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LEADERS INFLUENTIAL IN THE MIDWEST

STORY BY **KIMBERLY STERN AND DAVID HODES**



When we at *Midwest CEO* sent out a call for nominations for this year's list of Influential Women in the Midwest, we knew there were hundreds of business-savvy leaders who inspire others, create opportunities for their companies to grow and contribute to the community, lead civic platforms in their cities, and possess a crisp vision and entrepreneurial spirit. That spirit guides significant philanthropic efforts; major strategic community initiatives; and local, state, regional and national advocacy efforts for issues ranging from fairness in the workplace to diversity.

This year's honored Influential Women work diligently in their respective fields—fields such as banking, communications, health care, life sciences and technology. Here we present a list of the best and brightest—women who strive for excellence not only in the workplace but also in their communities, driving efforts to make their cities productive and viable places to live, work and attend school.

A selection of the Midwest's very best: (clockwise, upper left to lower left) Mary Jo Gorman, co-founder and CEO of Advanced ICU Care; Kathleen Barney, president and CEO of H&R Block Bank; Judy Hohn, owner of Serenity Day Spa; Denise Henning, founder of the Henning Law Firm PC; Chris Kelly, program coordinator for Metropolitan Community College in Kansas City; Karen Pletz, president and CEO of the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences.

ELLIE ARCHER, Executive Director/The Women's Fund in Omaha, Nebraska. Archer oversees fundraising and awareness of women's issues in Omaha.

BRENDA BALLARD, Executive Vice President/Westrop Insurance in Kansas City. Under Ballard's leadership, Westrop's property premium volume has grown 300 percent since 2001.

JERI BARTUNEK, Founder and CEO/Bartunek Technology Group in Kansas City. Her company is a top staffing company for the information technology business.

LISA BELL-REIM, Co-founder/Oculus Inc. in St. Louis. Bell-Reim has grown the architectural firm from four to 30 people in 13 years.

CHRISTINA BOVERI, Owner/Boveri Realty Group and Publisher/*Urban Times* magazine in Kansas City.

SHERRY BOWDEN, Vice President of the Vending Division/Treat America Food Services in Kansas City. Bowden has been instrumental in acquiring vending operations.

ROXANNE BARTON CONLIN, Owner/Roxanne Conlin and Associates in Des Moines, Iowa. Conlin was the first female president of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America.

KAREN COX, Executive Vice President and COO/Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics in Kansas City. Cox is also the associate director of the Nursing Workforce Innovation Center.

KRISTIN CRAVENS, Owner/Serendipity Accents in Kansas City. Cravens is currently in her fifth year of nearly 100 percent annual sales growth.

KATHLEEN BARNEY

PRESIDENT AND CEO/H&R BLOCK BANK, KANSAS CITY

Kathleen Barney joined H&R Block in 2003 to direct the organization of the H&R Block Bank. In May 2006 the new division opened after Barney successfully obtained a federal savings bank charter. During the bank's two years of operation Barney and her staff of fewer than 50 employees have worked closely with H&R Block's tax services team and have led the bank in the development of the Emerald Suite of products for Block. Barney serves on the H&R Block Bank board of directors and, because she is a proponent of education, sits on the boards of both the Missouri Colleges Fund and the Metropolitan Community College Foundation.

AIMEE BELL

VICE PRESIDENT, VENDOR FINANCE DIVISION/POPULAR EQUIPMENT FINANCE, BALLWIN, MISSOURI

Aimee Bell, a single mother who was unable to finish college before entering the workforce, joined Popular Equipment Finance (then known as Popular Leasing) in 2003 as a receptionist and quickly moved up to documentation specialist, eventually becoming documentation team leader. When a new president ousted the previous management team, Bell helped the company reinvent itself by offering new products and replacing the old guard with synergistic teams.

She also continued to forge national accounts with household name companies such as Baskin-Robbins, Dunkin' Donuts and Sherwin-Williams. Such partners help produce turnkey financing transactions for Popular Equipment Finance. In her current role Bell continues to lead 21 sales offices that are spread across 12 states. Those offices have a combined sales volume of more than \$100 million.

MARGARET GOLDEN BOWKER

VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING/JE DUNN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, KANSAS CITY



Margaret Golden Bowker began her career with Kansas City-based Bernstein-Rein Advertising Inc. and served as a principal at nationally renowned architecture firm Gould Evans Associates for 18 years. She then joined JE Dunn Construction Company, which has six operating companies in 22 cities nationwide, as an assistant vice president in marketing in 2006. Promoted to vice president in 2007, Bowker's responsibilities include marketing, business development, graphics development, public relations and advertising for the \$1.5 billion Midwest division.

Outside of work she serves on the executive board for Wyandotte County Economic Development Council. In that capacity she has worked to rebrand Wyandotte County and increase membership four-fold.

SUSAN K. BROWN

VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND MARKETING/THE ENERGY SAVINGS STORE, PRAIRIE VILLAGE, KANSAS



Susan Brown's leadership efforts for developing a green business have catapulted the revenues of 6-year-old solar and wind solutions company The Energy Savings Store to more than \$1 million annually.

Brown is a director on the board of The Energy Savings Store of Kansas and chairs the Concerned Citizens of Platte County Missouri board. In April 2008 Michael J. Chesser, chairman and CEO of Great Plains Energy Inc., asked her to sit on a discussion panel at the prestigious Edison Foundation's annual conference in New York City.

Passionate about renewable energy and efficiency, Brown is the vice chair of the buildings and infrastructure workgroup of the Kansas City,

Missouri, climate protection plan; she is a board member of Platte County Missouri's green-build committee and is a member of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's energy policy task force. She also represents Platte County on the Mid-America Regional Council's air quality forum.

MYRA J. CHRISTOPHER

PRESIDENT AND CEO/CENTER FOR PRACTICAL BIOETHICS, KANSAS CITY

Myra J. Christopher is the founding director of the Kansas City-based not-for-profit Center for Practical Bioethics, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. Established in 1984 with the mission of raising and responding to ethical issues in health care, the organization started with a meager \$7,000 budget. That number has since grown to an annual budget of more than \$2 million.

Currently Christopher serves at the pleasure of Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius on the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts. She is also a member of the American Pain Foundation board and serves on the advisory boards for the University of Kansas School of Nursing, the Duke [University] Institute on Care at the End of Life and the Institute for Spirituality at Shawnee Mission Medical Center. She is a fellow of the Federation of State Medical Boards and has received numerous national, state and local awards.

JO ANNE GABBERT

FOUNDER/ADAMS-GABBERT AND ASSOCIATES INC.; CHAIRWOMAN/ADAMS-GABBERT AND ASSOCIATES LLC ADVISORY BOARD; PRESIDENT/BICKNELL FAMILY HOLDING COMPANY; LEE'S SUMMIT, MISSOURI, AND LEAWOOD, KANSAS



Adams-Gabbert and Associates Inc. was founded by Jo Anne Gabbert in March 1999 and grew to a nearly \$5 million business at the end of 2007. That innovative management consulting company was then sold to the Bicknell Family Holding Company in 2008, and Gabbert continued as president, guiding the organization to another record year with \$5.5 million in revenue. On January 1, 2009, she accepted the position of president for the Bicknell Family Holding Company.

Gabbert and her businesses have received numerous business awards, including a designation as one of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's Top 10 Small Businesses of the Year, the Lee's Summit Small Business of the Year award, the Microsoft Bright Ideas Award and *Kansas City Small Business Monthly's* 25 under 25 Award.

MARY JO GORMAN

CO-FOUNDER, CEO/ADVANCED ICU CARE, ST. LOUIS

Through her work in critical-care medicine, Mary Jo Gorman has altered the way critically ill patients in community hospitals are cared for.

Advanced ICU Care, co-founded by Gorman in 2005, is a pioneer in that it uses telemedicine technology to bring intensivists and critical-care nurses to hospital ICUs that lack access to critical-care expertise. The company has maintained consistent growth, jumping from eight hospitals, 89 beds and \$3 million in revenues in 2007 to 10 hospitals spanning five states in 2008 with projected year-end revenues of between \$5 million and \$10 million. Gorman founded the Inpatient Care Group in 1997 in response to the growing need for the care of hospitalized patients. Two years later the company merged with IPC: The Hospitalist Company, and within three years revenues grew by 600 percent and physician staffing rose 375 percent. In 2008 IPC had a successful initial public offering.

BETTY DREES, Dean and Professor of Medicine/University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine. Drees was recently appointed to the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education.

GLENDA KEARNEY DUBOISE, Program Manager/Southwestern Bell in Topeka, Kansas. In 2005 she was named one of the top 10 businesswomen by the Topeka chapter of American Business Women's Association.

STEFKA FANCHI, Board President/Habitat for Humanity in Denver. Fanchi worked in inner-city schools before beginning a long career of grant writing.

KAY GOEBEL, Owner, Kay Goebel LLC in Oklahoma City. Goebel was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

DEBBIE GOLD, Head Chef/The American Restaurant in Kansas City. Gold was named "chef to watch" in 1997 by *Esquire* magazine and continues working at the prestigious American Restaurant.

SERRI HELM, Vice President Corporate Affairs and General Counsel/Community America Credit Union in Kansas City, one of the largest financial institutions in the Midwest.

GERALDINE HIGGINS, President and Owner/Portfolio Kitchen & Home in Kansas City, one of the top Midwest home design resources. She is frequently consulted by and interviewed in lifestyle magazines.

KATHY KOEHLER, Partner/The Koehler Bortnick Team in Kansas City. Koehler joined forces with her daughter and helped sales jump to \$50 million in just a few years.