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CAPITUS GROUP AND THE OLIN SCHOOL
OF MANAGEMENT MAKE THEIR MARK
Influential Women 2011
This year's 34 honorees enrich and embolden Kansas City's corporate community

STORY BY ABIGAIL DENNIS AND NATALIE MCALLISTER | PHOTOS BY KENNY JOHNSON

According to The Central Exchange, women constitute only 7 percent of Kansas City's boards of directors and occupy the same meager percentage of its executive offices, despite global research that indicates a strong correlation between the presence of female leaders and a company's profitability. This is one reason KC Business honors the achievements of the city's leading business women each year: We want to help make the corporate future brighter. And yet, as we support The Central Exchange and its win-win initiative to see women filling 20 percent of the aforementioned positions by 2015, we look forward to a time when a successful female CEO no longer deserves a spotlight, simply because she and her peers are finally as populous among C-level suites as their male counterparts.

Judging from the achievements and accomplishments of the 34 women we honor this year, that day may be closer than ever before. From dedicated educators and philanthropists to tireless entrepreneurs and corporate executives, KC Business' 2011 class of Influential Women have much knowledge to impart. And that, ultimately, is the goal of this recognition: to glean lessons from those who have fought and, more importantly, won business' most difficult battles. Some of these battles may have been gender related; others may simply have been obstacles—the fight for funding, the struggle for recognition, the juggling of work-life balance—that everyone, male or female, faces as they make their way up the ladder.

The motivating stories on the pages that follow stand alone as honorable achievements. That they come entirely from female Kansas Citians is simply a bonus. Enjoy getting to know these women, and join us on March 10, as we honor them in person at the National World War I Museum – Liberty Memorial (details at KCBCentral.com). Aside from making important connections that will enhance your own businesses, you'll be joining us as we take one more step in making women's achievements in the business world wonderfully unremarkable.

PAT BROWN-DIXON
U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Appointed just last month to be the new regional administrator for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Pat Brown-Dixon most recently served as director of the General Service Administration's (GSA) Regional Small Business Utilization program's Heartland Office. Under her leadership there, the monthly Kansas City Small Business Networking Breakfast grew to be one of the city's largest networking events. Indeed, the success of small businesses is Brown-Dixon's passion: In 2009, she facilitated the first-ever meeting between government officials and small business organizations to discuss that very topic. "[Brown-Dixon] has worked with and supported small business throughout her public service career," says SBA Administrator Karen Mills. "[She has] strong ties in the region and a wealth of experience providing tools and resources to small businesses so they can grow and create jobs." Brown-Dixon serves as chairperson of the small business committee of the Greater Kansas City Federal Executive Board and is a member of the Property Maintenance Appeals Board of Kansas City. Among her numerous awards are the GSA Administrator's Meritorious Service Award, the GSA EEO Impact Award and the GSA Commendable Service Award.

KENDRI BURKETT
MARY KAY

Mary Kay Sales Director and Team/Unit Leader Kendri Burkett bases her business philosophy on leading by example. Burkett joined Mary Kay after successfully running a personal chef business, Just In Thyme, for five years. In addition to earning a new car on three occasions for her sales efforts, Burkett has been ranked in the top 25 in her sales division of 150,000 consultants and recorded gross profit increases of nearly 25 percent in the course of a year. In her free time, Burkett offers her services as a skin consultant to residents of retirement and assisted living communities, as well as

Do the unusual. Do the unexpected. Doing so has helped me develop relationships, experiences and growth that I would not have had if I had stayed in the confines of my office.
—Pat Brown-Dixon

Most people give up right before the miracle happens. Success is the combination of persistence, coachability and courage.
—Kendri Burkett
to women at Cypress Recovery who are dealing with substance abuse and to Shawnee Mission West teenagers. Burkett is an active member of the Olathe Chamber of Commerce and the founder of the monthly local women’s networking group, Girls Out 2 Lunch.

**MELISSA MORRISON CABLE**
**DISCOVER VISION CENTERS**

Eye surgeon Melissa Morrison Cable is the only female and youngest full partner of Discover Vision Centers. Cable’s clinical research and surgical skills have elevated her to the pinnacle of her career path. A driving force in her firm, Cable helped Discover Vision Centers grow to become one of the largest privately owned ophthalmology, optometry and optical medical practices in the nation, single-handedly developing Discover Vision Center’s restorative and cosmetic ophthalmology department. Cable is a member of multiple national and international ophthalmology organizations but has devoted much of her time to local, community involvement as well, volunteering for the Kansas City Free Health Clinic, Eye Care America, American Academy of Ophthalmology and MetroCare to name a few.

**LINDA CAMPBELL**
**MARKSNEELSON VOHLAND CAMPBELL RADETIC**

Linda Campbell, a CPA and senior partner with MarksNelson Vohland Campbell Radetic LLC, works to create lasting client relationships with the CEOs of recognizable Kansas City brands like Tivol and Gail’s Harley-Davidson. In her 22 years with the largest,
locally owned public accounting and consulting firm in Kansas City, Campbell has established herself as a consultant with experience in forensic accounting and litigation support. She has worked her way through the ranks to head the firm’s consulting department.

Influence has value if it helps you move the needle for something about which you have a great passion. I am passionate about building a better future and about working with others who are thinking big, executing and sharing in this mission. I’m humbled to be considered influential in such compelling and gratifying work.

—Joni Cobb

Campbell has served as board president for Safehome and as a member of the board for both Hope House and the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce’s Johnson County Business Leadership Council. Throughout her career, she also has been affiliated with the Overland Park South Rotary Club, the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce and the University of Kansas School of Business advisory board. She is a recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow Award.

JONI COBB
PIPELINE

For Joni Cobb, founder and CEO of Pipeline, networking is the key to success. While serving as strategic advisor to Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation (KTEC) through her first startup, Cobb Communications, she developed Pipeline as a means of supporting technology entrepreneurs by providing financial and developmental resources as well as a national network of mentors and advisors. During this time, Cobb worked with KTEC leadership to implement and market the early phases of Kansas’ bioscience initiative on a regional and national level. Cobb also prepares the next generation of entrepreneurs by serving on the Kansas City Advisory Board for Youth Entrepreneurs, the policy committee of the National Association of Seed and Venture Funds and on various special
a facilitator for The Central Exchange Leadership Forum, on the board of directors of the Don Bosco Centers of Kansas City and on the business development committee for Associated Builders and Contractors. Craig’s franchise has been twice nationally ranked in the top ten for sales production, and recently achieved Advanced Sales Certification from LMI.

NANCY DUNTON
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS MEDICAL CENTER
SCHOOL OF NURSING

Under the direction of Nancy Dunton, PhD and research professor at the University of Kansas Medical Center School of Nursing, the National Database of Nursing Quality Committees for the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

DONNA CRAIG
LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Donna Craig, founder and principal of Leadership Resources, is in the business of developing talented executives into leaders who can empower employees to use their untapped abilities. Since establishing Leadership Resources as a franchise of Leadership Management International (LMI) in 1999, Craig has successfully implemented marketing plans, sales presentations, networking and speaking engagements to grow the franchise into a six-figure business. Currently Craig serves on a taskforce with other LMI franchise owners focused on standardizing national facilitation processes. She is also involved in committees for the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

Since joining the company in 2008, Flynn’s efforts have brought in more than 10 new clients, 12 proof of concept projects and $1.3 million in grant funding. Flynn brings a breadth of bioscience knowledge to Orbis: As a former director at Cerner Corp., she was responsible for a $5 million life sciences business unit; prior to that, she was an environmental engineer with Camp Dresser & McLeod. A former Pipeline Innovator, member of Cerner’s Executive Development Program, Kauffman Entrepreneur Program intern and a recipient of the Herman Family Fellowship for Women in Entrepreneurship, Flynn also offers her time to the programs and events committee of KansasBio, serves on the Board of Directors for Eden Renewal and currently participates as an active Pipeline alumna.

SONIA GARAPATY
FSC INC.

Within five years of joining FSC Inc., Sonia Garapaty has grown the company to international markets and earned the role of CEO. Garapaty came to FSC Inc. after 12 years in the telecom industry, where she acquired two held patents; at FSC, she has focused on promoting acquisitions and mergers. Her successes include the creation of FSC MEP, an engineering service company that she launched in 2007. Garapaty serves as president, the opening of both FSC Private and FSC Consulting Services in India, and the acquisition of Bredson & Associates. Under Garapaty’s leadership, FSC Inc. has more than doubled its employee base and nearly doubled in revenue. Garapaty also offers her skills as board of fellow and executive committee member for the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center and organizer of the center’s World Peace Maha-Yagna ceremony.

MARTHA GERSHUN
JACKSON COUNTY CASA

Since 2009, Martha Gershun has served as the executive director for Jackson County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates). In that role, she recruits, trains and supports
volunteers who work for abused and neglected children in the family court system. Prior to her current position with CASA, Gershun served as executive director for Reach Out and Read, a children’s literacy program that, with the assistance of doctors, gives books to low-income children at check-ups. She has used this background in nonprofit leadership to expand Jackson County CASA to encompass the largest volunteer base in the organization’s history with more than 250 volunteers who serve more than 800 children. Under Gershun’s leadership, Jackson County CASA also has raised approximately $800,000, the greatest amount in its history. Gershun’s community involvement and awards of recognition span diverse fields, as she consistently uses her networking talents and skills to contribute to the Kansas City community.

BECKY GOODMAN
BLOCK & COMPANY INC.

Since 1998, Becky Goodman has been a key member of the Block and Company real estate team, specializing in the development and brokerage of retail properties and in tenant representation. Goodman has been instrumental in bringing new retailers into Kansas City through her involvement with the development of shopping centers and restaurants. As a former panelist at Integra Real Estate Trends & Investment Criteria, Goodman addressed issues related to the forecast for the real estate industry. She has led roundtable discussions and been a panelist for other events, including the ICSC Next Generation Conference. Socially conscious and community minded, Goodman supports Operation Breakthrough, the Emilee Rosebud Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, the Rose Brooks Center and Jackson County CASA; she also has served on the board of the Women in Film Kansas City chapter, a leading nonprofit dedicated to supporting women in the global entertainment industry.

When the going gets tough, put your head down and work.
—Becky Goodman

Our boutique business has grown much over the past six years. We are proud that the community ... supported us [and that] we also live in a community that desires and supports great design and quality products, as well.
—Geri Higgins

I firmly believe it’s not what you get in life, it’s what you give. By giving generously, you get so much more back.
—Christine Hamele

CHRISTINE HAMELE
PARRIS COMMUNICATIONS

As co-leader of the Healthcare and Life Sciences Division at Parris Communications, Christine Hamele showers clients and coworkers alike with her optimism. In 1997, Hamele started Hamele Marketing Communications, bringing her company into the national spotlight before selling it in 2005. In 2007, Hamele transitioned her clients to Parris Communications; there, her expertise in health care communications has helped her division achieve more than 35 percent growth. Hamele has earned more than 25 awards for her work, including a PRISM Award, the Public Relations Society of America’s highest honor, for her work with Community Blood Center’s 50th anniversary event. Hamele shares her marketing talents by acting as board chair for Wonderscope Children’s Museum; in this role she assists the museum in building a regional reputation. She also has been key in developing Wonderscope’s regional outreach program for at-risk children.

GERI HIGGINS
PORTFOLIO KITCHEN & HOME

Innovative ideas and a fresh approach—combined with a passion for life—make Portfolio Kitchen & Home founder Geri Higgins a powerful design force. When Higgins started Portfolio after relocating to Kansas City, she wanted to create a design firm devoted to breaking the traditional mold of “kitchen showrooms.” Higgins’ dynamic staff works to accommodate every client’s individual tastes, and the small company has proved itself able to manage upscale projects. One of Higgins’ guiding philosophies is that a kitchen reaches far beyond its four walls, and she is devoted to extending Portfolio’s influence out into the community, as well. Aside from positions on multiple community boards focused on health care and children’s literacy, Higgins supports charitable causes including A Change of Heart, Cycling for Change, Cristo Rey Kansas City, Kansas City Free Health Clinic and Adorn for Harvest Ball, among others. Higgins and Portfolio are anticipating a summer grand opening of the Portfolio Flagship Store in the historic Pershing Building downtown—further evidence of the business’ ongoing success.

MARY LOU JACOBY
WAREHOUSE1 INC.

When the Macy’s warehouse and its contents went up for sale in 1984, Mary Lou Jacoby, owner of Warehouse1 Inc., saw an opportunity to capitalize on an underdeveloped market. She purchased the building; this move eventually led to her forming Warehouse1. Since its inception, Warehouse1 has refurbished or found new uses for an estimated
12 million pounds of surplus, overstock, seconds and outdated equipment each year, keeping the materials out of landfills. Jacoby is a mentor with the Helzberg Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program and a member of the National Association of Women Business Owners. She also works with the Blue Valley Industrial Association, the Salvation Army Board and Athena Powerlink.

**It's about creating sustainable success and improving the lives and happiness for every person or organization associated with you and your company. Leave the world a better place.**

—Mary Lou Jacoby

**JANELLE MATLOSZ**  
**REES MASILIONIS TURLEY ARCHITECTURE**

A partner at Rees Masilionis Turley Architecture since 2004, Janelle Matlosz deftly has guided the interiors division of the business to celebrated standing within the region's design industry. Principal of the more than 3,000,000-square-foot corporate office for six years, Matlosz's leadership skills span from business development and management to project design and implementation. Despite the current economic climate, Matlosz has sustained and expanded the business to 35 percent revenue growth. She leads the Rees Masilionis Turley Architecture's Social Team, a critical element of the firm that organizes company events for staff members and works with local nonprofits to offer employees public outreach opportunities through Ronald McDonald House, Harvesters and other nonprofits. In 2009, Matlosz served as co-chair of the auction committee for Community LINC, a nonprofit organization devoted to developing self-sufficient communities.

**LOUISE MEYERS**  
**PRYDE'S OLD WESTPORT**

Louise Meyers was raised at Pryde's Old Westport: Her parents, John and Connie Perucca founded the business more than 40 years ago. Since purchasing Pryde's from her father in 1991, Meyers has
taken the business to new levels of quality and success. Pryde’s provides Kansas City with a wide array of kitchen housewares and home accessories, and, despite competition in the category, Meyers has expanded the business to include 24 employees devoted to the customer experience, which includes free coffee and tea. Meyers is involved in the Westport Historical Society and the Heart of Westport Neighborhood Association. Under Meyer’s guidance, Pryde’s has truly become one of Westport’s, and Kansas City’s, gems.

**Entrepreneurship is about making hard decisions in a quick manner.**
— Marquita Miller

**MARQUITA MILLER**
FIVE STAR TAX & BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

Marquita Miller’s mission as founder of Five Star Tax & Business Solutions is helping clients realize their entrepreneurial niche. Miller started her company more than 10 years ago in order to offer services beyond just record keeping: Her desire is to see every client operate at the peak of his or her possibility. In her pursuit to encourage entrepreneurship, Miller has created a CD titled *Top Ten Things You Should Know Before Starting a Business* and a book: “FAITHPRENEUR: God Is Not an Agent for Your Failure but for Your Success!” A volunteer instructor who teaches classes on entrepreneurship for both the First Step Fund and the Joseph Business School of Kansas City, Miller also serves as treasurer for the Running Back Giving Back Foundation and is a member of the National Pearl Society.

**SUSAN MILLER**
ROSE BROOKS CENTER

As CEO of the Rose Brooks Center for the past 15 years, Susan Miller has positively influenced the lives of numerous women and children in the Kansas City area. Under Miller’s direction, the Center has tripled its capacity; it’s now able to offer shelter to more than 16,000 women and children each year. And, despite a significant loss of funding, Miller managed an increase of 34 percent in services in 2009. The Center is now a $5 million agency that employs a staff
The reason the Rose Brooks Center is a success is because of the wonderful staff and volunteers devoted to making a difference in the lives of women and children.
—Susan Miller

of nearly 100 and offers services at its main center as well as through the Bridge Hospital Advocacy Program, which places family advocates in courts, police departments and schools. The center’s program has

DENISE UPAH MILLS
LEADERFUElnOW LLC & PACIFIC Accord INC.

Named a KC Business Influential Woman in 2006, Denise Upah Mills owns multiple businesses, including LeaderFuelNow LLC and Pacific Accord Inc. And Mills has been busy since her last go-round with the Influential Women program: Most recently, she was selected by the United Nations to assist in leading a peace initiative to promote worldwide positivity. A firm believer in the concept that a positive mindset allows people to be productive at work, Mills shares her message around the globe. But the depth of Mills’ local community involvement is vast, as well. She is a founding board member of A Better KCK, supports Young Women on the Move and leads her own charitable organization, The Mills Family Foundation, which is incredibly active in Leawood. Mills has been recognized by many local organizations for her selfless and diverse work.

MYRA NEARENBERG
NATALIE M’S

Myra Nearenberg has guided her family-owned business, Natalie M’s, to become one of the region’s most recognized pageant boutiques. Each year, with the assistance of many local charities, she successfully organizes and executes the nation’s largest prom runway show; the proceeds benefit local schools in the greater Kansas City area. This
year, the Disney corporation is supporting the fashion show by sending every dress featured in their new movie, “Prom,” down the runway. The day-to-day side of Neareenberg’s business gives her an opportunity to guide and influence: Her store revolves around bridal, pageant and prom gowns, all integral pieces in creating some of her clients’ most important memories, and Neareenberg is always on hand to deftly help navigate the decisions involved. Neareenberg also is active with Kansas City, Kansas, Blue Valley and Olathe schools, the Jewish Community Foundation and Wounded Warriors.

TRACY PANKO
SPIRAL 16

A leader with diverse experiences in business development and acquisition, the CEO of Spiral 16, Tracy Panko, is acutely aware of the importance of social media in the modern business model. Spiral 16 provides monitoring software to companies looking to keep track of their Web and social media activities. Since joining the company in 2009, Panko has overseen 100 percent growth, an expansion of services to take advantage of the growth of social media and the creation of new opportunities for employee advancement. Panko shares her expertise by speaking on social media topics at conferences around the country. This active philanthropist has contributed her services to St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, the Salvation Army and the Susan G. Komen Foundation, among others. In 2010, Panko was named Professional Woman of the Year by the National Association of Professional Women.

SISTER VICKIE PERKINS
CRISTO REY KANSAS CITY

A member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth order, Sister Vickie Perkins has a lifelong devotion to empowering and assisting Kansas City’s youth through education. She began her career working at juvenile detention centers in both Jackson and Wyandotte counties before serving at-risk kids as a mathematics teacher at Bishop Ward High School and Bishop Hogan High School. Eventually, Perkins was appointed principal of Bishop Hogan; she then was named superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.
Perkins was and still is the first president of Cristo Rey Kansas City, a five-year-old college preparatory high school serving economically disadvantaged students that enhances its curriculum with an innovative work-study program. Now in her final year as president of the school, Perkins’ devotion has made her a driving force in engaging Kansas City’s corporate community and fundraising efforts: From 2006 to 2010, Perkins led her team in raising more than $7.4 million for the school. In May 2010, Cristo Rey graduated its first class, 100 percent of whom were accepted into college. Perkins has been honored by various Kansas City organizations throughout her 40 years of consistently working for the underserved in the community.

ANNIE PRESLEY
MCKELLAR CONSULTING

Annie Presley’s first company, The McKellar Group, specialized in event fundraising for nonprofit organizations and helped many worthwhile entities shatter their fundraising records. Now back in the Kansas City area after working on a presidential campaign and as a Wall Street executive, Presley has founded and is president of another business: McKellar Consulting, a fundraising consultancy firm that advises nonprofit organizations and political figures. Her interest in politics has taken her to Russia; she even served as a volunteer advance team member for former First Lady Laura Bush. A little closer to home, Presley donates much of her time to her alma mater, the University of Missouri. She serves on the University of Missouri Corporate Roundtable, the Chancellor’s Fund for Excellence and the Missouri 100, which advises and assists the university’s president in promoting the school. Much of Presley’s personal time is focused on nonprofit work, as well: She is an advisory board member for Los Angeles’ Starlight Foundation, which works with children afflicted with chronic illnesses, and a board member of Kansas City’s MOCSA, which provides support, therapy and advocacy for victims of rape and sexual assault.

DIANA RAMIREZ
EXPRESS EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

Owner of Express Employment Professionals in Topeka, Diana Ramirez uses her 17 years of staffing experience to help her clients analyze workforce challenges and develop hiring strategies that will improve their bottom lines. Since purchasing her franchise in 2008, Ramirez has maintained her dedication to community involvement by serving as chair for the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce/GO Topeka’s Minority and Women Business Development Council and as an executive committee member for the Topeka Independent Business Association. In the past, she also has served on the boards of the Society for Human Resource Managers, Sales and Marketing Executives of Topeka and Mana de Topeka. Her leadership skills have been recognized by the YWCA, Minority and Women Business Development Council, Sales and Marketing Executives of Topeka and the Topeka Independent Business Association.

MARGARET REYNOLDS
REYNOLDS CONSULTING

A Hallmark Cards employee from 1979 to 2000, Margaret Reynolds started her own business, Reynolds Consulting LLC, in 2001. Her high-performing consulting firm helps companies in various industries identify and develop market-based growth opportunities. Now considered an influential leader in the consulting field, Reynolds speaks at conferences and CEO roundtables locally and nationwide. An active community member, Reynolds currently offers her support through the United Methodist Church Foundation International Board; in the past, she has worked with multiple other organizations including Athena Powerlink, the Starlight Theatre long range strategic planning committee and various booster clubs and church groups.

TERRY SATTERLEE
SHOOK HARDY & BACON

For more than 35 years, Terry Satterlee has devoted her legal career to environmental law. Now a partner with Shook Hardy & Bacon’s environmental law practice, Satterlee’s current focus is on litigation and environmental disputes that involve local, state and federal agencies. Working for her clients’ best interests, Satterlee doesn’t hesitate to challenge regulations that do not serve the public interest. In the past, Satterlee has held board positions on many committees that deal with natural resources, real estate
and the environment, and she is currently on the board of the American Royal and a member of the Legal Committee for the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. Satterlee donates many pro bono hours working to handle legal matters for both the American Royal and for a variety of women's organizations.

**RACHEL SEXTON**
VPR CREATIVE GROUP

As creative director for VPR Creative Group, Rachel Sexton has assisted with the launch of six pharmaceutical products and managed the public relations and media campaigns for sports architecture firms across the country. She has been with VPR for 12 years, starting as a writer and working her way up within the full-service creative and marketing company. She is most proud of her nine-year relationship with the diabetes drug Lantus, which she helped launch and has now seen achieve $3 billion in U.S. sales. Sexton has also directed sports marketing campaigns involving the Washington Nationals, the Jacksonville Jaguars and, here in Kansas City, the Sprint Center. Outside of the office, she applies her media talents to Jackson County CASA and helps organize CASA’s annual Carnival event. She is a Junior League of Kansas City board member and active with “The Halls of Marion” project that shares the business legacy of Ewing Marion Kauffman.

**REBECCA SHIPLEY**
OLATHE GLASS & HOME DECOR

A second-generation co-owner of Olathe Glass & Home Decor, Rebecca Shipley spends every work day alongside both her brother and husband. Shipley's dedication to building consumer awareness of her company's quality, selection and service was rewarded in 2010 when the company saw double-digit growth and the acquisition of new projects required the hiring of more employees. Shipley built up the décor element of Olathe Glass & Home Decor after purchasing the business from her parents in 2005; her reclaimed and refurbished pieces have made the business a "must see" for Kansas Citians in search of unique finds. In addition to hosting after-hours events for the Olathe Chamber of Commerce, Shipley makes sure her store is a frequent participant in charity shopping events for MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), TLC, and Mothers & More, as well as in community events and with sports teams. Shipley emphasizes the importance of community in everything she does, and this has guaranteed that Olathe Glass & Home Decor has a small-town, local feel.

**CHERYL A. SMITH**
KANSAS CITY HOME CARE INC.

When she first entered her field as a gerontologist and care manager in 1985, Cheryl A. Smith was not impressed with the quality of home care her clients received. And so, in 1989 she founded Kansas City Home Care Inc. to provide private in-home care services for the elderly and disabled. Her “clients come first” philosophy has led to seven-figure annual revenues and shaped the focus of Kansas City Home Care: quality, reliability and service. Smith is also a founding member of the National Private Duty Association, a lobbying voice for private duty home care providers, and she works with a taskforce that is trying to determine the licensing requirements for private duty home care companies. Community involvement is also important to Smith, as demonstrated by several high-profile positions: She serves as chair of the Women's Employment Network, is a fellow with Helzberg's Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program and a board member for the University of Missouri-Kansas City Women's Council.

**TRACY THOMAS**
TRACY THOMAS ADVERTISING

Tracy Thomas founded her eponymous advertising company in 1974. Her philosophy
includes the mantra, “never play it safe,” and this attitude has helped her push her small business to grow and thrive despite economic uncertainties. Thomas’ dedication to placing her clients first has helped her generate new leads while maintaining her client roster. Thomas has supported the Kansas City community by founding and co-founding three nonprofits. She founded and served as the first president of the Kansas City Artists Coalition, co-founded and was the first president of the Kansas City chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners and, in 1990, co-founded the Church of Religious Science. A member of many other organizations, Thomas has assisted with more than 50 political campaigns, choosing to align herself with candidates who support her chosen causes.

**MARY THOMPSON O’CONNOR**
**COUNTRY CLUB BANK**

Mary Thompson O’Connor co-founded O’Connor Properties in 1982 based on the philosophy that a holistic approach to design, architectural planning and construction is critical to a company’s success. Now, as senior vice president of logistics at Country Club Bank, which is run by her family, Thompson O’Connor still carries with her the idea that success follows when the needs of both customers and associates are met. She has supervised more than $50 million in construction and interior
design projects for Kansas City clients, guided the bank's growth in assets to nearly $1 billion and managed the expansion of bank facilities and locations—despite the recession. In her private life, Thompson O'Connor has addressed the needs of others through her deep involvement with the Amy Thompson Run for Brain Injury, the MS Society, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and the Jake Clough Headstrong Foundation.

If you can answer the questions “who are we,” “who are our customers” and “what are the services they require that we can provide,” then you have the key to success.
—Mary Thompson O'Connor

**STEPHANIE TILLMAN**
IKROS.COM

Stephanie Tillman’s graphic design firm, Ikros.com, began with a single brochure when, while living at a Salvation Army shelter with her husband and children, she was asked to design an event pamphlet. This motivated Tillman in 2007 to establish her own graphic design company, initially called Crossover Graphics but recognized now as Ikros.com. Tillman’s company specializes in helping clients tell their personal corporate stories through Web and print design. In the four years since the company’s inception, Ikros.com has experienced exponential growth: In 2009 alone, the company grew by 553 percent; it now employs eight full-time workers. Tillman firmly believes that every project should be built around a story and encourages her employees to share their own tales. This keeps the culture at Ikros.com firmly rooted in companionship and positive relationships. Tillman sits on the board of Kansas City’s Salvation Army and recently donated $25,000 to build a new room in its shelter. Committed to spreading her story and giving back both financially and personally, Tillman inspires others to greatness.

**SHERYL VICKERS**
BLOCK & COMPANY INC.

Now a key asset for Kansas City-based Block & Company Inc., Sheryl Vickers had her real estate license for nine years before she founded Select Sites, a tenant representation firm, in 2005. Between 2005 and 2008, Vickers completed more than $25 million in transactions with the help of only one employee.
When Vickers’ expanding interests and the economic climate change motivated her to join Block and Company, she was able to broaden her scope: She single-handedly opened and runs a

It's not the falling down, it's the getting back up that brings success. For every problem, there's a solution.
—Sheryl Vickers

new Block office in Lawrence, and began representing property owners and managing various properties. Vickers’ success comes from maintaining a good rapport with clients; she makes sure deals get done through a blend of cooperation, communication and problem solving. Outside of the office, Vickers, a single mom, manages balances her workplace obligations with the demands of raising two toddlers.

**ABBY WENDEL**

**UMB FINANCIAL CORPORATION**

Senior vice president of corporate strategy and investor relations for UMB Financial Corporation, Abby Wendel has a message for elected officials: Not all banks were responsible for the financial crisis. Formerly the assistant vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Wendel joined UMB in 2008 to lead the company’s response to the federal government’s efforts to institute financial regulatory reform. In this position, Wendel regularly deals with key government officials and serves as a counselor to UMB’s leadership team. As the primary point of contact to UMB’s investor community, Wendel relaunched UMB’s strategic planning process; during her tenure the company has already seen its analyst coverage increase by nearly 50 percent. An active and enthusiastic volunteer, Wendel has served on the boards and committees of Young Leadership Society through United Way, Ronald McDonald House, the Kansas City Free Health Clinic and Kansas City Repertory Theatre, as well as the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art’s Friends of Art Council. **KCB**

**Influence boils down to patience, persistence and tenacity. Without persistence and tenacity, you won’t get anywhere, but success also takes patience to arrive at the best solution.**
—Abby Wendel