lahaina Keiki Relief Fund, giving backpacks and 600 meals a week to affected families. Maui has not fully recovered, but with a strong local clientele and Ron's commitment to serving the Maui community with Aloha, his restaurant is still thriving.

Idaho Small Business Person of the Year

Jeanne McFall, Owner **RIVHAB, PLLC, Eagle, ID**

Jeanne McFall, owner of RIVHAB, PLLC, a fisheries and wildlife conservation engineering and construction company, launched the business in her hometown of Eagle, Idaho, in 2019. McFall quickly expanded into federal contracting through the WOSB and 8(a) program with the assistance of APEX and SBA alongside support from the Idaho Women's Business Center.

In 2022, RIVHAB received an SBA 7(a) loan that was critical in the growth and success of the business to compete, invest in technology, and assemble a team of six employees to serve the Pacific Northwest.

RIVHAB has two decades of specialized experience in addressing aquatic habitats, watersheds, and wetland restoration. They provide technical solutions in wildlife habitat improvement, water resources, geomorphology, wetland, and floodplain design.

McFall is a champion of the environment and her community, volunteering her time to fish and wildlife organizations and sponsoring community charities.

Illinois Small Business Person of the Year

Jacqueline Jackson, *President*

Ah Ha Chocolates Fudge and Ice Cream dba Kilwins, *Chicago, IL*

Jacqueline “Jackie” Jackson is the Owner/President/Operator of Ah Ha Chocolates Fudge and Ice Cream dba Kilwins. With seven stores in Hyde Park, Michigan Avenue, Navy Pier, Andersonville, Evanston, River North and Geneva, Jackie has grown her network from one store in 2012 with 10 employees to well over 75 employees in her Chicagoland network.

With COVID-19, George Floyd Protest/Mayhem, and the rampant vandalism, her dreams were hijacked. As a result, Jackie sought SBA assistance. From 2020 to 2022, she procured an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) to offset the pandemic's adversity, another loan for her Navy Pier buildout, and another EIDL for her Michigan Avenue repairs due to vandalism.

Jackie continues to participate in chamber of commerce events, is a mayor appointed SSA Commissioner (Special Service Agent) on the southside of Chicago, and she sits on the boards of the Chatham Business Association and the Chicago Loop Alliance Group.

Indiana Small Business Person of the Year

DuJuan A. McCoy, *President, CEO and Founder*

Circle City Broadcasting, *Indianapolis, IN*

After 30 years building TV stations for others, Indianapolis native DuJuan McCoy bought his first seven TV stations in 2008 with the help of an SBA-backed loan. In 2019, McCoy passed the reigns of his first ownership then came home, founded Circle City Broadcasting, and bought sister stations WISHTV and MyWindy23. As COVID devastated 2020, McCoy used an SBA Paycheck Protection Program Loan (PPP) to stay on the air. Currently, Circle City Broadcasting is the only Black-owned media company in a top 25 market.

McCoy supports the community through the DuJuan and Tina McCoy Foundation and partnered with Ivy Tech Community College spearheading the Multicultural Media Producing Program, a hands-on training designed to build diversity in media teaching technical skills needed to put on a TV broadcast. MMPP’s first cohort graduated this winter; a second is underway.

Iowa Small Business Person of the Year

Cathy Bishop, *President*
Aggies, Inc., *Sergeant Bluff, IA*

Cathy Bishop is the President of Aggies, Inc., a BBQ catering company in her hometown of Sergeant Bluff, Iowa.

A 1983 graduate of Texas A&M (the Aggies), Cathy spent ten years in Colorado as a Bank Examiner. She had always dreamed of being an entrepreneur though, and in 1994 Cathy came home and opened Aggies. Aggies began as a restaurant with some catering, but in 2009 Aggies pivoted to catering full time and turned the restaurant into an event venue.

Like most restaurants, Aggies was affected by COVID. Aggies started “COVID Carryout” where customers could place pick-up orders from a daily menu posted on Facebook. This concept, along with two PPP loans and a Restaurant Revitalization Fund (RRF) award from SBA, helped Aggies survive the pandemic without laying off any employees. Aggies has grown since and currently employs over 50 full and part-time employees.

Cathy serves on the board of the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce and, through Aggies, supports many local charities and organizations.

Kansas Small Business Person of the Year

Dallas Michael Haselhorst, *President*
Treetop Security, LLC, *Hays, KS*

Dallas Haselhorst is the owner of **Treetop Security, LLC**, a cybersecurity firm located in Hays, Kansas, that specializes in securing and protecting customer data.

Haselhorst is an information security engineer, researcher, and entrepreneur. He founded and managed an IT service provider until its acquisition in 2016. He then founded TreeTop Security with the primary focus of improving the cybersecurity posture of small businesses.

The pandemic halted Treetop Security’s growth momentum in 2020. Their sales pipeline dried-up and they gained only one new client that year. The SBA’s PPP loan was a critical financial resource

that helped the firm maintain its staff and strategize a response to the crisis. SBA's PPP loan allowed the firm to recapture and grow its sales when the economy opened back up.

Haselhorst is also the founder of STEM Harvest, a non-profit technology-centric education space for kids located in Hays, Kansas. When not working, Dallas enjoys promoting STEM education.

Kentucky Small Business Person of the Year

Ines M Rivas-Hutchins, *President*
INTEC Group, LLC, *Lexington KY*

Ines M. Rivas-Hutchins, founded INTEC Group, LLC in 2014, after having experience working for other contractors in the industry. Originally from Valencia, Venezuela, Ines moved to the United States in 1999, with a background in Architectural studies.

INTEC Group is an Economically Disadvantaged Woman Owned Small Business (EDWOSB), SBA certified HUBZone, and 8(a) Certification Program participant firm in the State of Kentucky that specializes in all aspects of general construction. INTEC Group has a successful history of providing products and services to the federal government including the U.S. Department of the Army and the U.S. Corps of Engineers.

INTEC Group has grown each year at a rate of about 20%, and currently has 24 employees. During COVID-19, the company was financially in a good place, the only concern was managing its workforce and concerned staff.

Ines M. Rivas-Hutchins serves on several boards in her community and is a proud sponsor of the Stem 4 Girls program.

Louisiana Small Business Person of the Year

Iam C. Tucker, *President & CEO*
Integrated Logistical Support, Incorporated (ILSI, Inc.), *New Orleans, LA*

Iam C. Tucker is the President & CEO of Integrated Logistical Support, Inc., a civil engineering firm in New Orleans, Louisiana. ILSI Engineering provides services in the civil engineering field, specializing

in sewer, water, street, and drainage design projects.

As a 2nd generation owner of ILSI for over 15 years, she has generated more than 100 contract awards across various state, local, and federal agencies. She has grown the company from 9 employees to 50 employees, with a revenue of over \$2.7 million.

Ms. Tucker is graduate of the SBA 8(a) Business Development Program, and she utilized the financial assistance available through SBA loan programs. Under her leadership, ILSI Engineering continues to extend and expand the company's capabilities and clients both locally and nationally.

Maine Small Business Person of the Year

Matthew Polstein, Owner

New England Whitewater, Inc. (DBA New England Outdoor Center), Millinocket, ME

Matt Polstein became a registered Maine Guide in 1982 and established New England Outdoor Center in the small town of Caratunk along the Kennebec River. By 1995, Matt decided to expand and add a property on Millinocket Lake with cabin rentals and land for recreation.

In 2001, Matt purchased 280 acres of land to build a seasonal activity center and started looking for more opportunities to grow. Just as the local economy was starting to recover after the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID pandemic disrupted every tourism business. With PPP loans from SBA, NEOC was able to keep their staff on the payroll and ensure that they could last until the 2021 season.

Matt has now been able to work on all the plans he had put on hold since 2008. With a 7a loan from SBA, NEOC added a year-round event center, and an activity center to facilitate a range of activities, as well as a microbrewery and wood-fired pizzeria to cater to NEOC's guests.

As a true advocate of his community, Matt serves on committees and supports organizations active in Maine's rural areas. These range from serving on the Millinocket Town Council and Maine Community Foundation, to name just a few.

Maryland Small Business Person of the Year

Rose M. Li , *President & CEO*

Rose Li Associates (RLA), *Bethesda, MD*

Rose Li is President and CEO of Rose Li Associates, a research firm in Bethesda, MD.

In 2003, Rose started RLA in her home with a goal of moving science forward through research and collaboration. The company works in three areas: research and analysis, science communications, and multimedia and event production.

RLA later moved to a facility in Chevy Chase, MD with staff in Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. RLA benefited from SBA assistance, landing \$25M in 8(a) multi-year federal contracts and subcontracts for the National Institutes of Health, leading to a 118% increase in personnel and tremendous increases in revenue, net profit, and net worth.

SBA's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) helped RLA continue to pay staff for six months while the office was closed during COVID-19.

Rose serves as President of the Li Education Foundation, promoting, advancing, and developing Chinese history, culture and education. She was appointed by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan to serve on the boards of the Maryland Commission on Aging, Maryland State Board of Education, and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Accountability and Implementation nominating committee.

Massachusetts Small Business Person of the Year

Stephanie Vanderbilt, *Owner*

Coastal Windows & Exteriors, *Beverly, MA*

Stephanie Vanderbilt is the owner of Coastal Windows & Exteriors, a home remodeling company based in Beverly, MA. A former teacher for the hearing impaired, Vanderbilt's passion for service and perspective of educating people with special needs helped guide the establishment of the business which she started with her husband.

Since its beginning in 2011, monthly gross revenue has multiplied by 10X, and today Stephanie manages 30+ employees. Mentoring sessions with SBA resource partner, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), helped Stephanie lay the foundation for success as a woman-owned

business in a predominantly male-dominated industry.

After starting with an office above a warehouse – Coastal Windows & Exteriors now has a storefront office in downtown Beverly, MA with a newly expanded sales team devoted to education, outreach and training.

Stephanie gives back to the community in a number of ways, including over \$300,000 in donations given to Habitat for Humanity; and their own initiative “Roofs for Heroes” which donates roofs to veterans in need.

Michigan Small Business Person of the Year

Tiffany Klingensmith, *President*
Unconventional Solutions, Inc., *Wixom, Michigan*

Tiffany Klingensmith, President of Unconventional Solutions, Inc. (USI) launched her business in September 2002, after a major family crisis. She is a certified repair and protective paint expert with over 15-years’ experience in providing customers with corrosion, erosion and chemical attack solutions.

In 2012 as the company continued to grow Tiffany purchased a building for her headquarters with an SBA 504 loan in Wixom, MI. She also expanded and opened two additional locations, in Ohio and Indiana. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic she closed the Indiana location. Currently she has 17 employees that staff the Michigan and Ohio operations.

Through all the ups and downs she contributes her time to the Great Lakes Women Business Council (WBC) and volunteers by mentoring to women business owners.

Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year

Micah Eveland, *Owner/CEO*
Kent Eveland, *Owner/Board Member*
Eveland’s Inc. DBA Scamp Trailers, *Backus, MN*

Micah Eveland, CEO and President of Scamp Trailers, took over leadership of the company from his father Kent Eveland in 2022.

The Eveland family founded Scamp Trailers in 1971, producing 130 trailers per year. Today, they produce 700 units annually, and manage 74 employees.

Micah and Kent mitigated the impacts of the pandemic by ensuring a friendly, family-oriented culture. These efforts to keep a stable business culminated in an expansion of facilities and staff to meet demand and capitalize on new markets.

In 2022, the company underwent a 12,000-foot expansion, resulting in a 20% production increase. The Small Business Development Center served as a trusted advisor and business analyst providing nearly 80 hours of SBA-backed consulting services to guide this development.

The Eveland family is dedicated to their rural Minnesota community and donates their time and resources to local programs and charities, and by ensuring the availability of quality, year-round jobs in the area.

Mississippi Small Business Person of the Year

John Ruskey, Owner/Founder

Quapaw Canoe Company, Clarksdale, MS

John Ruskey is owner and founder of the Quapaw Canoe Company located in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

Quapaw Canoe Company provides adventures and expeditions by canoe, kayak, or paddle board on the Mississippi River. John started Quapaw Canoe Company in 1998 with one aluminum canoe. With growth in sales and several locations, today Quapaw has 12 employees and 2 franchises.

Like most businesses, John's business suffered during the pandemic. Quapaw Canoe Company received two SBA Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, which helped the company survive the pandemic. John also received counseling from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

John was awarded the Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award and the St. John's College Award of Merit for distinguished and meritorious service to the Mississippi River for outstanding achievement in the arts and exploration.

Quapaw Canoe Company donates trips and volunteers to help achieve equal access for all with low-income schools and youth groups.

Missouri Small Business Person of the Year

Charles (Charlie) M. Downs III, Owner **Sugarfire Smokehouse, St. Louis, MO**

Charlie Downs founded Sugarfire Smokehouse in 2010, growing it to 14 locations (some of which are franchises) along with several sister restaurants. Company-owned locations currently employ 170.

Sugarfire uses locally sourced ingredients when possible—with suppliers listed right on their website. Winners of local and national awards, featured on national cooking shows, and great press writeups are some of their accolades.

They are good corporate citizens—giving to local and national charities and placing a donations link on their homepage.

While Sugarfire’s growth has been explosive, there were also missteps and issues. During the pandemic they closed locations in Iowa and Florida, and as the pandemic wound down, so did locations in Texas and Illinois.

Sugarfire was able to keep their remaining locations open during the pandemic thanks to SBA’s Paycheck Protection Program and SBA’s Restaurant Revitalization Fund which allowed them to continue to pay their employees and keep their patrons safe from COVID.

Montana Small Business Person of the Year

Loretta L. Bolyard, PHD, Co-Owner/Founder **Mountain West Psychological Resources, Butte, MT**

Loretta L. Bolyard, PHD is the co-owner/founder of Mountain West Psychological Resources, an outpatient-based clinic offering a full-spectrum of services, including mental health counseling, psychiatric medication management services, and neuropsychological assessment based in Butte, Montana.

Loretta’s life journey unfolds from a challenging upbringing in a disadvantaged background, raised by a single mother contending with significant developmental disabilities. As a Shriner kid grappling with spine issues, a pivotal moment occurred when she secured a scholarship for undergraduate

studies, ultimately discovering her calling as a neuropsychologist. Her diverse professional history includes roles as a Forensic Psychologist, Behavioral Health Care Psychiatric Consultant, numerous academic awards, and contributions to various journals.

SBA Resource Partner, the SBDC in Butte, MT assisted Loretta with her business plan, cash flow projections and loan packaging to acquire financing in 2022. This allowed the business to expand, build a new facility in a designated Opportunity Zone and increase the number of providers at the facility.

Nebraska Small Business Person of the Year

Michael Moravec, PT, DPT, OCS, Owner
Bluffs Physical Therapy, Scottsbluff, NE

Michael Moravec, PT, DPT, OCS, owns Bluffs Physical Therapy, a physical therapy clinic in Scottsbluff.

In 2018, Michael worked with U.S. Small Business Administration resource partner, Scottsbluff Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC), to help him form a business entity with a business plan and financial projections. Michael obtained funding and opened a small rental space with one employee. Quickly growing in clients and staff, Michael contacted the NBDC again in 2019 to assist with financial projections to construct a larger building.

The 2020 COVID pandemic necessitated social distancing restrictions, reducing staff to one. As restrictions were lifted, Michael returned his employees one at a time. Fortunately, Michael's construction on the new building was nearing completion. Michael officially moved his company to a larger building, which is currently staffed with 24 employees.

Michael serves on multiple community boards, volunteers, and donates yearly to various organizations, schools, and other programs.

Nevada Small Business Person of the Year

Wanda Luna, Owner
Universal Furniture Design, LLC, Las Vegas, NV

Wanda Luna an immigrant from Honduras founded Universal Furniture Design, in 2013. They manufacture custom furnishings for the hospitality industry.

Starting in her garage, she now occupies 9018 sq ft with 15 employees. They are known for their craftsmanship and affordable quality products.

The shut down in 2020 resulted in no new business. Wanda's leadership and with existing projects, they survived, despite soaring prices of cost of goods especially lumber. Forced to reduce hours she never laid off an employee. Their SBA EIDL loan was instrumental in this effort.

2023 has been their best year ever; highlights include 14 projects at a new Las Vegas hotel and an extensive guestroom remodel at another have quadrupled prior year's numbers.

Wanda is the president of the LV chapter of NEWH, a national hospitality association. She supports local charities, the Good Deed Project helping low-income families and the Bright Young Girl Organization assisting well-being and dignity of young girls in need.

New Hampshire Small Business Person of the Year

Susan Borchert, PhD, *Partner*

Betsy Harrison, LCMHC, NBC-HWC, *Partner*

Counseling Associates, PLLC, *New London, NH*

After many years of working together and a mutual vision of providing affordable healthcare, Susan Borchert and Betsy Harrison, co-founded Counseling Associates (CA) in 2004 leveraging their combined 40 years of clinical expertise.

Their practice offers comprehensive mental health therapy including treatment for anxiety and depression, couples therapy, career counseling, and substance abuse services for individuals from all backgrounds and communities. During the past several years CA has expanded to five locations and increased its reach through telehealth options. The organization is comprised of over 85 professionals, who benefit from opportunities through internships and mentoring programs that foster the development of future mental health providers.

Betsy and Susan's community engagement extends beyond their practice, with active participation and volunteer work with many state and federal agencies and several schools. Their strategic approach included years of consultation with NH SBDC working on their commitment to sustainable growth. They also benefited from the SBA PPP Loan during the pandemic to maintain their team during those uncertain times.

New Jersey Small Business Person of the Year

Isabelita “Lita” Abele, *President / CEO*

U.S. Lumber, Inc., *Woodbury Heights, NJ*

Isabelita "Lita" Marcelo Abele, President and CEO of U.S. Lumber, Inc. migrated to the U.S. and now is one of the few women CEOs in the lumber industry.

Her company supplies lumber, plywood, and related materials and serves New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Notable projects in the company's portfolio include Philadelphia's Convention Center, Lincoln Financial Field, and the New Jersey School Construction Corporation, which earned U.S. Lumber, Inc. recognition in Diversity Digest.

Lita's business received a PPP loan to maintain payroll and ensure future success. Lita has increased overall sales and created jobs for her community. Lita has received more than 50 distinguished international, national, regional, and local business awards and media features.

She has been a prime contractor with the federal government for over 20 years. Lita is involved with several charitable organizations with a focus on education. The Rowan College of South Jersey recently launched the "Lita Marcelo Abele Institute for Women in Business Studies."

New Mexico Small Business Person of the Year

Christopher J. Sweetin, *Co-founder/CEO*

Triskelion Group of New Mexico, *Albuquerque NM*

Chris Sweetin, an honorably retired Air Force Veteran (20 years), started 3D Security Training Solutions in 2014, which grew into Triskelion Group of New Mexico (TGoNM). It comprises 3D Security Training Solutions, 3D Security Investigative Services, and 3D Security Services Group. He's the co-founder/CEO of this multifaceted company in New Mexico.

Sweetin's SBA relationship began in 2015 with the Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC) and Boots to Business (B2B). Since then, he's used other SBA resources: B2B Reboot, Emerging Leaders, Resource Partners' counseling and services, and funding. These resources have helped his business grow from four employees to 67 and contract with private and government clients nationwide.

Sweetin has volunteered over 1,200 hours and \$35,000 to help his community. He's the co-founder

and President of the NM Professional Security Association and founder of the Rio Rancho Regional Chamber of Commerce Veterans Business Support Coalition.

New York Small Business Person of the Year

Aneesa T. Waheed, *Chef, President, Founder*
Bollywood Masala Corp, aka Tara Kitchen, *Schenectady, NY*

Aneesa T. Waheed is chef, owner and founder of Tara Kitchen, a Moroccan restaurant which she started in Schenectady, NY in 2012, after falling in love with Moroccan cuisine while visiting Marrakech. In the last decade, the business has grown to six locations including NJ, NY, and India.

Aneesa and the Tara Kitchen team faced incredible challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aneesa received an EIDL loan through the SBA in 2020. Prior to that, she had received a PPP loan. Since dine-in service wasn't possible, Aneesa used the financial assistance to offer take-out and weekly specials.

Throughout the pandemic, Aneesa maintained her staff and even grew her business. She credits SBDC's in NY and Albany as well as SCORE's support for her success. She now has close to 50 employees.

She dedicates time to charitable initiatives from local schools to Tara Incubator for women- and minority-owned businesses offering her services for free. She has received numerous recognitions for her professional and charitable work.

North Carolina Small Business Person of the Year

Dylan Gehrken, *President*
Greasecycle, *Raleigh, NC*

Dylan Gehrken is owner of Greasecycle, an innovative business focused on used grease recycling. Founded in 2009, the company has grown steadily each year. Gehrken started the company with his old college laptop, used van and drive to collect grease!

Greasecycle supports restaurants, commercial kitchens, and manufacturers by providing grease trap cleaning, waste processing, cooking oil recycling and preventative care. The company then converts

the waste into renewable energy sources to environmental sustainability. From 2020 to 2024, the company grew from 28 employees to 66 in now 12 NC & SC locations. Sales rose from \$6.5 million in 2020 to over \$22 million in 2022.

In 2022, Greasecycle expanded with an SBA 504 loan through BEFCOR (Business Expansion Funding Corporation). This multi-million-dollar project allowed them to continue growing the company with the addition of a Charlotte, NC facility. The company provides paid internships for college students who are mentored by the sales team. They also financially support environmental university research.

North Dakota Small Business Person of the Year

Cherie Olson Harms, *President/CEO*
Leonardite Products LLC, *Williston, ND*

Cherie Olson Harms is the majority owner and CEO of Leonardite Products LLC, a mining and processing operation in Williston, ND. The company was formed in 2008 to purchase a leonardite mining operation that included an idle processing plant. Leonardite is an oxidized lignite found naturally in Western North Dakota. It is used in agricultural fertilizers and oil drilling fluids. The company sells its product domestically and exports to 12 countries worldwide.

Rebuilding the processing plant to expand capabilities was key to growing a viable company. Additional challenges were faced including embezzlement and the pandemic. Leveraging multiple SBA loan programs and the North Dakota SBDC, Harms has met the challenges with the guidance she received and that has led to better margins and consistent net profits.

Harms contributes to and serves on the boards of multiple charitable organizations, including the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, regional hospital foundations, and the Great Plains Food Bank.

Ohio Small Business Person of the Year

Ericka Adams, *Founder*
Adams Dental Assisting Academy, *Gahanna, OH*

Ericka Adams, an Army Veteran opened Adams Dental Assisting Academy after 30-plus years in the dental field. She has equipped her academy with modern equipment and technology giving

students a realistic and immersive learning environment.

Ericka recognized the financial gaps in the community, lowered tuition, and partnered with The Ohio Department of Education to participate in the Second Chance Grant Program. This program covers a portion of tuition costs for students who have started a program elsewhere and did not finish.

Ericka utilized counseling and capital resources through SBA Microlender The Economic Community Development Institute (ECDI) to help sustain and grow her business.

In Ericka's spare time, she volunteers at a local retirement community and supports St. Jude.

Oklahoma Small Business Person of the Year

Angelene Ripley Wright, Owner

Ida Red, Tulsa, OK

Angelene Ripley Wright helped create the concept for Ida Red's first store in 2008 before buying the business in 2016. Ida Red's now has three locations and 16 employees in the Tulsa area. Ida Red General Store is a retail shop offering unique gifts, nostalgic treats, Oklahoma goods, and a family friendly atmosphere.

Wright purchased the business with an SBA loan and was helped through the COVID-19 pandemic with two PPP loans and a COVID-19 EIDL loan. She has doubled the employee count since buying the business.

Ida Red supports numerous local charities including 100 percent of proceeds on special merchandise for the Tulsa Area COVID-19 Response Fund and the Red Dirt Relief fund. The store donated a portion of their store sales during the Juneteenth weekend to the Tulsa Race Massacre Foundation and the Juneteenth Foundation.

Oregon Small Business Person of the Year

McKean Banzer-Lausberg, CEO/Co-Founder

Michael Branes, Head Brewer

Colin Rath, Director of Pubs

Eric Banzer-Lausberg, Director of Sales

Migration Brewing, LLC. Portland, OR

Migration Brewing started from a conversation about going into business among four friends McKean Banzer-Lausberg, Michael Branes, Colin Rath, Eric Banzer-Lausberg. The four quickly realized that they shared not just a passion for great beer; they shared a value set about life and the role that beer plays in it. A dream was born, and with the help of an SBA loan they were able to open the doors to their brewpub in Portland, OR in 2010.

What started as a 3000 square foot neighborhood brewpub with eight team members has grown to six retail locations totaling 40,000 square feet and a staff of 45. In 2010, Migration Brewing produced and sold 217 beer barrels and in 2023 produced 10,000 beer barrels distributed across Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Japan, and Thailand.

Migration Brewing is an active member of the community giving generously to local causes and actively supporting a wide array of charitable fundraisers.

Pennsylvania Small Business Person of the Year

Dorothea Spencer, Owner/CEO

D. Gillette Industrial Services, Inc., Easton, PA

D. Gillette Industrial Services, founded in 2002, is an SBA 8(a) business solely owned by CEO Dorothea Spencer. DGI has 15 employees and specializes in the design, fabrication, repair, and assembly of parts and equipment for the lifecycle sustainment of military customers' assets, the federal government, and worldwide commercial and foreign military clients.

DGI's expansion occurred when competitors focused on outsourcing and when women were underrepresented in the manufacturing sector. In 2016, Spencer became one of the few women-owned manufacturing companies certified in the 8(a) program. Between 2017 and 2023, DGI's revenues grew by over 9,200% and its profits grew by over 6,000%.

DGI secured SBA COVID EIDL and PPP loans to weather the pandemic and sustain DGI's operations. Spencer is a 2017 graduate of SBA's Emerging Leaders Program. She serves on the board of the Developmental Education Services of Monroe County. DES provides support to developmentally challenged adults.

Puerto Rico & Virgin Islands Small Business Person of the Year

Eduardo Diaz-Armigon, *President*
Baldwin Animal Hospital, PSC, Guaynabo, PR

After working as a veterinarian for different Veterinary Medical Centers in Puerto Rico, Dr. Eduardo Díaz-Armigón identified a business opportunity for his professional career and decided to establish his own clinic and hospital. He applied for an SBA-guaranteed loan to make improvements and purchase equipment for his new project.

Baldwin Animal Hospital, PSC, is a licensed veterinary clinic and hospital located in Guaynabo founded by Dr. Diaz in November 2010. This veterinary facility provides medical care and emergency services for canines, felines and other exotic pets. His clinic also offers a wide range of services including boarding, professional grooming and pet taxi transportation.

Dr. Diaz recently expanded his operations, acquiring an existing full-service veterinary clinic that has been in operation for over 38 years. Dr. Diaz used an SBA 7(a) loan to purchase the business and has increasing his number of employees to 18.

Rhode Island Small Business Person of the Year

Brian Matthew Goldman, *Chief Executive Officer*
Big Blue Bug Solutions, Providence, RI

The nation's smallest state has the largest celebrity (at least by height) in Nibbles Woodaway, who stands 58 feet high on the side of Interstate 95, welcoming all as they travel Rhode Island's busiest highway. Nibbles, a giant termite replica, is the distinctive mascot of Big Blue Bug Solutions, a pest control company.

Founded in 1935 as a one-man operation, the now 3rd generation, family-owned company has over 100 employees with locations across New England. Under CEO Brian Goldman, the company has

continued to be named one of the best companies in the state to work for, ensuring both customers and employees are treated like family. During the pandemic, Goldman utilized a PPP loan to help keep employees on payroll while still finding new ways to provide service to customers during the most uncertain of times.

Goldman has continued the family legacy of giving back to the communities it serves. Supporting entities such as Make-A-Wish Foundation, and the Ronald McDonald House, to creating Operation ROVAC to support the RI Veterans Home each year, the impact the Goldman family and Big Blue Bug Solutions have in the community is easy to see, no matter how tall the mascot.

South Carolina Small Business Person of the Year

Vickey Evans, *President*

CORG Management Group LLC, *Columbia, SC*

Vickey Evans is the President of CORG Management Group, a women-owned, economically disadvantaged, HUBZone, and 8a business established in 2008. CORG Management Group has grown to expand into three states since formation headquartered in South Carolina with offices in Georgia and North Carolina.

Vickey has increased revenues since entering the contracting assistance programs. Employees have grown from 3 to currently 55 employees. Sales revenue and net profit have also increased, growing over 300%.

The SBA has been instrumental in helping Vickey navigate federal contracting in the 8(a) Program, utilizing assistance from Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), now APEX Accelerators (APEX), and graduating from the Emerging Leaders Program to help facilitate growth.

Vickey contributes time and money in support of local community and charity and has served on several boards and participated in local organizational committees in support of her community.

South Dakota Small Business Person of the Year

Nick Heineman, *Member/President*

Greg Heineman, *Managing Member*

Look's Marketplace, *Sioux Falls, SD*

Look's Marketplace (69th Street Look's Market, LLC), owned by father-son team D. Greg and Nicholas "Nick" Heineman, has been providing a successful history of products matched with neighborly guest care since 1883. Nick's food industry experience paired with Greg's decades of business experience make an excellent combination.

During the pandemic, Look's Marketplace leveraged Small Business Development Center (SBDC) guidance and SBA 504 loans to grow into a 17,000 square foot remodeled marketplace, increasing services and the number of employees from 16 to 110. Look's Marketplace offers a local neighborhood grocery store, butcher counter, bakery and delicatessen, micro-brewery, wine and liquor sales, and many onsite dining opportunities.

The Heinemans have a strong philosophy of investing in the community and actively support fundraising efforts for several Catholic charities.

Tennessee Small Business Person of the Year

Craig Charles, *President*

Crown Cutz Academy, *Johnson City, TN*

Craig Charles is the owner of Crown Cutz Academy, which includes two barber schools in the Appalachian areas of TN and VA.

In 2017, Craig opened his first barber school, a location in downtown Johnson City, TN with the help of the local Tennessee SBA resource partner the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

In 2020, his entrepreneurial journey continued with TSBDC assistance and Craig expanded to a second location in Bristol, VA.

Since Craig opened his first barber school, he's established himself as a figure in the barbering community and an advocate for mental health and domestic violence awareness.

Craig also serves as a barber ambassador for the Confess Project of America, where he travels across the country training barbers about mental health and domestic violence awareness.

Craig was recently honored with the Barber of the Year Award in 2022. He's also made contributions to mentorship and guidance in the barbering industry through podcasts, information sessions, NPR interviews and features in Black Enterprise and Yahoo's In the Know.

Texas Small Business Person of the Year

Tamiko Bailey, *President and CEO*

Bailey's Premier Services, LLC, *Fort Worth, TX*

Tamiko Bailey is a US Air Force service-disabled veteran and the President and CEO of Bailey's Premier Services, a multi-state defense contractor that provides aircraft maintenance and other support services to the United States government and state and local agencies.

Tamiko has over 30 years of combined military and industry experience. During her military career, she worked in an aviation environment supporting an F-15/F-16 squadron and she served two tours of duty in Saudi Arabia. Tamiko started Bailey's Premier Services out of her garage and established the business as an LLC in 2010. Advice from the Small Business Development Center led her to utilize SBA loans to refinance existing debt and establish working capital. Today, the business has employees working at military bases across 11 states. Bailey's Premier Services recently expanded its operations internationally and operates with 167 employees.

Utah Small Business Person of the Year

Autumn McGregor, *Founder/CEO*

Zion's Tiny Homes, *Hurricane, UT*

Autumn McGregor, the driving force behind Zion's Tiny Homes, has overcome severe adversity in her life and has become a beacon of innovation and inspiration for others. She started her business venture in 2017 and together with her 14 employees, she not only provides customizable tiny homes nationwide but also an affiliated nonprofit community for homeless and abuse survivors.

With the support of a 504 SBA Loan, Zion's Tiny Homes expanded to a 5,000 sq ft. property, allowing her to double production and create additional jobs. Autumn's philanthropy extends beyond her non-profit and includes Zion's Tiny Homes donating a tiny home to someone in need.

Vermont Small Business Person of the Year

Dr. Kerry Boyle, *Owner and Founder*

Integrative Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, Montpelier, VT

Dr. Kerry Boyle is a licensed acupuncturist and doctor of Acupuncture in Montpelier, Vermont. Kerry became interested in natural healthcare while working at health food stores in the 90s. She then pursued education at Bastyr University in Seattle Washington graduating with a Masters in Acupuncture in 2003. She spent 4 years traveling internationally and implementing and launching acupuncture on board cruise ships.

In 2008 Kerry returned home to Vermont and founded Integrative Acupuncture. Her passion for her patients and leadership has allowed IA to grow to three locations, serving about 300 people per week. Her team of 12 consists of acupuncturists, massage therapists, naturopathic physicians, and valued support staff.

She plans to continue advocating for more Vermonters to receive access to Acupuncture care via her legislative work with the Vermont Acupuncture Association and People for Acupuncture.

Kerry is a 2023 graduate of SBA's THRIVE Emerging Leaders Initiative.

Virginia Small Business Person of the Year

Anil Boinapalli, *Chief Executive Officer*

Sky Solutions, LLC, Herndon, VA

Anil Boinapalli is Chief Executive Office of Sky Solutions, LLC, a tech service company in Herndon, Virginia.

Established in 2008, Sky Solutions focuses AI and machine learning technology on business process challenges in the public sector, healthcare, life sciences, and financial services industries. Thanks, in part, to assistance from SBA's 8(a) program, Sky Solutions and has grown to more than 160 employees servicing over 30 clients on 100+ projects, expanding from a home office setup to a 5500sqft facility as of 2023 and a presence in 15 states.

Active in his community, Anil organizes a charitable match program within the company, and he and his employees volunteer at local shelters, providing essential support to individuals in need. The

company and its employees also participate in local toy drives and make food bank donations. Anil is also a member of the ATA Business Committee and TiE Global where he mentors entrepreneurs.

Washington Small Business Person of the Year

Heather McDowell, *Founder and Steward*
Seattle Green Earth Cleaning, Seattle, WA

Heather McDowell launched Seattle Green Earth Cleaning in 2013 with the goal of creating an eco-friendly, socially responsible company to improve the lives of clients, employees, and the community.

Initially working out of a home office and storage unit, the company has grown to support 46 team members. SGEK eventually acquired their own building with offices, a warehouse, and staff amenities.

In 2023, Heather participated in the SBA T.H.R.I.V.E Emerging Leaders Reimagined program, honing her strategy for growing the company through employee development and a cooperative leadership model.

The company is an active supporter of the local food bank, a regular donor to local charities, and volunteers their cleaning services to local organizations and to regular cleanup of their adopted city street.

West Virginia Small Business Person of the Year

Lisa Fritsch, *President*
Peter Fritsch, *Chief Technology Officer*
Adam Leach, *VP of Operations*
Chet Tobrey, *VP of R&D*
Agile5 Technologies, Inc., Fairmont, WV

Lisa Fritsch, Peter Fritsch, Adam Leach & Chet Tobrey are the owners and executive team of Agile5 Technologies, Inc., a systems architecture and software development firm specializing in enterprise software systems for the U.S. Government.

In 2011, Agile5 started as a vision to improve the future of technical and program management support. Twelve years later the business has grown from an 80 square foot office to an operation of more than 90 employees in two locations, in North Central West Virginia and Huntsville, Alabama.

In the early years, Agile5, like many small businesses, faced issues obtaining access to capital. The executive team knew to expand their business they needed to bring on more employees. Their short-term capital could not cover more than two months of payroll and receivables could take up to 75 days to collect from some clients. SBA was able to step in and offer an SBA-backed line of credit that was approved within a week. In addition, they have received SBA assistance through counseling with the SBDC, training from the West Virginia District Office, and contracting guidance with WOSB and HUBZone certifications.

Wisconsin Small Business Person of the Year

Eric Rupert, *Founder*

Sam McDaniel, *CEO*

Jessica Benish, *COO*

Fortune Favors, *Cottage Grove, WI*

Eric Rupert, chef and co-founder, describes Fortune Favors' caramelized pecans as his crowning achievement. The Fortune Favors team--Eric, Sam McDaniel, and Jessica Benish--has created a million-dollar firm in just five years.

Launching in 2018 with strong retail sales and SBDC help with rapid expansion, COVID forced a quick pivot to online selling backed by SBA COVID EIDL and PPP loans. With 1000% online sales growth, Fortune Favors has expanded into wholesale markets. SBA has powered its rebound with a credit line to purchase inventory; a 504 loan for a plant; and a 7(a)-working capital loan. They recently partnered with a Wisconsin chocolate firm to make a new candy bar to augment their three pecan flavors and distribute to 500 outlets nationally. The firm now has 10.5 employees.

Eric, Sam, and Jessica support local food pantries and arts organizations. They source pecans from New Communities, a Georgia consortium of Black-owned farms.

Wyoming Small Business Person of the Year

Dr. Erica Higgins, Owner **Empowered Chiropractic, Casper, WY**

Dr. Erica Higgins is the owner of Empowered Chiropractic, specializing in neurologically based chiropractic care in Casper, Wyoming.

In 2020, after receiving her doctorate, she established her practice and now enjoys serving families in Central Wyoming.

With steady growth over the last 3 years, she has been able to increase both staff and the number of patients she serves.

Erica's practice suffered during the pandemic and credits SBA's 7(a) loan program for her success in opening, and ability to maintain staff.

Dr. Higgins serves on as a board member for the Wyoming Chiropractic Association and is also active in women's business and national chiropractic mentorship groups.