

2020 A Special Supplement to

TIMES LEADER

DISTINCTIVE WOMEN

Sunday, October 4, 2020

Porsche Wyoming Valley

Ed Napleton Automotive Group



Proudly highlighting 12 of Northeastern Pennsylvania's most Distinctive Women

Clancy Cash Harrison | Dr. Lucyann Sciandra | Deborah Mozal | Rebecca Brominski | Suzanne Kapral
Susan Yelen | Senator Lisa Baker | Ronne Kurlancheek | Dr. Jill Murray | Gloria Blandina | Maura Smith | Vivian Williams

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 third annual program. We opened voting in print and online for four weeks in March. We paused when the pandemic hit and restarted the nomination process again in July.

The response was overwhelming as we knew it would be. Narrowing the group down to twelve 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 celebrated with a safe, socially distant luncheon at the Westmoreland Club Tuesday, October, 29.

We offer a special thanks to Richard Yelen who accepted the award on behalf of his late sister Susan Yelen. Susan unfortunately passed away shortly after the Distinctive Women winners were notified. Richard and his family members helped our team develop the profile that you will read today.

Thank you, Porsche of Wyoming Valley, for being our sponsor for 2020.



Congratulations to

Rebecca Brominski

LCCC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

2020
DISTINCTIVE
WOMEN



And congratulations to all of the amazing women featured who have impacted their communities!

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SENATOR LISA BAKER

More than a legislator, also an advocate for communities

Residence: Lehman Township | Family: Husband, Gary, son, Carson, daughter-in-law Katie, grandchildren Bryce and Blair

By Jerry Lynott
jlynott@timesleader.com

New to the state Senate in 2007, Lisa Baker knew her way around Harrisburg.

She'd been a legislative aide for her predecessor, the late Sen. Charles Lemmond, and worked for two former governors, Tom Ridge and Mark Schweiker.

Still, as a freshman senator she was reminded she was stepping into a majority male legislature.

"When I was first elected, I was the only woman in the Senate who had a child of school age," Baker recalled.

Her welcome was less than warm at one point.

"I had one individual who asked me who was home watching your child," Baker said. "I asked him who was at home watching yours. He took a step back and said, 'I apologize for asking that question.'"

Over the past 16 years, more women have become senators; the Senate counts 13, seven Democrats and six Republicans, including Baker. She became a grandmother, too. Her son Carson and his wife Katie, have two children, Bryce and Blair.

In addition to the family milestones, Baker, 59, has made her mark legislatively, becoming the first woman to sit as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. As a non-lawyer, she said, she brought a different role to the committee.

"I took a fresh look at a number of issues," Baker said.

She's worked extensively on crime victims, including the witness testimony of children and special needs children in the courtroom, human trafficking and extending the statute of limitations for victims of sexual assault over the age of 18.

Sure, Baker is the face of the office for the 20th Senatorial District, but there's a dedicated and professional staff working behind the scenes. And there are plenty of people who've helped and guided her during her career.

She credited her Dallas High School civics teacher, the late Jerry Stinson, with encouraging her to enter into politics. "I viewed it more as public service," Baker said.

Nonetheless, Stinson went to the local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs for scholarship money to send Baker to Washington, D.C. for a leadership program.

"We watched oral arguments in the Supreme Court that really solidified my decision to pursue politics," Baker said.

At home, participation and discussion were encouraged, especially with a father who was an attorney, Baker said.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in public administration from Shippensburg University.

Factor into the mix the jobs she's held, from delivering a newspaper, waitressing, working in the concession stand of a drive-in and at the former Boston Store, her position on the staff of former state Sen. Bob Jubelirer, R-Altoona, and her role as director of the Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania's Blue Ribbon Foundation.



Baker said she enjoyed working at the Foundation, connecting resources to deserving people and programs.

"I could see myself in the non-profit world," Baker said, if she wasn't in politics.

But Baker is planning to stick around and put her experience and expertise to good use.

"One of the things I like best about this role it's not just legislative. It's also being an advocate for the communities I represent," Baker said.

Preparation, listening, research and a willingness to look at different perspectives are skills she said she employs to do her job.

"I think that's the key to what I've tried to do in this role and try to reach as much consensus as you can," Baker said. "You don't have to be disagreeable when you disagree."



"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

-Muriel Strode

Congratulations to all of the amazing women being honored for their impact on our communities.

DR. LUCYANN SCIANDRA

Infectious disease expert spends year battling against COVID-19

By Patrick Kernan
pkernan@timesleader.com



Joe Soprano | Times Leader

Dr. Lucyann M. Sciandra, right, is present her Distictive Women award by the Times Leader's Diane McGee at the Westmoreland Club in Wilkes-Barre on Tuesday.

WILKES-BARRE — Dr. Lucyann Sciandra is an infectious disease expert, so you can imagine that her skills have been a bit in-demand this year.

Sciandra is based out of a Wilkes-Barre private practice, along with partners Dr. Linda Slavoski and Dr. Gary Decker, specializing in helping patients who are battling infectious diseases.

While in normal years, Sciandra said this would usually involve helping patients deal with more standard infections. And while there are still plenty of patients who need help with that these days, Sciandra says much of the focus has, understandably, shifted to the fight against COVID-19.

“The day-to-day is a long day to begin with,” Sciandra said. “Not only do you have to take care of the normal things, now you have to deal with the pandemic.”

Sciandra says that part of the struggle comes from just dealing with the fact

that COVID-19 is the largest scale health crisis since the influenza epidemic of the late 1910s.

“The AIDS epidemic, I remember as a medical student, and that was scary,” Sciandra said, before adding that COVID-19 is, in many ways, an even deeper existential threat than the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Part of that comes from the fact that, every day, everything seems to change.

“The days seem longer for us. It’s hard,” she said. “It’s a disease process that, every day, something new seems to come out. The recommendations seem to change every day.

“You have to use your best judgment, and that puts a bigger burden on us,” she went on to say.

Sciandra said she uses her expertise at several of our area’s hospitals, including Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton and Commonwealth Health

Moses Taylor Hospital, still working with patients who are struggling with illnesses besides COVID-19.

According to her, infectious disease seemed to be the thing she was best suited for.

“In med school, it seemed to be what clicked,” she said, saying that she just had the head for keeping all the facts and figures of infectious diseases straight. “I was a person who loved microbiology and everything that entailed. ... It just comes easier to me.”

Sciandra, 54, is a native of Pittston, and spent time throughout the state, attending medical school at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine before doing her residency in Philadelphia. She spent a few years teaching, before eventually returning to practice in our area to be closer to family. She now resides in Jenkins Township.



Joe Soprano | Times Leader



Joe Soprano | Times Leader

CLANCY CASH HARRISON

“A lot of people in the United States think food insecurity is a third world problem. Food insecurity can be having stress around if your money is going to run out at the end of the month.”

DALLAS — Registered dietitian Clancy C. Harrison is on a mission to make Americans aware of how big of a problem food insecurity is in the country, including right here in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

“People need food,” Harrison said simply. “Hunger is here in Luzerne County.”

Harrison, 45, has been a dietitian for 20 years, but has been spending the past decade specifically fighting against hunger. According to her, her passion toward fighting hunger began when a church near her children’s school needed a president for its food pantry.

One thing led to another, and, as she said, “It became a passion of mine,” before adding, “Because I’m a dietitian, it means a lot to me.”

Harrison’s battle against hunger has taken her onto international stages as a speaker, discussing the social determinants of health and hunger. According to her, many Americans have an inaccurate view of how hunger works.

“A lot of people in the United States think food insecurity is a third world problem,” she said, but it isn’t as simple as that. “Food insecurity can be having stress around if your money is going to run out at the end of the month.”

Further, she said that food insecurity also doesn’t just cause people to be underweight; according to Harrison, some of the cheapest food is extremely high in fat, leading to many people experiencing food insecurity to actually be *overweight*.

“It creates a lot of misconception,” she said. “Hunger looks like you; it’s on every street.”

Harrison said that one of her biggest goals is to increase awareness around hunger, and break down the stigmas surrounding seeking help.

“I hope that people take a step back from judging,” she said. “We could use more empathy and less judging... it’s OK to need help.”

Harrison said that, in addition to acting as a keynote speaker on international stages, she recently launched the Food Dignity Podcast, a show dedicated to the broader mission of getting the word out about food insecurity.

The show, launched in September, comes out weekly.

“It’s about people telling their hunger stories,” she said. “It’s a personal, story-telling podcast.”

Covering topics such as how diversity intersects with food dignity and hunger issues for the elderly, the Food Dignity Podcast is available on iTunes, Spotify and other podcast hosting services.



Congratulations Clancy Harrison



Clancy Cash Harrison MS, RDN, FAND
Founder of The Food Dignity® Project,
TEDx Speaker, Author, Registered Dietitian



570-881-0683 | Clancy@ClancyHarrison.com
www.ClancyHarrison.com | [Skype: ClancyHarrison](https://www.skype.com/Skype:ClancyHarrison)



Join Clancy weekly on
The Food Dignity® Podcast.
The Food Dignity® Podcast is a storytelling
podcast that demolishes the barriers
and stigma associated
with healthy food access.
#FoodDignity

SUZANNE KAPRAL

Using her life experiences to help children

By Bill O'Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Suzanne M. Kapral used her early childhood experiences to help others.

Kapral, director of marketing & development at The Lands at Hillside Farms, is one of the region's Distinctive Women for 2020.

"I began a routine of self-initiated farm-based, animal-assisted therapy when I was a child," Kapral said. "A friend of mine introduced me to a special place behind her home, Hillside Farms."

Decades later, Kapral developed and spearheaded Hillside's Children's Grief Camp, which serves children who have experienced loss of a family member due to illness, accident, murder, or suicide, children in foster care, and children with parents in active addiction.

Children's Grief Camp provides farm-based, animal-assisted interventions, grief education and grief sessions and is made possible through the generosity of community partners and donors.

"When I spent time walking throughout the rolling pastures, visiting with the cows and sheep, I felt safe and accepted," Kapral said. "Growing up in the 60s and 70s, children did not speak of the trauma they experienced."

Kapral said the farm animals were her therapists.

"They listened without judgment," she said. "I felt safe, free and protected."

Later in life, Kapral had the opportunity to work at her childhood haven. She said she wanted to find a way where Hillside Farms could help other children who were hurting — to find something so they too could feel comforted and safe.

This "something" would be a summer camp for grieving children.

"Often, the term sustainability is connected to an overall healthy environment — air, soil, water, recycling," Kapral said. "Yet, if we do not focus on our most valuable and vulnerable asset — our children — what good is the rest? What good is providing resources on improving what surrounds us, while the inside of the collective we are hurting? Sustainability as a society is a collective of key variables, and children need to be a priority."

"All children, regardless of circumstances and abilities have value, matter, and belong. They are not a burden. Kids need to believe that and this grief camp is just one way to help them get to that place."

"We all have the power to help heal future generations. Be willing to step in the trenches with one hurting child. Let her know she matters."

Working with grief professionals and Hillside's trained camp counselors, children work and play side-by-side with others who are also grieving.

"Comfort can be found knowing that there are others having similar experience and feelings," Kapral said. "Here, children will learn coping strategies, communication skills, and when necessary, how to say goodbye."

As a March 2020 TEDx Scranton speaker, Suzanne shared her own story of recovery, "How Cows and a Cornfield Help Heal Childhood Trauma," that was the catalyst for Children's



The Lands at Hillside Farms Director of Marketing and Development Suzanne Kapral.

Grief Camp.

She has served in a fundraising/marketing capacity for 25 years and is founder and Principle Consultant of Kelly Green & Associates, LLC. Kelly Green & Associates offers a range of expertise in fundraising, public relations, marketing and market research, government relations, traditional and social media, and strategic planning. She produces and hosts a podcast, "Chanel and Muckboots – Women Who Get **it Done" (chanelandmuckboots.com).

For a decade she was an on-air fundraiser as well as producer/host of "State of Pennsylvania" for WVIA-TV/FM and for seven consecutive years Suzanne represented WVIA as National Congressional Arts Competition Coordinator for Pennsylvania Districts 10, 11 and 17.

Suzanne holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Marketing and a Master's of Science in Organizational Management with a concentration in non-profit, from Misericordia University. She is currently doing post-master's work and research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and expects to complete her second Master of Science in Animal Behavior/Animal Welfare in 2022.

In November 2018 Suzanne was sworn in as Luzerne County Court Appointed Special Advocate for Children.

You can learn more about Suzanne at suzannekapral.com.



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GLORIA BLANDINA

Committed to helping those in need

By Kevin Carroll
kcarroll@timesleader.com

PITTSTON — When the Care and Concern Free Health clinic opened on William Street in 2007, Gloria Blandina was there.

Thirteen years later, she's still as committed as ever to helping those in need, even if she can't be at the clinic physically due to COVID-19.

"There are so many people without health insurance that we take care of," Blandina said. "It's been a pleasure and a privilege."

Blandina was brought on board at the clinic by her dear friend Ann Cocco, who had the idea in the first place to open up a free health clinic.

"She [Ann] went into a room with a bunch of other people and made this clinic happen," Blandina said.

Soon after the clinic opened in 2007, Cocco had to step away, and asked Blandina to step in as director.

"I was going to say no, initially," Blandina said. "But I changed my mind, and here I am all these years later."

Blandina grew up in Pittston, and currently resides in Wyoming with her husband of 48 years, Jim. She's got two children, Jamie and Michael, and five grandchildren.

She's devoted a lot of time to family, and has dealt with health struggles in the past, but that's never stopped Blandina's tireless desire to help others and to give back to the community she calls home.

"We've served 4,154 patients in 13 years," Blandina said of the clinic, which offers free services to people without health insurance. "It's been remarkable."

Unfortunately, COVID-19 meant that the clinic had to close its physical location for the time-being, meaning that Blandina hasn't been able to do the work she loves so much.

"I worry about our patients, how they're doing and if they need us," Blandina said. "I haven't been in the clinic since March."

However, the clinic has still acted as a referral service of sorts during the pandemic, taking calls from patients and connecting them with the help they need.

"A lot of doctors we reach out to are willing to do pro bono work for us," Blandina said. "It's so important that everyone gets the help they need."



Congratulations

"A Recognition Well Deserved"

Gloria Blandina



St. John the Evangelist

Care & Concern Clinic
and Friends

Congrats to you, Gloria!

So Proud of the way you share your love & kindness with others.
Love Jim



We Love You, Gigi!
Love Enzo, Giada, Joey, Barrett and Carson



Mom, Thanks for the examples you have set for us!
Love, Jaime, Jay, Michael and Areinne

SUSAN YELEN

Remembering an extraordinary life

By Bill O'Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Just a few days after Susan Yelen was notified that she was selected as one of the region's Distinctive Women, she passed away on Thursday, Aug. 20.

Her family, friends and colleagues have graciously taken the time to remember Susan for who she was and the legacy she leaves behind.

Thanks to Susan's sister, Alice Yelen Gitter, and her brother, Richard Yelen, Susan is remembered here and it is clear as to why she was selected for this honor.

Susan Yelen considered herself as an educator and a social worker first. A nationally recognized Certified Financial Planner, instrumental in supporting community causes and with a well-rounded personal life.

An accomplished financial planner, Susan served the needs of individuals and families for 38 years, beginning at Smith Barney, followed by three decades at Morgan Stanley.

Caring for people who needed help was constant in Susan's work and life.

National Awards

Susan's commitment to serving others has been recognized by the financial industry with several distinguished honors. She is a Five Star Wealth Manager award winner — among them, in 2008 Barron's magazine named her one of the Top 100 Women Advisors in America, and in 2009 she was listed in Barron's magazine as one of the Top 1000 Financial Advisors in America.

RJ Shook, founder of Forbes/SHOOK Top Advisors and founder of Winner's Circle advisor rankings, sold to Barron's magazine, said this:

"Susan quickly become a friend in the early 2000s when I was building my Winner's Circle. We've had a shared passion for taking care of others. In addition to our personal relationship, I looked up to Susan for guidance for my business. Her integrity, professionalism and the extraordinary care she offered her clients made her stand out as one of the very best advisers in the industry, and she has been an incredible role model for others to follow. I've been proud to show her off to the world on my rankings, and more importantly to call her a friend. Susan has been one of those special people that have made an incredible impact on so many others."

Peers

Susan was a natural leader and referred to by her colleagues as a "trailblazer" — a woman in an industry that was traditionally male-dominated, as well as for her creative, caring and humanistic approach to the individuals she served.

In 2011 she was voted by APIC colleagues as the recipient of the Thomas Gorman Award for leadership, advocacy, sharing and innovation.

Adam Warshavsky, president-elect of APIC, said:

"Susan was the consummate professional and her care and concern of others is remarkable. The science of what we do is the easy part — the foundational tools Susan so aptly exhibited and practiced — it's the learning of how to have the listening and caring skills that are so important."

Clients

Susan's sharp analytical mind combined with a unique creative twist, innate psychological insight and ingrained sense of excellence impacted the lives of her clients. Susan treated all clients with equal importance, regardless of the size of their assets, believing that everyone's goal to make their life the best they could with what they had, was similar.

Recognizing the enduring value of personal guidance and experience, Susan brought her personal qualities to her work: unwavering devotion to family; a stalwart sense of responsibility to care for friends; sincerity and compassion.

"It is not uncommon to hear from a client of Susan's that they relied on her for important financial decisions in their life," said Susan's partner Chris Prater, financial advisor, The Yelen Group, Morgan Stanley.

According to Rebecca Winder, Yelen Group registered associate, Susan would answer her phone at anytime of day, and when a client would say "sorry to bother you" and she would say "You're the purpose of our day" — no matter what time it was.

Mentoring and Learning

Susan loved learning and teaching. Mentoring was one of her passions.

Susan had both a thirst for knowledge and a propensity for sharing it. She mentored her handpicked team and infused her philosophy for client care into her well-trained team.

In addition to sharing with peers and educating clients, Susan taught the Basics of Investing at Wilkes University for several years.

Community Involvement

Susan took her communal work as seriously as she did her career. She made huge impacts on local organizations, sticking to her principles even when they were not popular. Susan had the



Susan Yelen

reputation of helping to make non-profits fiscally sound.

Rabbi Larry Kaplan, Temple Israel Wilkes-Barre said:

"Susan was a significant part of our Jewish community. She not only served on our organizations' boards, she offered sage advice and hours of her time to enhance local lives. As president of Jewish Family Service, she oversaw staff appointments and discharges, when necessary, with wisdom and compassion, and moved JFS to meet the needs of those in distress. She served on the JCC and JCA boards and chaired the Rick Evans JCC camp scholarship program. Susan helped to organize the funding to maximize the number of community children of all faiths and backgrounds that could attend our wonderful summer camp.

"And for Temple Israel Susan helped to keep our congregation financially stable through difficult and uncertain times. With a firm hand she explained calmly and professionally what we needed to do in order to preserve our Temple's future. Susan's leadership and investment of time, energy, and financial support will have lasting positive effects on our Jewish community for many years, and her memory will continue to be a blessing to all who knew her."

Her colleague Chris Prater said that her honesty is probably what she is most noted for. It was the same on community boards as well.

Susan was generous — not just about giving, but also spending time, very generous with her time — clients, questions from her team. If someone needed to talk, Susan listened. If someone did not understand, Susan explained.

Life and Travel

Susan was an avid photographer, cook and visiting professor.

Travelling was a hobby to Susan and she travelled extensively to places such as Paris, Rome, London, Japan and China to unusual places such as Cambodia, Armenia, Romania, Slovenia, Chile, Brazil, Morocco, Estonia and Vietnam.

Susan wrote: "Spending two summers in Israel working on a kibbutz, reinforced my sense of place in the constellation of cultures, peoples and faiths of the world."

Susan spent some college time in Florence, Italy, became fluent in Italian, and studied Renaissance art. She was a very good linguist in general, and had a propensity to pick up language when traveling in a country.

There was a wide range of subjects that Susan could talk about. Usually backed by voracious reading. She loved listening to news. From childhood she was noted as a terrific athlete in a range of sports. In adult life, she loved gardening, and at her death, was in the middle of reconstructing her house with an increased garden.

Accomplished athlete

Susan was a star athlete. She won Women's Club Championship at Fox Hill Country Club eight times in her 20s. She was an avid photographer and an adventurous traveler, always seeking a global perspective combined with a human point of view.

REBECCA BROMINSKI

Finding her place by helping others.

By Mark Guydish
mguydish@timesleader.com



NANTICOKE — You can usually recognize Rebecca Brominski at Luzerne County Community College Board of Trustee meetings just from the upbeat attitude. She's the one always reporting on more accomplishments by the nonprofit LCCC Foundation Inc.: the money it raised, the scholarships it funded, and the many students it helped.

"I'm in this position a little over a year," said the executive director for Institutional Advancement and the Foundation. "I think I've definitely found my spot."

Brominski has been working a lot longer at LCCC than that "little over a year." The Plains Township native who now lives in Mountain Top left the area for about 4 years working in higher education, but came back to the Valley with a Heart after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

"I decided that I was missing out on the things that mattered the most: family," she said. "Having the opportunity to experience living and working out of this area made me realize that you *can* come home. Moving back to the Wyoming Valley enabled me to see this area still has all the values and beliefs my parents instilled in us so many years ago and I am still proud to call it home."

Ending up working at LCCC was fitting, considering she started her college education earning an associate degree in education there. The Coughlin High School alum went on to get her bachelor's and master's at Wilkes University.

Her first job at LCCC was as an adult literacy instructor. "It was the most rewarding position I have ever held. To see an adult learn

a skill that they never thought they could was my most rewarding experience." She stayed in that helping mode ever since, serving as the Educational Conference Center director and Wilkes-Barre Center Director before landing her current position.

"With the collaborative efforts of our Foundation team, I now raise funds to support the college's scholarship program," she said. The effort has been successful enough "to ease the financial burden of attaining a college education for over 300 students annually."

But it doesn't stop there. Her list of service is long, and surely helps explain why she was nominated as a "distinctive woman":

Dress for Success Luzerne County Board Member, Wyoming Valley Children's Association Board Member, Leadership Wilkes-Barre Board Member, Luzerne County Bar Association Lay Advisory Board Member, Leadership Wilkes-Barre Class of 2008, Leadership Wilkes-Barre 2016 Distinguished Leader Alumni Award, and 2016 United Way of Wyoming Valley Campaign Co-Chair to name a few.

That last one merits a bit more detail; the other co-chair was her husband, Don.

"The United Way campaign was an eye opening but yet very rewarding experience. Having the opportunity to co-chair the 2016 campaign with my husband Don was an experience, most couples do not have to work together professionally. I would do it again if I had the opportunity and recommend it to others. We brought our greatest strengths of compassion and commitment to the table and with enormous help from some incredible donors and a great deal of teamwork raised over \$3.4 million

to fight childhood poverty."

Service, she said, was bred into her at an early age by her parents Jim and Carol Shedlock. "They raised myself and two brothers to be kind, compassionate, hard working and have a strong sense of community. They instilled in us hard work always pays off.

"If you believe in a cause you make the time to serve. One component of organizational success depends on passionate and dedicated individuals who believe in the mission and are willing to give their time, talent and treasure to see it flourish."

The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, changed how she does her job at LCCC this year, particularly when the school shut down in-person lessons last March for the remainder of that school year. Students are back in the classrooms this fall, with a lot of social distancing and safety protocols in place.

"It was a little bit different, trying to keep all the balls in the air." Still, they managed to get food to students in need through the college's food bank even when none of the students were on campus. And while the pandemic made the annual scholarship dinner a no-no, they improvised.

"The dinner is our major fund raising component," she said, but the donors have remained generous enough to keep the scholarship money flowing, "and our students need it now more than ever."

Is she looking to move on to bigger things? Not yet.

"I love what I do here. I definitely see myself here for many years."

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environment.**



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RONNE KURLANCHEEK

A lifetime spent making the sale

By Jerry Lynott
jlynott@timesleader.com



If the shoe fits, Ronne Kurlancheek knows how it feels.

Wait a minute, doesn't she own Kurlancheek Home Furnishings in Forty Fort? What's does that have to do with shoes?

She does and it doesn't. But if she wasn't in the furniture business, well, here's her what she had to say.

"I would probably be an artist. Wait, I'd either be an artist or a shoe salesman," Kurlancheek said during an interview for the Times Leader's Distinctive Women of 2020.

"I'm such a salesperson that if I'm on vacation or I have a day off and I'm in a shoe store and a customer's confused about what they should buy, I end up going over," she said. "I can't help myself."

At 69, Kurlancheek of Wilkes-Barre has spent a good deal of her life matching customers with the right sofa, chair or table and doing it on her terms.

Starting out in the 1980s it was rare in the furniture industry for a woman to have an ownership role, Kurlancheek said. She turned heads when walking into a meeting or seminar.

"And because my name is Ronne, they expected a man to walk in. And actually

it worked in my best interest, because it put them so off guard that I was able to ask for things and get them just because they didn't know quite what to say," she recalled.

Kurlancheek grew up in the family furniture business in Duryea. She had plans to become a fabric designer when fate, otherwise known as her dad Ben, directed her to the showroom floor to fill in for salesperson.

Then just out of college, she was a combination of nerves and excitement, having never made a sale, but brimming with ideas about colors, fabrics and function. She'd seen her mom Priscilla put smiles on peoples' faces when they made their purchases.

"I made the sale and that was the beginning," Kurlancheek said. Since then, she's been blending the creative and fashion aspects of her background to her customers.

"This is like a canvas that I can design," Kurlancheek said of her showroom at 145 Welles St.

Her West Side location is the latest in her business odyssey. She moved there last year from a temporary stay at the Gateway Shopping Center in Edwarsville after a tornado on June 13, 2018

destroyed her store on Mundy Street in Wilkes-Barre Township.

"I like it here," Kurlancheek said. "I did buy flood insurance just in case. With all the disasters I've had, insurance is very important."

Perhaps what's insured her success over the years has been her experience and smarts. What's worked for her, Kurlancheek has passed on to other.

"I'm very excited talking to women about the fact that even though they might be afraid, they can jump into a management position; that you've gotta take the risk. And it's really OK to make mistakes," Kurlancheek said.

When you don't have the financial acumen necessary to keep the lights on and pay the employees and bills, hire someone just as Kurlancheek did.

"So I guess the thing is to, it's OK to know your strengths, but you really better know your weaknesses in business," Kurlancheek said.

"As an older person still running a business, I also accept my weaknesses now. I'm not tech savvy compared to my young people and I appreciate what they have to offer. And every so often I can train them on a thing or two also," she said.

DEBORAH MOZAL

Teamwork is key part of success

By Patrick Kernan
pkernan@timesleader.com



Submitted photo

Deborah Mozal, chief executive officer of the Community Regional Credit Union, was selected as one of the Times Leader's Distinctive Women.

Deborah Mozal, chief executive officer of the Community Regional Credit Union, submitted the following statement to the Times Leader for her inclusion in this year's Distinctive Women, as opposed to a traditional interview:

"Luckily, I work in an industry with national, state and local support. The Credit Union National Association (CUNA) and the National Credit Union Foundation (NCUF) offer numerous resources and support to credit unions of all sizes, which is where I have earned the Credit Union Development Educator and the Credit Union Compliance Expert designations. The PA-NJ Cross State Association offers all of the same support at the state level, where I currently serve as a mentor in the Executive Leadership Program of the Foundation. The Northeast Chapter of Credit Unions, where I have served as an officer and director, participates in local food drives, financial education and various charity organizations.

As a member of the Community Outreach Committee of the Global Women's Leadership Network, an arm of the World Council of Credit Unions, myself and our team members at the credit union have worked with Luzerne County Dress For Success, the CEO/Weinberg Food Bank, the Salvation Army Giving Tree, Little Eric's Foundation

and Toys for Tots, to mention a few. I have met many "credit union buddies" who inspire me through their community efforts. Ashlee and I have worked the Holiday Food Drive distribution for many years, and I have rarely left without shedding a few tears. Eric runs an annual fantasy football league where ½ of the winnings are donated to the winner's charity of choice. Nanci collects ipsy bags, fills them with personal products, and distributes them to young girls at local schools. Carole, organizes local financial reality fairs and a local golf tournament which raises thousands of dollars each year for local charities. They are all an inspiration to me. Traci, sits by my side on the Luzerne County Community College Foundation Executive Board.

Our team also has a wonderful community neighbor, the Kingston Fire Department, particularly Eric Derr. This guy does phenomenal work in the community, most of it anonymously. We bounce fundraising ideas off each other. While my grandson was visiting us this summer, Eric and Floyd gladly toured him through all of the engines.

I am blessed to work alongside of all of these great people. I have also been blessed to have exceptionally strong women in my life starting with my mom. She was a full-time career woman

raising three children when it was not the norm. Professionally our board members, Elaine, Jackie and Sue, have supported, advised and calmed me down more than once. My daughter, near but far, supports me and grounds me when I need it.

Thank you to all of these wonderful people in my life, including my husband of almost 37 years who I can say has been my best friend. We are the proud parents of two children, Nicholas and Marlena. Nick resides in Wilmington, DE with his wife Chantel and our two grandsons, Vinnie and Frankie. Nick is an attorney who focuses his practice on corporate and commercial litigation in the Delaware Court of Chancery and Supreme Court. Marlena resides in Fort Walton Beach, FL where she dedicates most of her time to changing the lives of children as a pre-school teacher.

Thanks to my team members, Renee, Brenda, Nissa, Kaitlyn and Lou Ann who stand beside me every day. Thanks to our board and committee members, Elaine, Mark, Thom, Jackie, Chrissy, Brittany, Sue, Marc, Debbie, Marjie and Theresa who all strive to provide financial security to our members. And thank you to the Times Leader for this honor. I hope to leave a footprint on our community and nobody does this alone, we all need to be part of a team."

Congratulations



DEBORAH MOZAL on being named one of NEPA's 2020 Distinctive Women

*We appreciate your leadership and commitment
to our members and our organization!*

From your friends and family at
Community Regional Credit Union

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Joe Soprano | Times Leader



Joe Soprano | Times Leader

Times Leader publisher Mike Murray delivers remarks at the Times Leader Media Group's Distinctive Women awards luncheon at the Westmoreland Club in Wilkes-Barre on Tuesday.

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DR. JILL MURRAY

“The path isn’t always so easy. It’s often strange and twisty. What’s important is finding the right fit, and finding something you love.”

By Kevin Carroll
kcarroll@timesleader.com

SCRANTON — Becoming the president of Lackawanna College right in the middle of a global pandemic? It doesn’t seem ideal.

But Dr. Jill Murray, who took over as president on July 1, has made the most of a bizarre situation, and has hit the ground running.

“There’s no playbook for this,” Murray said. “But we’re a pretty nimble institution, and we’ve tried to demonstrate some institutional patience during the pandemic.”

Murray, who still resides in her hometown of Scranton, previously served as Lackawanna’s executive vice president and chief innovation officer, and as the VP of Academic Affairs from 2008-2012.

“That was my dream job,” Murray said of her years as executive vice president.

When Mark Volk announced his retirement last year, Murray was surprised to see that she was being considered to take his place as president of Lackawanna College.

“I was actually surprised when they considered me for the presidency, I thought they would look outside,” Murray said.

Murray said that, even as the COVID-19 pandemic turned everything upside down, she and Volk worked together on a transition period starting last year.

“It’s been a total team effort,” Murray said. “The world changes so quickly ... We have to not only live in the past, but live in the future as well.”

Murray’s impact on Lackawanna College is vast and varied. Her biography on the school’s website lists her as “the catalyst behind Lackawanna’s e-sports program” as well as having helped increase student population, improve graduation rates and expand online learning options.

Her impact extends far beyond just the world of academics. Murray is just the ninth president in Lackawanna College’s history — and the first woman to hold the office.

“It’s such an honor to be a woman leader, period,” Murray said. “There’s not always a glass ceiling.”

As someone who’s seen a lot over her career, Murray had some advice for aspiring young leaders.

“The path isn’t always so easy. It’s often strange and twisty,” Murray said. “What’s important is finding the right fit, and finding something you love.”



LACKAWANNA
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proudly congratulates

President Jill Murray, Ph.D.

on being named one
of the Times Leader
Media Group’s

2020 Distinctive Women

MAURA SMITH

Managing business, family and community involvement

By Kevin Carroll
kcarroll@timesleader.com



WILKES-BARRE — Maura Smith never has a dull moment. Even in the middle of a global pandemic, Smith wears plenty of different hats — mother, businesswoman, advocate and so much more.

“Every day is different for me,” said Smith, the vice president of marketing and communications at Pepperjam, a digital marketing company with local roots. “There’s always some project that’s got me busy.”

Smith, originally from Forty Fort, now resides in Dallas with her husband and two children. She’s been working from home in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which she says affords her more time to spend with her family.

“We made the decision to work remotely,” Smith said. “I’ve gotten to be a teacher too, these last few months.”

Smith has been at Pepperjam for 14

years in a variety of roles, before rising to her current VP position a little over two years ago.

“I learned about Pepperjam through a friend,” Smith said. “I had just finished my undergrad studies and was interested in a career in marketing.”

Over the years since it was founded, Pepperjam has constantly evolved and rebranded in order to best serve its clients and to function in an ever-changing world.

Smith’s been there for plenty of changes, plenty of initiatives and even July’s acquisition of Pepperjam by partnership automation giant Partnerize.

“I’ve taken pride in being a part of redefining the Pepperjam brand, and also helping to set the tone for the brand’s story,” Smith said.

One of the things that has stuck out to Smith is the global outreach that

Partnerize has, with offices around the world.

“Not every organization is international, so it’s great to be exposed to other places in a cultural sense,” Smith said.

In addition to her work at Pepperjam, Smith also sits on the board of the Victims Resource Center in Wilkes-Barre Township (with sister locations in Tunkhannock and Lehighton).

The VRC provides crime victims with crisis intervention, counseling and basically anything they may need in terms of support. It’s a cause that Smith holds dear.

“I was asked to sit on the board, and I thought it was a great opportunity,” Smith said. “I wanted to be part of an organization that serves the community and helps those in need, particularly women and children.”

Congratulations!

Let's hear it for Pepperjam's CMO, Maura Smith, on being named one of the Times Leader's 2020 Distinctive Women!

Pepperjam stands steady on a foundation of strengthening partnerships and relationships that yield results and no one exemplifies this quite like Maura. With nearly 15 years of affiliate marketing experience, Pepperjam's ecosystem of clients and partners as well as Pepperjam's dedicated employees look to Maura every day for wisdom and guidance.

This wisdom and guidance extends beyond the office walls to her work as a board member serving The Victim's Resource Center as well as the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce.



VIVIAN WILLIAMS

Helping break down barriers and building stronger communities

Maria DiBuo
mdibuo@timesleader.com

Breaking down barriers in the local community is something Vivian Williams has become familiar with throughout her career.

Williams, 41, is the community initiatives coordinator for the Scranton Area Foundation and has been with the organization for roughly four years. Williams has worked closely with NEPA Moves, an initiative which operates through the foundation and was created in 2017. The initiative is focused on increasing access to transportation in Lakawanna and Luzerne counties, with the mission of improving quality of life for residents.

“I’ve always had a servant’s heart,” said Williams, when speaking of her motivation to begin a career in the nonprofit sector of business.

Williams, who has worked in fund and program development for most of her life, has lived in Scranton since earning her master’s in business development at Marywood. Prior to pursuing her education in the Scranton area, Williams studied at Salem College in Winston, N.C.

Self-described as a relationship broker, Williams’ primary focus through her work with the Scranton Area Foundation is the identification of needs in the community to encourage equity in opportunities seen in the area.

For Williams, fostering dialogue amongst partners of the nonprofit organization who typically don’t “talk” is something she is most proud of. Recently, through the NEPA Moves initiative, a bus route to the Jessup Industrial Park was created, allowing for individuals to benefit from reliable transportation to and from work.

“Through the fostering of the relationships between the Scranton Chamber of Commerce and COLTS, there will now be a bus line to the Jessup Industrial Park,” explained Williams. “It’s big, because during a time of pandemic where so many services are being cut and agencies are losing funding, we’ve been able to support our partners in this development that can potentially change a lot of people’s lives.”

In addition, Williams also takes pride in her role in breaking down barriers between counties by increasing stable transportation between the Lakawanna and Luzerne county lines, stating that the efforts have been able to unite the two counties around a topic both knew needed to be addressed.

In her free time, Williams enjoys spending time with her family, as well as reading on social issues. Additionally, she is passionate about giving back to the community, volunteering with her children’s parent teacher association within the Scranton Area school district, as well as with Marley’s Mission, a nonprofit organization aiding children through equine-assisted psychotherapy.

“Scranton is my homebase, which makes the work I do even more important to me,” said Williams. “We have to make our community better, and we have to do it together.”



Looking toward the future, Williams hopes to expand the NEPA Moves initiative beyond the realm of transportation and into Wayne and Pike counties, expressing her desire to aid in the increase of affordable housing, poverty and racial and educational equity.

Overall, Williams is extremely grateful for the connections she has made throughout her time working with the NEPA Moves Initiative at the Greater Scranton Foundation, which include state and local representatives, as well as the increase in opportunity the initiative has created in the community.

“The people I’ve met, the relationships I have now — I still can’t believe I’m that person,” said Williams.

Congratulations, Vivian!

2020 DISTINCTIVE WOMEN AWARD RECIPIENT

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