

2019 A Special Supplement to
TIMES LEADER

DISTINCTIVE WOMEN

Saturday, March 16, 2019

Proudly highlighting 14 of Northeastern Pennsylvania's most Distinctive Women

Alana Roberts | Cassandra Coleman | Catherine O'Donnell | Deborah Zbegner Ph.D., WHNP-BC, REIN-RNC
Kathi Bankes | Kerry Miscavage | Lindsay Griffin | Maribeth Jones | Mary Siejak
Sara Peperno | Jennifer Rogers | Lori Nocito | Dawn Evans OTD. OTR/L | Lisa Golden

A note from our Vice President of Sales and Marketing



Kerry Miscavage
Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
Times Leader Media Group

As Times Leader Media Group, it's an honor and a privilege to work with so many inspiring women that serve the business communities of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Times Leader Media Group's Distinctive Women's program was designed to showcase local women doing just that, inspiring and leading by example. This is our second annual program.

We opened voting in print and online for four weeks in January.

The response was overwhelming as we knew it would be. Narrowing the group down to fourteen was nearly impossible! The committee spent a lot of time reviewing each nomination.

The women you'll read about in the next few pages are truly exemplary. The Times Leader Media Group thanks them for their community service and how they help shape the culture of Northeastern Pennsylvania. We also took some space to highlight some special women who are leading the five groups of the Greater Wilkes Barre Chamber of Commerce. Congratulations!

These women are champions in the non-profit sector, dedicated business professionals, civic leaders and influencers who rise to the challenge of making our community a better place every day. They are women respected amongst their peers and family members and are most deserving of the "distinctive" title.

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WOMEN**



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*Congratulations to Kerry Miscavage and to all of
Times Leader Media Group's 2019 Distinctive Women!*



Congratulations on all that you do for our communities; including shopping Shursave!

Alana Roberts
Cassandra Coleman
Catherine O'Donnell
Deborah Zbegner
Kathi Bankes

Kerry Miscavage
Lindsay Griffin
Maribeth Jones
Mary Siejak
Sara Peperno

Jennifer Rogers
Lori Nocito
Dawn Evans
Lisa Golden

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MARIBETH JONES

Position: Vice President of Strategic Planning at Lewith & Freeman Real Estate Inc.

Hometown: Plains Township

Quotable: “The real estate business is a tremendous career. You interface with dynamic people, utilize your business, marketing and management skills and ultimately help your clients with the biggest decisions of a lifetime.”

By Lyndsay Bartos
lbartos@timesleader.com

Maribeth Jones cannot say enough about how much she enjoys helping people make some of the most important decisions of their lives.

Jones is Vice President of Strategic Planning at Lewith & Freeman Real Estate Inc. She now has a new title: 2019 Times Leader Distinctive Woman.

“The real estate business is a tremendous career,” said Jones. “You interface with dynamic people, utilize your business, marketing and management skills and ultimately help your clients with the biggest decisions of a lifetime.”

Jones, of Plains Township, spent decades building her own business. During her career, she says she formed important relationships with real estate peers which ultimately led her to a key leadership role outside her own company.

“I have a long-time relationship with (CEO) Rhea Simms and Virginia Rose (president of Lewith & Freeman). Rhea and I served on the Greater Wilkes-Barre Association of Realtors as past presidents and both of us received the ‘Realtor of the Year Award,’” said Jones.

“We have the same values and ethics. After 27 years of owning my own business, I decided to sell. Shortly after, Virginia called me to have a meeting and the leadership position was a great opportunity to work with the Lewith & Freeman team of realtors I admired.”

Jones is a graduate of the Leadership Wilkes-Barre organization and deeply involved in the community. She is currently on the committee of the Little Theatre of Wilkes-Barre and also chairs a committee at the Westmoreland Club.

In her spare time, she likes to weight-train at Danko’s gym, bicycle, play golf, and ski – weather permitting.

“One interesting thing people might not know about me – I like to cook,” she revealed. “I like good food and wine. Cooking is my down time.”

Finding time for friends, family, and even herself is one of the biggest challenges Jones faces in her execu-



Maribeth Jones is the vice president of strategic planning at Lewith & Freeman Real Estate Inc.

tive role.

She says she works tirelessly, especially through spring, summer and fall.

“I had a course on time management and it has served me well,” she noted.

Jones credits her co-workers and clients for contributing to her success.

“The people who surround me daily – the Lewith & Freeman management, staff and agents; the contractors I call on to perform jobs for my clientele; the inspectors, mortgage brokers, title companies, and attorneys who make the process work to sell homes – are all the spokes that make the wheel turn to success.”

Rose, president of the company, praised Jones’ achievements in the field.

“We are proud Maribeth is being honored as a Distinctive Woman,” she said. “Maribeth is a well-respected leader in the industry, an exceptional member of our Lewith & Freeman management team, and a broker associate who provides the highest level of knowledge and personalized service to all of the clients she serves.”



LEWITH & FREEMAN REAL ESTATE, INC.

Congratulations

to Maribeth Jones on the
2019 Distinctive Women Award!

From everyone at **Lewith & Freeman:**

Thank you, Maribeth, for your constant support, guidance,
and the expertise you share with us every day!

CATHERINE R. O'DONNELL



Submitted photo

Catherine R. O'Donnell, Esquire, of O'Donnell Law Offices, Kingston, specializes in estate planning and administration.

Position: Lawyer | **Residence:** Shavertown | **Hometown:** Pittsburgh | **Age:** 55

Quotable: "The most important part about what I do is communication and trust-building with my clients. I make sure to identify with them in their most vulnerable moments, handling everything from collection of materials and records to finance. Being able to treat people in the most humane way during this time is essential. It's what I love most about what I do."

By Alicia Belch | abelch@timesleader.com

KINGSTON — With the death of a loved one not only comes overwhelming grief, but also the difficult task of dealing with that person's estate.

Attorney Catherine O'Donnell found that her desire to help others fit naturally with helping families navigate that difficult time as an estate lawyer. She also deals with Orphans Court issues and elder law. She partners with her husband, Neil, at the O'Donnell Law Offices.

However, she did not begin law school with the intent of becoming a tax estate lawyer. She credits her success to both the challenges and flexibility of law.

"There are so many aspects of law, and I specifically was interested in owning my own business," Catherine said. "By obtaining my Juris Doctorate and Master of Business degrees from the University of Pittsburgh (in 1988), I was able to study the mathematical and marketing aspects of business law I enjoyed while also challenging myself to learn economics."

Her work as a lawyer and community involvement is the reason O'Donnell was chosen to be honored in the Times Leader's Distinctive Women special section.

Catherine and Neil met during their first day of law school, and they married in 1989. After working at law firms in Philadelphia for three years, the two decided to relocate to Shavertown.

Before partnering with Neil at his firm in 2002, Catherine worked as an associate in the Scranton office of Dilworth, Paxson, Kalish & Kauffman, and then part-time for Elliott Reihner Siedzikowski & Egan, PC, while raising the couple's son, Neil Philip, and daughter, Renata. Neil Philip and Renata are both now lawyers.

Catherine's inspiration for continued success in both her law career and personal growth stems from client involvement and the desire to work hands-on within the community.

"The most important part about what I do is communication and trust-building with my clients," Catherine said. "I make sure to identify with them in their most vulnerable moments, handling everything from collection of materials and records to finance. Being able to treat people in the most humane way during this time is essential.

"It's what I love most about what I do."

Catherine is a past president of the parents' association of Wyoming Valley Montessori School and the Lower and Upper Schools of Wyoming Seminary; current vice president of the Wilkes-Barre Law and Library Association; board member of Junior Leadership of Wilkes-Barre; member of the United Way board; and chairperson of Dress for Success of Luzerne County, among other accomplishments.

"Once my children were gone for school, I wanted to find something community-based to be a part of that focused on women," she said. "I began doing hands-on work for Dress for Success, helping women with re-entry into the workforce. I enjoy the practical aspects of community involvement.

"You give what you get, and I have made lasting relationships with so many great people here over the last 30 years."

O'Donnell is a coffee enthusiast and aside from relaxing at the family home, she enjoys visiting her children in New York. This past January, her son married a fellow lawyer.

"A whole new chapter has begun with my new daughter-in-law in the family. I loved the four of us and now the five of us," she said.

Congratulations
Cathy O'Donnell
 From all of us at O'Donnell Law Offices.

Cathy O'Donnell is the Vice President of the Wilkes-Barre Law & Library Association (Luzerne County Bar); Chairperson Luzerne County Dress for Success; a member of the Board of Directors United Way Wyoming Valley; a member of the Board of Directors for Junior Leadership of Wilkes-Barre; and a Luzerne County Community College Board Member. In addition to her Juris Doctorate, she is an MBA and a member of the DC Bar. Cathy practices in the areas of Estate Planning and Administration, serves as O'Donnell Law Offices' Business Manager and has been named a Best Lawyer for three years and a PA Super Lawyers honoree for over 10 years.



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LISA GOLDEN

Position: COO of Geisinger Health Plan
Hometown: Plains Township
Residence: Moosic
Family: Two children, a 20-year-old son, Michael, and 18-year-old daughter, Lauren.
Quotable: 'We all have our fears. The key is knowing what those fears are and having the courage to address them.'

By Joe Soprano
 jsoprano@timesleader.com

A career in health care seemed like the logical choice for Lisa Isbitski Golden.

"We had a large family," Isbitski Golden said, noting there were four nurses in the family. "And we were always taking care of my grandmother. It was just natural to take care of people.

"(Health care) seemed to be the right road for me to go."

Isbitski Golden earned a BSN in nursing from Wilkes University and became a nurse. She later earned an MHA in health administration from King's College.

She is currently chief operating officer of the Geisinger Health Plan and is responsible for the management, process improvement and planning within the overall insurance operations.

It is that work that has earned Isbitski Golden a spot among the 14 women selected to be honored in the Times Leader's Distinctive Women special section.

Previously, Isbitski Golden served as the chief administrative officer for Geisinger Community Medical Center in Scranton. She was responsible for the overall operations of the hospital, a 293-bed community hospital and level 2 trauma center.

She also oversaw a \$97.1 million expansion project.

Prior to joining Geisinger in 2006, Lisa served in a leadership position in care management at Geisinger Wyoming Valley until May 2013 when she joined GCMC as associate vice president, clinical program development.

Before beginning the climb up the corporate ladder, Isbitski Golden spent a decade as a nurse. The years spent working with doctors at the bedside of patients gave her great insight she relies on in her current position.

"Having a nursing background is an advantage," she said, noting her experience as a nurse allows her to "wear more than one hat."

But even as a nurse, Isbitski Golden knew there was more for her to accomplish.

"As a nurse, I always wanted to advance myself," she said. "I was always asking how and why. I was always really pushing myself.

"When I start to feel comfortable it's time to move forward and be uncomfortable," she said. "I enjoy stretching myself and my knowledge."

Isbitski Golden still gets great satisfaction working



Submitted photo

Lisa Isbitski Golden is the chief operating officer of Geisinger Health Plan.

with patients, knowing she is helping more than just them.

"When you come into the hospital, those people are having a lot worse day than you," she said. "You're not only making a difference for the patient, but also the family."

She's also eager to mentor young professionals to pay back the help she's received in her career.

"I enjoy mentoring millennials because you don't do this on your own," she said. "I'm successful because of the great people I have around me."

Among the people Isbitski Golden credited with her success were her family. She was quick to thank her parents - Helen and Robert Isbitski - for encouraging her to continue her education. She also was quick to thank her children - Michael, a junior at Misericordia, and Lauren, a senior at Scranton Prep - for supporting her.

"They keep me grounded to have the courage to step out of my comfort zone and face the everyday challenges that leaders are faced with day to day," she said.

Lisa is the 2011 recipient of the Geisinger Division of Quality and Safety Award. She is a member of the Pennsylvania Trauma System Foundation Board of Directors, the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce Board, and the Children's Advocacy Center Board of Directors.

Congratulations

Lisa Golden

for being named one of 2019's
 Distinctive Women!



DISTINCTIVE
 WOMEN

TIMES LEADER MEDIA GROUP
 2018 LEGACY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

KERRY MISCAVAGE

Position: Vice President of Sales and Marketing at the Times Leader

Residence: White Haven

Family: Husband, Michael

Quotable: “Most advertising leaders have one mission in mind and that is to meet the revenue goals of the newspaper. I also strive to bring interesting content to our pages as well. The two missions actually go hand in hand.”

By Bill O’Boyle
boboyl@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Kerry Miscavage wanted the Times Leader to create a program that honors women in the community.

Miscavage did what she set out to do, helping to create the Times Leader Media Group’s Distinctive Women and in 2019, Miscavage finds herself as one of the honorees.

Miscavage, the Times Leader Media Group’s Vice President of Sales and Marketing, said throughout her 23-year career at the newspaper, she has worked with many inspiring women.

“Some are colleagues, friends, advertising customers and community business partners,” Miscavage said. “I knew that as a newspaper we could create a program to honor women throughout the year. We have to do this annually because there are so many women worthy of this honor, and I dedicate this award to all women in our community working toward their goals.”

Miscavage said she believes she was nominated because of her contributions to the newspaper — working seven days a week to make sure the Times Leader is developing programs that fit the needs of today’s local businesses and readers.

“Most advertising leaders have one mission in mind and that is to meet the revenue goals of the newspaper,” she said. “I also strive to bring interesting content to our pages as well. The two missions actually go hand in hand.”

One example, Miscavage said, would be the paper’s Industrial Park Series. Miscavage said she developed the idea over a year ago and worked with John Augustine of Penn’s Northeast to make it a reality.

“With our partners help, we’ve published five Industrial Park pieces that truly give our readers new information about our area’s economy and how it’s growing,” Miscavage said. “There are more to come. I enjoy leading a creative team. We have the capability, creativity and talent to create custom packages through print, digital and beyond to help customers grow their business. It’s what we do every day. I enjoy being here every day.”

Miscavage said she was interested in working at the Times Leader because as a senior at Wilkes University she took a class from Cliff Schechtman, who was the paper’s managing editor at the time. Even though Miscavage was an English major, she saw an opening in the advertising department, not in the newsroom.

“I started the job three months after my graduation in 1995 and have been here ever since,” Miscavage said.



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Kerry Miscavage first became interested in working at the Times Leader when she was a senior in college at Wilkes University.

“I’ve held various positions in the advertising department until I was named Advertising Director in 2016 and Vice President of Sales and Marketing in 2018. As it turns out, the English degree definitely has helped.”

Miscavage met her husband, Michael, in 2001 through the Times Leader, and they were married in 2008 — on their way to their 11th anniversary.

“He certainly supports and understands my time at the office,” Miscavage said. “He understands the drive for what we do and how our mission supports the community.”

Outside of work, Miscavage said she enjoys visiting locally owned restaurants, networking with downtown friends, family and business partners. She likes to travel to Philadelphia to meet her good friend Lora for an occasional girls night of shopping, eating and walking.

“I have certainly met my best friends in life while at the Times Leader — Rosa, Lora, Kathy, Shirley, Justin, the list goes on and on,” she said. “I’m lucky to have met so many wonderful friends through this career — and I enjoy spending time with my niece, Ellie.”

Miscavage said she is looking forward to her mother visiting more often upon her approaching retirement and working on upgrades and decoration changes to her home.

When it comes to channel surfing, Miscavage said her favorite channel is Bravo. Right now her favorite show is “Riveria,” a series on the Ovation channel with Julia Stiles. A close second is “I am the Night” on TNT.

“I DVR them both and watch them when I can,” she said. “If you haven’t seen Bravo’s ‘Dirty John’ or Lifetime’s ‘You’ (both mini series) I highly recommend them. I also read a lot.”

Right now, Miscavage is reading The Last Romantics by Tara Conklin.

“It’s about a family, more specifically siblings over a span of almost 100 years,” she said.

**Congratulations
Kerry Miscavage and to the
area women for their
outstanding achievements!**

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ALANA ROBERTS

Position: Regional Affairs Director of the Northeast Region of PPL Electric Utilities

Hometown: Scott Township

Quotable: "I want to be part of solutions for those organizations and PPL customers."

By Patrick Kernan
pkernan@timesleader.com

SCRANTON — Alana Roberts' favorite part of her job is how every day is different.

Roberts, 39, works as the regional affairs director of the Northeast Region of PPL Electric Utilities. It's a position she's held for four years, and she said every day takes her to a different part of her seven-county service area.

"Every day is different and that's one of the most enjoyable things about my job," she said.

Roberts spends much of her day connecting with customers and potential customers, helping them get the full picture on getting electric utilities.

Roberts said she meets with nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, other business groups and other customers, seeking to find out what "they're trying to accomplish."

"I feel like I'm a connector," she said, explaining that she's always trying to learn more about the local communities so as to better connect with those customers.

Roberts said she's proud of the role she has in the community, saying that she's effectively the face of electricity locally.

"There's no doubt electricity is something we all rely on, and PPL is supplying safe, reliable electricity," she said. "You can't really see electricity, so I'm sort of the embodiment of the electric company for the community."

Roberts is clearly passionate about PPL, and said she's excited about finding ways for the company to provide solutions for people.

"I want to be part of solutions for those organizations and PPL customers," she said.

It's Roberts' background that made her perfect for her current position. Having majored in environmental science at Juniata College, Roberts said she was a good fit for a previous customer service position at the company, which she said relied on both her scientific knowledge and skill with dealing with customers.

Then, when the position she currently has opened up,



Alana Roberts is the Regional Affairs Director of the Northeast Region of PPL Electric Utilities.

she said her new-found customer service skills helped her succeed.

Roberts said this ability to learn new skills has served her well in her career, and she said it's something important for other people to follow.

"Be curious and always willing to learn," she said. "When given an assignment that feels uncomfortable or that you're not used to, embrace it."

She also chalks up a lot of her success to strong mentor figures, who she said taught her the importance of maintaining a work/life balance.

"Find a strong mentor; look at what strengths they have to offer," she said. "You need someone that will be your cheerleader; we all need that kind of support."

CONGRATULATIONS!

Hat's off to PPL Electric Utilities Regional Affairs Director **Alana Roberts**, on being named one of the Times-Leader's 2019 Distinctive Women.

At PPL, we're unwavering in our commitment to our customers and communities and Alana is a perfect example of that mindset. Folks in northeast Pennsylvania, where Alana is based, know they can depend on her — and PPL.

Whether it's providing safe, reliable electric service, helping customers be more energy efficient, or supporting things like early childhood education, we're here for you.



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APRIL 18TH
11:30AM-1:30PM



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Please join us for an educational and interactive discussion from our area's most inspiring women. The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber's Women's Network will host the ATHENA® Panel Luncheon.

Lunch will be provided, and our panel of ATHENA honorees will discuss topics from career advice to professional advancement.

\$35 Per Person
Register at www.wilkes-barre.org

*Congratulations to Lindsay Griffin
and to all of the outstanding
distinctive women of 2019!*

*Thank you for your dedication to community, business and to family!
You are true leaders and inspiration to all women!*

- Mary Erwine



LINDSAY GRIFFIN

Position: COO and vice president, Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce

Alma mater: La Salle University

Mentors: Include Kathi Bankes, Mary Erwine, Liz Graham, Lori Nocito and Kerry Miscavage

Quotable: "I surround myself with people that are great at many things, especially those things I don't know as much about. I collaborate with them, I learn from them."

By Roger DuPuis
rdupuis@timesleader.com

Lindsay Griffin's road to success has relied on some tried-and-true life lessons: Work hard, ask for help when you need it, and don't be afraid to try new things.

Griffin, chief operating officer and vice president, Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, stressed those virtues during a recent interview at her office on Public Square.

"When I came to the chamber it was a new world and I didn't know everything about everything and that was kind of intimidating," said Griffin, who has been with the chamber for three-and-a-half years.

"The background I came from was not exactly this. You know what? That was actually OK, because I was able to learn so many new things, and that process helped me become good at what I am doing," Griffin said. "Do not be afraid to ask for help."

Griffin is a graduate of La Salle University in Philadelphia, where she studied business management and marketing. With an interest in sports marketing, she had the opportunity to work with the Philadelphia 76ers and Flyers for two years as an intern.

But the big city was not where she stayed.

"I had a great time in Philly, but my family is in the White Haven/Hazleton area, so you know this to me was always home," Griffin said. "Toward the end of college, I just really wanted to be closer to them."

Griffin landed a position at what is now Mohegan Sun Arena, where she worked for two years in marketing and events.

"It was a great way to move back home and still be in that realm that I loved — events and bringing people together — and I also saw a lot of great things starting to happen in this area when I came back," she said.

Griffin also spent two years in a similar role at Mohegan Sun Pocono before joining Best Western Plus Genetti Hotel & Conference Center in 2008, working for the man she fondly referred to as "Mr. Genetti."

"He got me involved with the chamber," she said of owner Gus Genetti. "He is such a community man, and he really wanted me to be involved like he always was."

That involvement eventually led, perhaps not surprisingly, to her current role.

"I love so much about what I do," Griffin said. "There are things we learn about different companies moving in, and different opportunities and things being built that I would have never known about if I didn't work at



Courtesy Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce

Lindsay Griffin, chief operating officer and vice president, Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, is seen outside the chamber's offices in the former Pomeroy's building on Public Square.

the chamber."

As in so many of her roles, Griffin loves her job for "the ability to help bringing people together."

"And for my team," she said, referencing the chamber's staff of nine.

"I love them very much," Griffin added. "For what we do, I think we are a small team and we all wear a lot of hats."

"We are all super-involved and we have fun together," she said. "We're all friends, which is really cool."

There's another team in her professional life: The mentors who have coached Griffin along the way — including Genetti and many others.

Griffin advises all up-and-coming professionals to find mentors and draw from their wisdom.

"I surround myself with people that are great at many things, especially those things I don't know as much about. I collaborate with them, I learn from them," she said. "I think really that's been a tremendous help to me, learning from my mentors, and I have lots of them."

Among them are several of our Distinctive Women.

"Definitely Kathi Bankes (director of catering and events for Metz Culinary Creations), who has been someone who has helped me immensely, especially with community activities," Griffin said.

"Kathi got me on my first committees, she and I worked on several and we now co-chair together. She is like me — you know, she never stops, and she is someone I love to run alongside with. I am so lucky to have known Kathi," Griffin said.

"Also, my female board chairs, Mary Erwine and Liz Graham, have just really taken me in from the day I started here, spent time with me and really helped me to develop," Griffin said, "and all of the female board chairs that I've gotten to know.

"And also the women on the Distinctive Women list — Lori Nocito (executive director of Leadership Wilkes-Barre) and Kerry Miscavage (Times Leader Media Group's vice president of sales and marketing), all these great women that I do a ton of things with and are with me at events, trying to make this community better."

Congratulations, Lindsay Griffin

ON BEING NAMED ONE OF
NEPA'S
2019 DISTINCTIVE WOMEN!!

YOU'RE AN INSPIRATIONAL LEADER TO
OUR TEAM
AND THE COMMUNITY!

CONGRATULATIONS FROM
THE CHAMBER TEAM,
COMMITTEES, AND BOARDS!!



Greater Wilkes-Barre
CHAMBER of
COMMERCE



CASSANDRA COLEMAN

By Mark Guydish
Mguydish@timesleader.com

Cassandra Coleman confesses she does not actually remember her first foray into politics, hanging out at a polling place wearing a sandwich board listing her grandfather's team ticket. But she laughs while admitting her own son, now 4 and a half, has soundly beaten her record when it comes to early politics.

"It's funny, I do the same thing with my son. I have one photo of (now) governor (Tom Wolf) holding my son. He was a week old." Barely-born James was sporting a onesie that read "Wolf for Governor."

If there is still doubt that the Exeter resident revels in politics, consider her latest gig: She has been appointed to head the Pennsylvania Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial — that's the country's 250th birthday, officially in 2026. Which means she has taken on a job with a commission that has not yet convened yet requires a commitment of seven years.

"The goal is to make sure all of Pennsylvania is represented," at the big event in Philadelphia.

It may sound like a big chunk of the 31-year-old's future, but she sees an even bigger picture. "I took this new job because I was looking at it and thinking about 1976 (the bicentennial). I think about the future when I have grandchildren and my son can talk to them and say "your grandmother was part of that!"

Still not convinced politics courses through Cassandra's veins? A brief history is pretty definitive:

- Aside from wearing a sandwich board touting her grandfather's election bid at age 3, she recounts wearing a shirt with his ticket to school in grade 4. "I got sent home," she said.

- In her last two years of high school, she was on the Exeter Junior Council.

- In 2006 she went to work for then-state Rep. Phyllis Mundy. "She kept me on part-time through college."

- After starting at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, she transferred to King's College to get a degree in Political Science in 2010.

- In 2008, as a 20-year-old junior at King's, she was appointed to complete her grandfather's term as mayor of Exeter after he died. She is animated in recalling how her real-life experience as mayor played out in college courses. "They'd talk about the RFP (Request For Proposal) process, and I'd say, 'Hey, I did that!' She won re-election twice.

- In 2010, she became deputy finance director for U.S. Sen. Robert P. Casey, a position she held until 2013.



Tony Callaio | For Times Leader

Cassandra Coleman has been involved in politics since campaigning for her grandfather when she was a child.

- In 2011, she was one of six women nationwide highlighted in the May edition of Oprah Winfrey's publication, O Magazine. She was also featured on an NBC segment "the Smart Woman." And no, she didn't meet Oprah.

Under Gov. Tom Wolf, she served as his regional representative until being named Special Adviser to the Governor which in turn is proving to be a transition to the title of executive director of that semiquincentennial commission.

Oh, and as an interlude, she nearly died from blood clots after knee surgery in 2012, losing all her capacity in one lung and almost all in the other. "I spent 46 days in the hospital, and was released in a wheelchair."

Beating the odds, she has made a full recovery as far as anyone who meets her would know, though she admits "I still have a little bit of a speech delay." The blood clot near-miss turned her into a passionate advocate for awareness of the problem.

Through it all, there is a recurring theme in every recollection of success: Backing from family, friends, neighbors, teachers, constituents, employers, hospital staff and many others.

"I've just been very lucky in having community support systems," she says.

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"I am proud to have been recognized in the Times Leader's inaugural Distinctive Women edition last year. Kevin Grebas and I both offer our congratulations to this year's award winners!"

- Atty . Brenda Colbert

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| • Alana Roberts | • Kerry Miscavage | • Sara Peperno |
| • Cassandra Coleman | • Lindsay Griffin | • Jennifer Rogers |
| • Catherine O'Donnell | • Maribeth Jones | • Lori Nocito |
| • Deborah Zbegner, PhD | • Mary Siejak | • Dr. Dawn Evans |
| • Kathi Bankes | | • Lisa Golden |



DEBORAH ZBEGNER



Dr. Deborah Zbegner is the dean of the Passan School of Nursing at Wilkes University.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Position: Dean of Passan School of Nursing at Wilkes University | **Hometown:** Mountain Top

Quotable: “We need to send people out into the world equipped to battle diseases and help comfort their families. This valley is in need of nurses across all agencies.”

By Dan Stokes | dstokes@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — For Dr. Deborah Zbegner helping the community through service and teaching the next generation of nurses is crucial to the future.

“We need to send people out into the world equipped to battle diseases and help comfort their families,” Zbegner, 60, of Mountain Top said. “This valley is in need of nurses across all agencies.”

Zbegner’s dedication to helping mold the nurses of the future is one of the reasons she was selected to be honored in the Times Leader’s Distinctive Women special section.

Zbegner said that each clinical nursing student is required to do five hours of community service a semester.

“I think it’s really important to be a proactive member in your community,” she said. “One day our students may be treating one of these community members or someone they know as patients.”

Before Zbegner became the dean of the the Passan School of Nursing at Wilkes University, she served as an obstetrical, gynecological and infertility nurse.

“If you (had told) me when I started out that I would have gone on to become the dean of a university department, I would have laughed at you,” Zbegner giggled.

Zbegner has overseen Wilkes’ nursing program since it came to fruition after branching out from the university’s pharmacy program.

“It took a lot of hard work and a big commitment from the faculty,” she said. “It takes a team with a great vision.”

Part of Zbegner’s job is to oversee the nearly 800 nursing students – both undergrad and graduate students – at the school.

After working as a clinical nurse, Zbegner said she needed some time away to spend with and start her

family.

“Education gives that outlet,” the Mountain Top native noted. “It’s really a different type of workload. No matter what nursing route you decide, they each bring on a certain amount of stress. That’s why having outlets are important.”

In recent years, Zbegner has seen changes in the nursing field from when her career began in the 1980s.

“When I started, it was expected that women were supposed to do everything, like balance a career, do the cooking and cleaning,” she mentioned. “Now women are starting to realize that and that they don’t have to do everything.”

“There comes a certain point in life when you want to do something. Luckily nursing provides that opportunity. You can always hop back in.”

When Zbegner is not planning for the school’s upcoming accreditation or serving as a nurse practitioner one day a week, she has a few hobby’s that help her decompress from her stressful schedule.

But no activity is as important as spending time with her children.

“I have three children, a daughter who lives in Los Angeles and two sons,” the nursing school dean said. “I want to travel and have dinner with them because I don’t always get the opportunity to do so.”

Zbegner considers herself an avid reader and enjoys going to local bowling alley’s to knock a few pins down for fun.

She is also an active member of the PA Coalition of Nurse Practitioners of Northeastern Pa. and is president-elect of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Nursing Schools Association (PHENSA).

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Deborah Zbegner,
PhD, CRNP, WHNP-BC, RNC-REIN
Dean of the Passan School of Nursing



Mary Kathryn Siejak
Dance Instructor for the
Conservatory at Wilkes University

ON THEIR SELECTION AS 2019 DISTINCTIVE WOMEN!



Wilkes University

KATHI BANKES



'I like to exceed expectations,' Kathi Bankes said, whether she's helping people plan a business meeting, cocktail party or perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime wedding. Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Position: Director of Catering and Events for Metz Culinary Creations | **Hometown:** Exeter

Quotable: "I don't think there's any other industry where co-workers are so willing to help each other out. We're a team. Honestly I don't feel like a Distinctive Woman. I'm just part of a team."

By Mary Therese Biebel | mbiebel@timesleader.com

"I love my job. I love to think, 'I just made her fairy tale come true,' " said Kathi Bankes, who considers the chance to help a couple plan a wedding one of the most enjoyable aspects of working as director of catering and events for Metz Culinary Creations.

"With any wedding, for any bride, you are creating the dream she's had since she was old enough to know what a wedding is," Bankes said, remembering one of the most unusual venues she's transformed in time for a wedding reception was the hangar at the Wyoming Valley Airport.

The airport usually doesn't see a lot of banquets, but she and her staff brought in their own stoves and made sure everything was in place for "a beautiful sit-down dinner."

Bankes knew the bride and groom planned to arrive via helicopter. What she didn't expect was to see birds flying around inside the hangar before the festivities.

"I think they were robins," Bankes said, remembering she coped by scattering crackers to distract the birds away from the tables.

Hitting upon such a creative solution gives her satisfaction; so does working as part of the Metz team, which she has done for 13 years — starting as a bar manager at T.G.I. Friday's and progressing to general manager at Lucky's Sporthouse and sales manager at Ruth's Chris Steak House.

"I don't think there's any other industry where co-workers are so willing to help each other out. We're a team," she said, adding modestly. "Honestly I don't feel like a Distinctive Woman. I'm just part of a team."

She's also an enthusiastic volunteer — an avocation she began as a 12-year-old eager to serve as a camp counselor.

"I told the priest in charge I really wanted to do it, and I was used to younger children because I had brothers and sisters," she said. "When I told my mother, she said, 'As long as you understand, you're a volunteer and that means you don't get paid' and I said, 'I don't care; I want to do it anyway.'"

Bankes eventually started working for pay in the food service industry.

"I spent two years as a car hop," she said.

"Not on roller skates," she clarified with a laugh.

After she graduated from Carbondale Area High School, Bankes didn't immediately seek post-secondary

education. Years later she was a single mom, working as a secretary during the day, when she decided to study tourism and hospitality at a vocational-technical school in the evening.

"I decided, I had to get a better grip on life," she said.

No matter what else she was doing, she said, she always had an extra job as a server or tending bar in the food service industry, where it feels like "I can get paid to socialize, and your co-workers become your family."

Speaking of family, Bankes was mother to three children, ages 12, 8 and 2, when she suffered a stroke at age 32.

"I had to get well," she said, remembering how she worked through rehab, learned to speak again and eventually became a spokesperson for the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women campaign.

She's also chairman of the board of directors of the Wyoming Valley Chapter of the Red Cross and serves on the boards of Northeast Sight Services and the YMCA. She's active in a golf tournament that supports Dinners For Kids, a program for which Metz supplies meals to children in need in the Back Mountain area — "I'm so glad to work for such a generous company," she said — while Ollie's Restaurant does the same on the West Side.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), which pairs caring adults with Luzerne County children in foster care, is also close to her heart; she serves on a committee to help the organization.

"This is where we live," she said firmly. "We need to take care of the people in our community because if we don't, who will?"

"Believe me, when you get done volunteering you have the best feeling," said Bankes, who frequently encourages young people to volunteer.

Bankes, 65, lives in Exeter with her husband, Dave. She has three grown children: John Baldino, married to his wife Rachael; Shauna Turlip, married to her husband, Mike, and Kelsey Tyson, married to her wife, Marin. Bankes also has four grandchildren.

Congratulations

KATHI BANKES

ON THE 2019 DISTINCTIVE WOMEN AWARD!

We are proud that you are part of our team!

JENNIFER ROGERS



Judge Jennifer Rogers said she finds "great purpose" in her job.

Fred Adams | for Times Leader

Position: Administrative Judge of Family Court and Dependency Court | **Hometown:** Jenkins Township

Quotable: "Becoming a judge to me was an honor."

By Jerry Lynott | jlycott@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Accidentally hardly describes how Jennifer Rogers became a judge. Eventually is more apropos.

Rogers has been on the Luzerne County bench since January 2012, currently serving as Administrative Judge of Family Court and Dependency Court. But getting there took some time and a career change that the 52-year-old Rogers acknowledged set her on a course for the courtroom.

"Becoming a judge to me was an honor," Rogers said during a recent interview.

She earned a degree in English/Journalism from the University of Delaware and returned to the Wyoming Valley to work in public relations at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, where she was born. She moved when she was 3 to the Baltimore, Md., area with her family.

The process of reading and writing was something Rogers always enjoyed and the desire to put it into practice helping others led her to change direction and attend the Widener University School Law. She joined the firm of Hourigan, Kluger & Quinn before starting her own practice.

The thought of becoming a judge was in the back of her mind. "Over time as an attorney you would like to be considered," Rogers said. The opportunity arose to put it front and center in 2011 when she was one of seven candidates running for six seats on the bench.

It's been a privilege to serve for Rogers.

In her courtroom no two days are the same and the

cases, though dealing with similar issues, are unique. For someone who views family as "the meat and potatoes of life," Rogers said she finds "great purpose" in her job.

Her role places her in the public eye, and she said it's "inescapable" to avoid being seen as a role model. Hopefully, Rogers said, her life would show that through hard work, determination and commitment you can do what your heart leads to.

And that can lead young people to follow her into a career in law, other professions or anywhere. "We want to be able to have balanced people in a balanced world," Rogers said.

Rogers reflected on who influenced her. "To that I would have to say my parents," she said.

Her father, Ron, was a career professional with the Boys Scouts of America and mother, Madge, a homemaker. The couple who live in Dallas have had the most influence on her life, exemplifying a commitment to community service and providing her with a foundation of values and morals.

Rogers and her husband, attorney Vincent Cappellini, live in Jenkins Township.

She plans to run for retention for another 10-year term in 2021.

Honorable Jennifer Rogers:

THANK YOU

For being a Champion for Children in Luzerne County.

You have made a difference in their lives.



DAWN EVANS

Position: Assistant Professor in the Occupational Therapy Department at Misericordia

Hometown: Hanover Township

Quotable: “Don’t limit yourself, especially in the healthcare field. We tend to limit ourselves and put ourselves in a box. We can do anything we want with any population or age group.”

By Dan Stokes
dstokes@timesleader.com

DALLAS TWP. — For Dr. Dawn Evans the call to service has been a big part of her life.

Whether it be teaching and advising students in the occupational therapy at Misericordia University or serving as a spokesperson for the Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Evans believes she is making a difference.

“Service is very important,” said Evans, 52, of Hanover Township. “It’s important for us to help others in the community.”

It’s because of that attitude that Evans was selected to be honored in the Times Leader’s Distinctive Women special section.

Evans currently serves as assistant professor in the occupational therapy department at Misericordia.

“It was one of those things I investigated when I went to high school,” Evans said about choosing her path in occupational therapy. “I went to Misericordia University, and I’ve been linked there ever since.”

Evans has earned her bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees from the Back Mountain university.

“I accepted a job as an assistant professor in 1995 while I was still doing clinical work,” she said. “I haven’t left.”

Evans has been a trailblazer in creating service opportunities for her students, and it started when she became the academic field work coordinator.

“For 15 years I served in that role,” the professor noted. “My job was to place students all over the country, even internationally in clinical experiences. It’s part of the students curriculum to do clinical.”

Evans has even created clinical experiences in places that didn’t have them before such as the YMCA, day care and senior centers.

Evans also serves as an adviser to the university’s largest club on campus, the Misericordia Occupational Therapy Club.

She has more than 25 years of clinical experience in the practice area’s of psychiatry, physical disabilities and forensics. But said most of her clinical experience came with psychiatric patients.

“It’s was a hard switch from clinical to academia at first because academia is a whole different ball game,” Evans said. “It’s more schedule based with classes and meetings. You are your own captain and steer the ship.”

“But I love to work with younger kids who are learning about the whole process and seeing the light bulbs go on in their heads,” she added.



Submitted Photo

Dawn Evans is an assistant professor in the occupational therapy department at Misericordia University in Dallas and chapter chair for the Northeastern PA chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Foundation.

Occupational therapy has been a female dominated profession, Evans admitted.

“We’ve dominated really since World War I,” she said. “We were originally called reconstruction aids. We would go in and help the soldiers when they came off the front lines and took care of them. We showed them that they could still do the simple things in life.”

Evans is currently working on a collaborative research projects with graduate occupational therapy students in the areas of adolescent and parent perceptions of healthy living.

She did provide some advice for women in the field saying, “Don’t limit yourself, especially in the healthcare field. We tend to limit ourselves and put ourselves in a box. We can do anything we want with any population or age group.”

Aside from teaching, Evans is a proactive member serving as the chapter chair for the Northeastern PA chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Foundation.

For Dawn, it’s a cause very close to her heart. Her son died by suicide five years ago.

“I want someone to know that there are people who know what they are feeling and thinking,” she said. “People feel lost after suicide. There has always been a taboo about suicide in the country.”

Evans said suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. It’s also the second leading cause of deaths in Pennsylvania for kids between the ages of 10 to 24.

She has also been contacted by the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board to do more programming about suicide awareness for kids.

When she is not on campus or representing her organization, Evans said she has been planning and helping her daughter prepare for her upcoming wedding.

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MARY SIEJAK

Position: Individualized Instruction teacher at Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston; Ballet Instructor at the Degan Ballet Center at the Conservatory at Wilkes University.

Residence: Hanover Township

Age: 28

Quotable: "I was always good in school. And as I started meeting different people, they would come to me to seek answers or just to talk. I thought maybe I could use this talent to teach and to guide."

By Bill O'Boyle
boboyl@timesleader.com

KINGSTON — Mary Siejak said she knew at an early age that she wanted to teach.

Siejak (pronounced "Shay-ock") said it took her a while to put the pieces together, but they all fell in place.

"I was always good in school," she said. "And as I started meeting different people, they would come to me to seek answers or just to talk. I thought maybe I could use this talent to teach and to guide."

Calling herself "a cheerleader" of sorts, Siejak said she enjoys every day helping students reach their fullest potential.

"I'm that little voice inside their head until they have their own voice," Siejak, 28, said.

In her job as an Individualized Instruction teacher at Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston, Siejak said she works with middle school-aged students with special needs — those with mental and/or physical challenges.

"I set high standards for my students," she said. "I tell them 'we can do this, you can do this,' and we do it together. And I feel it's important for them to celebrate the little wins along the way."

Siejak said she also teaches pre-ballet at Wilkes University for 3- and 4-year-olds.

"I help them gain the confidence to try different moves," Siejak said. "If you work with them, they will succeed. I find it truly inspiring to watch them learn and grow."

When she isn't teaching, Siejak said she has a few passions — Amberdonia, a pizzeria and bakery off of Wyoming Avenue in Kingston — is one of her favorite stops.

"I really like to spend time with my family," she said. Siejak also enjoys going to Balance Yoga in Forty Fort. However, Siejak said with all of her time working and



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Mary Siejak is an individualized instruction teacher at Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston

volunteering, she doesn't have a lot of free time.

Siejak said she likes driving her Mitsubishi Outlander Sport — a mini-SUV — and her favorite food is "a good Caesar salad."

She likes classical and easy listening music — "anything by Billy Joel" is at the top of her list.

"That's on my bucket list — to see Billy Joel in concert," she said.

Siejak earned her bachelor's degree in elementary and special education from Wilkes University.

She is co-moderator of the Holy Redeemer Dance Team; off-ice ballet instructor for the Diamond City Figure Skating Club; participant in IMPACT: A Leadership in Education Program, Class of 2018; and participant in the KISS Theatre fundraising event "Dancing Stars of Wilkes-Barre."



Mary Kathryn Siejak

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Women Leadership in Wilkes They're Distinctive Too!

Women Changing the Business Sector: Greater Entities All Chaired by Female Leaders for the First Time

WILKES-BARRE, PA: In 2019, the five entities of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber will all be chaired by female leadership for the first time in its history.

Mary Erwine, RN, MSN, President, Erwine Home Health & Hospice, Inc. will serve her second term as the 2019 Board Chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce. Erwine built the Kingston-based Erwine Home Health and Hospice from a three-person operation in 1993 to more than 90 employees providing services in 10 counties of Pennsylvania. Beyond building a business, she is an advocate for enhancing the business climate in NEPA through service on the Board of Directors for the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry, Circle 200, Misericordia University, Diocese of Scranton, and as an Advisory Board Member for PNC Bank, Northeast Region. In 2007, she received recognition as one of Pennsylvania's Top 50 Women in Business and in 2010 was named one of the "Great Women in NEPA" by The Times Leader. She exhibits a strong passion for women professionals and is a member of the National Association of Female Executives.

Elizabeth Graham, Chief Operating Officer of Riggs Asset Management Co. was elected to be the 2019 Board Chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry and Greater Wilkes-Barre Growth Partnership. In her role as COO, Graham oversees all

firm operations and employees. In addition to her operations role, Graham is an investment advisor representative where she manages the wealth and investment needs of entrepreneurs, professionals, and multi-generational families with complex wealth.

In 2009, Graham was recognized by the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce with the ATHENA Award and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Business Journal recognized her as one of the "Top 25 Women in Business." In 2001 the same publication recognized her as one of the "Top 20 Executives Under 40." In the community, she has served as Chair of the Boards of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce; The Diamond City Partnership; and The Nuangola Lake Association, and is currently the first female Chair of Board of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry in the organization's 135 year history. In 2003, she co-founded Circle 200, a by-invitation only forum for senior executive women in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and she continues to serve as an Advisor and Member of its Board. Today, Circle 200 counts more than 100 women leaders in its membership.

Teri Ooms, Executive Director of the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development, will serve her fourth term as Board Chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Industrial Fund. Her strategic skills as Executive

Director have allowed The Institute to expand its ser-

Mary Erwine

Mary Erwine is the President of Erwine Home Health & Hospice, Inc. In 1993, Mary set out to create a health care organization that was committed to both state-of-the-art medical technology and compassionate, personalized care that focused on the needs of each individual. Erwine Home Care was the first of three of her companies. The second phase was Erwine Private Duty Healthcare established in 1995 and the third phase was the Hospice division added in 2004.

Though her companies now serve eight counties under Mary's guidance, it was originally just three employees. Today, that number is one hundred, and despite this growth, Erwine Home Health and Hospice and Erwine private Duty Healthcare have remained true to Mary's original vision and commitment.

Erwine cares for many patients in Northeastern Pennsylvania and conscientiously fulfills the attending physician's instructions and provides kind words and caring hands to each and every patient.

Erwine holds a number of degrees, including a Bachelor and Master of Science in Nursing, and School Nurse Certification from University of Misericordia. She also has multiple certifications from Temple University and Divine Providence Hospital as well as an Associate Degree in Nursing from Luzerne County Community College.

In addition to her role as President of her company, Erwine serves the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce as the Chair of their Board of Directors. She is also a member of many other local organizations including a member of NEPA Dt. Jude Children's Research Hospital Fundraising, to name one.

Erwine has been and continues to be involved in many important leadership roles in the community and has also received a list of awards, including Woman of the Year in 2002.



Teri Ooms



Ooms is responsible for all facets of research, organizational strategy, and management. Ooms is an active principal investigator in all Institute research. Ooms has been nationally recognized as a leader in regional economic development. She turned that skill into a research institute to help other regions develop and prosper. Her strategic skills have allowed The Institute to expand its services to the private and non-profit sectors for research and analysis in community health needs assessments, strategic planning, market and feasibility studies, and economic impact analysis. Ooms' leadership has expanded The Institute's work to other states. Under her direction, The Institute has completed over 100 client and community based studies. These studies have resulted in new jobs, new programs, sustained initiatives, and new legislation throughout Pennsylvania and in New York. Ooms also serves on a number of local and regional non-profit boards.

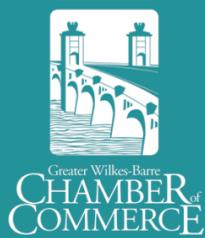
In 2016, Ooms was named Innovator of the Year by the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry for the development of the Connect program for entrepreneurs, the United Way's Poverty to Possibility Initiative, replicating the Lehigh Carbon Community College SHINE model to Luzerne

County, and the development of the regional energy economic development strategy.

From 1997 – 2004, Ooms served as President/CEO of the Inland Empire Economic Partnership (IEEP), Riverside, CA and of its two sister companies – The Inland Empire Tourism Council and the Inland Empire Foundation. IEEP is responsible for the regional marketing, attraction, and recruitment of new business to the region, the expansion and retention of existing business, film, tourism, high tech regional development, a workforce collaborative, regional visioning & planning, legislative advocacy, and the Small Business Development Center.

As President/CEO, Ms. Ooms completed a reorganization of the company resulting in new programs and services, financial stability and increased prominence in the community. In the period of 1997-2003, IEEP had 70 successful business attractions and retentions resulting in over \$730 million in new investment into the region creating over 9,500 jobs. The region had over 5,000 film shoots, demonstrating a little over \$425 million in regional impact in the same period. In 1999, she was awarded "Management Leader of the Year," by the A. Gary Anderson Graduate School of Management, and in 1998, 1999, and 2000 was a recipient of the "Women of Distinction" award given by the Business Press. During her term as CEO, IEEP's membership grew by 10% and maintained an average membership retention ratio of 93%. IEEP evolved to include a high technology development program and coordination of the region's workforce collaborative to bring education and business partnerships to benefit employers, employees, and students as well as the Tourism Council and Foundation. Ms. Ooms is a cum laude graduate of the University of Scranton with a BS in Public Administration and an MBA in Finance.

es-Barre?



Wilkes-Barre Chamber First Time.

services to the private and non-profit sectors for research and analysis in community health needs assessments, strategic planning, market and feasibility studies, and economic impact analysis. Ooms' leadership has expanded The Institute's work to other states. Under her direction, The Institute has completed over 100 client and community based studies. These studies have resulted in new jobs, new programs, sustained initiatives, and new legislation throughout Pennsylvania and in New York. Ooms also serves on a number of local and regional non-profit boards.

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Tara Mugford-Wilson, President of Power Engineering Corporation, will serve her second term as Chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Development Corporation. In January 2016, Ms. Wilson took the position of President of Power Engineering Corporation, where she oversees the company's direction, relationship management, sales and workforce as well as overseeing all facets of the project management team including estimating, job cost



Lindsay Griffin

analysis, budgets, scheduling and purchasing.

A committed leader in the local community, Wilson is currently co-chair of the United Way Campaign as well as a Board Member, past and current Chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Development Corporation Board, member of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry/Growth Partnership Board, Appleseed Foundation, Geisinger Wilkes-Barre Advisory Board, Circle 200, Luzerne Foundation, The Institute for Economic Development and Public Policy, and is a past member of the Penn State Wilkes-Barre Board, Diocese of Scranton Catholic Social Services Board, and American Cancer Society of NEPA.

Lindsay Griffin, Chief Operating Officer and Vice President of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber, looks forward to their leadership. "Our team has had the opportunity to work alongside these incredible women for the past few years. Now, having them at the helm of our organization is truly an honor and we look forward to their leadership as our Chamber continues to enhance the business climate and promote business success and quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania."



Tara Mugford Wilson

Tara Mugford Wilson joined the family business, Power Engineering Corporation (PEC), as Special Projects manager in 1992. PEC, which opened in 1922, is a commercial/industrial mechanical, HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning), plumbing and service company doing business throughout the mid-Atlantic states. In 1993, Ms. Wilson acquired Power Mechanical Corporation (PMC), a union sheet metal and mechanical pipefitting business. Under Wilson's leadership, PMC was able to attain Certified Women Business Enterprise (WBE) status in Pennsylvania. She also retooled PMC's fabrication facility with state-of-the-art fully automated fabrication equipment while continuing to grow the company's capabilities and annual sales.

As a signatory contractor to Sheet metal Workers Local 44 and Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 524 she served in a trustee role for all the funds at both locals. She was President of the Sheet metal Contractors Association of NEPA for 6 years and served on the board of the

Sheet metal Contractors of PA. She was a regular member of the negotiating committees both on the local and national level.

Ms. Wilson sold Power Mechanical in 2015 and took the position of President of Power Engineering Corporation in January 2016. Ms. Wilson's current responsibilities include overseeing the company's direction, relationship management, sales and workforce as well as overseeing all facets of the project management team including estimating, job cost analysis, budgets, scheduling and purchasing.

A committed leader in the local community, Ms. Wilson is currently co-chair of the United Way Campaign as well as a board member, past and current chair of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Development Corporation Board, member of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry/Growth Partnership Board, Appleseed Foundation, Geisinger Wilkes-Barre Advisory Board, Circle 200, Luzerne Foundation, The Institute for Economic Development and Public Policy, and is a past member of the Penn State Wilkes-Barre board, Diocese of Scranton Catholic Social Services Board and American Cancer Society of NEPA.

A Dallas, PA native, Ms. Wilson is a graduate of Wyoming Seminary and Drexel University with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Ms. Wilson currently resides in Dallas, PA with her children Robert and Alexandra, and companion, Dan Petrishin.

Elizabeth Graham

Elizabeth Graham is Chief Operating Officer and Principal of Riggs Asset Management Company, Inc., a large investment advisory firm headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In her role as COO, Ms. Graham oversees all firm operations and employees. In addition to her operations role, Ms. Graham is an investment advisor representative where she manages the wealth and investment needs of entrepreneurs, professionals, and multi-generational families with complex wealth. She and her brother, Bob, launched the Riggs Family Office in 2008 to help meet the growing needs of their client base.

Prior to joining Riggs in the spring of 2001, Ms. Graham directed the marketing and strategic planning efforts of a large national law firm with offices in Washington, D.C., New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Stamford, Newark, and Dallas. While in Washington, she was instrumental in developing Women Business Leaders in Healthcare, the first senior executive women's forum for the health care industry.

In June 2009, Ms. Graham was recognized by the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce with the ATHENA Award. This award is given out once a year to the woman who has made significant contributions to the business and local community. In March 2009, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Business Journal recognized her as one of the "Top 25 Women in Business" and in 2001 the same publication recognized her as one of the "Top 20 Executives Under 40." She has served as Chair of the Boards of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce; The Diamond City Partnership; and The Nuangola Lake Association. Currently, she is Chair of Board of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, the first woman to Chair that Board in the Organization's 135 year history. In 2003, she co-founded Circle 200 a by-invitation only forum for senior executive women in Northeastern Pennsylvania and she continues to serve as an Advisor and Member of its Board. Today, Circle 200 counts more than 100 women leaders in its membership.



SARA PEPERNO



Sara Gorgone Peperno is the CEO/president of Northeast Sight Services.

Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

By Joe Soprano | jsoprano@timesleader.com

Position: CEO/President of Northeast Sight Services | **Hometown:** Old Forge | **Family:** Husband, Rob, and 11-year-old daughter, Mia

Quotable: "I was excited to come somewhere I could see what the need was and then help to grow the organization to help people in a specific area."

Sara Gorgone Peperno certainly earned her spot in the Times Leader's Distinctive Women section through her dedication and service throughout a career in the nonprofit field.

But as CEO and president of Northeast Sight Services, Gorgone Peperno knows she's following some women who were distinctive in their own right.

"What is really neat for me as a woman is that the agency was founded by a woman 100 years ago ... by a woman that was blind actually," she said recently, referring to Arline Phillips. "So to be able to follow in those footsteps ..."

She also mentioned Eilene Kaska, who started the agency's prevention of blindness program and is still involved with the agency.

Gorgone Peperno, 41, started working with nonprofits in college during an internship.

After college she landed a marketing job with the United Way.

"I basically went to Penguin games and helped fund raise there, and things like that," Gorgone Peperno said. "And just built my career there to a vice president position overseeing all the fund distribution and all the marketing.

"So it was a great run there."

And about the time that Gorgone Peperno was ready for a new challenge, the CEO/president's position at Northeast Sight Services (then called the Greater Wilkes-Barre Association of the Blind) opened up.

"I really wanted to get into direct service," she said. "At the United Way, it's a little bit more hands off as to providing actual services to people who are in need.

"I was excited to come somewhere I could see what the need was and then help to grow the organization to help people in a specific area."

And for the past five and half years, that's exactly what Gorgone Peperno has been doing.

"I really like being able to see the direct effect of all the programs we have here," she said. "I really get to know clients."

The agency is dedicated to serving the needs of the blind and visually impaired community with pride and commitment.

Gorgone Peperno was quick to point to the agency's Vision Resource Center, which was revitalized as part of Northeast Sight Service's centennial celebration last year, as one of the ways it serves the community.

"This is something new that we are offering the community," she said of the center. "It's really just a resource for people to come and try out new items with our staff who are experienced with them and just try to determine what works best for them."

She also mentioned that a big part of what the agency does is making sure its clients can live independently.

"We go right out into the home and are able to say, 'What are your problems and what are the issues that you are having, and here are some of the solutions,'" Gorgone Peperno said.

However, helping the visually impaired live independently goes beyond just working with the agency's clients.

"We are really going to start a push to get the community more accessible to people with visual impairments," she said. "That's going to be our goal for 2019 and 2020."

The past year was a big one for the agency and Gorgone Peperno. Not only did Northeast Sight Services celebrate a century of service in 2018, it re-branded itself, changing its name from the Greater Wilkes-Barre Association of the Blind.

"My biggest accomplishment here has been the name change," she said. "It was humbling to be here at such a momentous time for the agency."

Gorgone Peperno was quick to credit her staff with making the transition a successful one.

"I love our team here," she said. "We have a great team. Everyone is always full of new ideas and always trying to implement new and exciting ideas for the agency, so that's been an incredibly rewarding piece to being here."

Peperno Gorgone lives in Old Forge with her husband, Rob, and her 11-year-old daughter Mia.



LORI NOCITO



Times Leader file photo

Lori Nocito is the executive director of Leadership Wilkes-Barre.

Position: Executive Director of Leadership Wilkes-Barre

Quotable: "The minute you stop learning, you start moving backward."

By Patrick Kernan | pkernan@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Lori Nocito describes herself as a "joiner," and she thinks this has been the key to her success over the years.

Nocito, 54, has been the executive director of Leadership Wilkes-Barre for 16 years. Leadership Wilkes-Barre, located at 4 Public Square in the city's center, is an organization that teaches enrolled students how to be better leaders in their community.

Nocito is herself an alumna of the program.

"I always say, 'I wouldn't tell you to do something that I wouldn't do myself,'" she said.

According to Nocito, she's long been active in the community, finding herself getting involved with a number of local philanthropic and professional opportunities — precisely why she gave herself the title of being a "joiner."

It's that attitude that landed Nocito a spot in the Times Leader's Distinctive Women special section.

She said that she thinks this ability to get involved in the community is what marked her while she was enrolled at Leadership Wilkes-Barre; Nocito was hired as the organization's executive director shortly after her time in the program.

"I believe I was selected because of my community involvement," she said.

However, it seems likely that Nocito's opinions about leadership also played an important role in her position. Nocito spoke at length about what she think leadership entails, and, to her, leadership doesn't come from

a desire to have power. It comes from a desire to serve. "From the desire to serve, the leader emerges," she said.

This idea is one that Leadership Wilkes-Barre aims to instill, with each class breaking up into smaller sections to work on "community impact projects," where they aim to effectuate some change in the local community. The members of the smaller groups are able to direct what they do with their projects, and Nocito said the goals of the project vary from group to group, from class to class.

But, Nocito said, one goal remains the same: to develop "informed leaders."

"The projects are great," she said. "But it's really about the process."

When asked what advice she has for young people who want to be in a position similar to hers, Nocito highlighted the importance of learning. Nocito said there's something to learn from everyone, and that everyone in your life can serve as a mentor.

Recently, she visited Slovenia, which is the 45th country she's visited. Nocito said there is so much to be learned from meeting people of other cultures.

"The minute you stop learning, you start moving backward," she said.

Congratulations to all Distinctive Women

Alana Roberts
Cassandra Coleman
Catherine O'Donnell
Deborah Zbegner
Kathi Bankes
Kerry Miscavage
Lindsay Griffin
Maribeth Jones
Mary Siejak
Sara Peperno
Jennifer Rogers
Lori Nocito
Dr. Dawn Evans
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Congratulations

to the Times Leader's very own
Vice President of Sales and Marketing,

Kerry Miscavage

for being named one of 2019's
Distinctive Women!

From all of us here at the Times Leader,
we thank you for all you do!



We'd also like to congratulate all of this
year's Distinctive Women!

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Catherine O'Donnell

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