

# WOMEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE 2012 FINALISTS

There were so many excellent contenders for the Women Making a Difference Awards this year, we couldn't let these honorable finalists slip by without recognition. Congratulations to each of the following women listed below who have made a tremendous difference to our business community and society at large!

## BUSINESS OWNER/ CEO OF THE YEAR

### Polina Bernstein Bernstein & Friedland, P.C.



Polina Bernstein has a thriving law practice and specializes in employment law. She aggressively seeks justice for her clients, most of whom are female and/or minority workers who were illegally terminated due to disability or because they requested a medical- or pregnancy-related leave of absence, because they complained about sexual harassment, or because they are older workers. During the last three years, Bernstein has obtained settlements for her plaintiff-side clients that total over \$3 million. She and her sister, who works alongside her at the firm, take these plaintiff-side cases on a contingency, which means that they advance all costs and attorney's fees until a settlement or judgment is reached. The work is risky but rewarding — especially when the firm is helping someone who would otherwise be powerless to stand up to his or her employer.

### Margaret Crane Barlow Group



Margaret Crane is the president and CEO of the Barlow Group and its subsidiaries, including Barlow Respiratory Hospital, Barlow Respiratory Research Center and the Barlow Foundation. She oversees daily operations at the specialty hospital — including patient care, human resources, finances and business strategy. She has been a member of the Barlow family for more than 20 years, and has held her position as president and CEO since 1993. In her role, Crane exemplifies what it means to lead by example and inspire and engage those around her. She's in contact with all levels of staff on a daily basis, meeting with them on everything from the type of care a patient is receiving to a department's technical equipment needs and what the hospital is planning for the future — whether in terms of technological advancements, patient flow or staffing changes. What's more, Crane is in direct contact with patients and their families on a regular basis.

### Liz Davidson Financial Finesse



Liz Davidson was a successful hedge fund manager when she decided to leave the industry altogether and pursue a more philanthropic mission she uncovered while giving workshops to investors. Fifteen years later, her Financial Finesse is the leading provider of unbiased financial education programs in the coun-

try and has been able to help thousands of employees on an annual basis to avoid costly mistakes that have impacted their overall ability to achieve their life goals and improve their family's financial situation. Within a year of receiving financial education through Financial Finesse, employees typically save 3-5% more in their retirement plans, with participation in the plan increasing 15-20% for companies without auto-enrollment and to over 95% at companies with auto-enrollment. On average, employees who have had 5 or more interactions with Financial Finesse's services save an average 11% of their income into their company sponsored retirement plan, vs. a national average at other organizations of 5.5%.

### Mary Emmons Children's Institute, Inc.



Mary Emmons has served as the leader of Children's Institute, Inc. (CII) for thirty years. CII has created one of the nation's strongest models for working with children, youth and families who have been affected by violence. For more than a century it has served the most at-risk and oft-overlooked young people in Los Angeles — those harmed by child abuse, neglect, domestic violence, gang and community violence. CII specializes in working with children, youth and families who have been affected by trauma. Its Integrated Service Model is designed to serve the "whole child" as well as the entire family. Even in the worst economy since the depression, this last year, Emmons almost doubled the size of the organization. CII opened a new campus for the children in the community to attend during the day allowing parents to work and sent her teams to work with the emotionally abused children and their parents.

### Christine Essel CRA/LA-Community Redevelopment Agency



Christine Essel began her tenure at Paramount Pictures managing budgets as a facilities accountant, and worked her way up to become a community affairs Vice President. She oversaw the creation of hundreds of jobs as she worked to rebuild the dilapidated Paramount lot into a state-of-the-art production facility. She also created mentoring and internship programs to give L.A.'s youth an opportunity to get experience in the entertainment industry. Essel has served California and the City of Los Angeles as an appointed commissioner on numerous boards. She was chair of the California Film commission from 1999-2007. In 1992, she was appointed to the Community Redevelopment Agency board by Mayor Tom Bradley. After being appointed commission chair by Mayor Richard Riordan, she led the effort to turn around Hollywood Boulevard to make it a safe and attractive destination for tourists and residents alike. She has also led efforts to develop what became the Agency's stringent green building guidelines.

### Dr. Cecilia Jefferson Freeman Fred Jefferson Memorial Homes Inc.



In 1989, Dr. Cecilia Jefferson Freeman founded the Fred Jefferson Memorial Home for Boys. Her love and compassion for all children fueled her desire to create a quality home-like environment for children in need of out-of-home placement. She has operated up to five group home at one time. In 1995 Dr. Jefferson Freeman opened the Fred Jefferson Foster Family Agency where families are certified and trained to provide out of home care to children who are removed from their birth homes due to abuse and/or neglect. In 1996 she opened Freeman Enrichment Center, a non-public school designed to provide a nurturing educational program for children with special educational needs coupled with behavioral problems.

### Tamara Gurney Mission Valley Bank



Tamara Gurney began her career in community banking 32 years ago at American Pacific State Bank as Executive Assistant to the President. In 2000 when that bank was sold, Gurney was Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. Today she is the Founding President and Chief Executive Officer of Mission Valley Bank, a \$250 million dollar community based business bank headquartered in Sun Valley. It started in 2001, when Gurney brought together a group of respected community bankers, along with a number of local area business people to form Mission Valley Bank. This past summer marked Mission Valley Bank's 10th Anniversary serving the financial needs of the Greater Los Angeles, Santa Clarita and San Fernando Valley area business communities. Today Mission Valley Bank's three branches and Specialized Lending and Accounts Receivable Divisions serve more than 3,000 clients throughout Southern California.

### Toni Erickson Knight WorldLink



Founded in 1997 by Toni Erickson Knight, WorldLink is one of the world's leading and fastest-growing multi-platform advertising sales firms. Celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, WorldLink launched in Los Angeles with a staff of four representing a single client. Within a year, the company was profitable and enjoying surging growth. Today, it has a global team of more than 60 individuals with offices in L.A. and New York — all handling 200-plus companies throughout the world. With annual billings that have grown an average of 19% per year since 1997, in 2011 WorldLink had booked sales of \$189 million, a 1,073% increase from its first year of operation. The largest woman-owned business of its kind, earning official certification from the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), in 2011 the Los Angeles Business Journal ranked WorldLink as the sixth largest woman-owned business in Los Angeles County.

### Toni Ko NYX Los Angeles Inc. dba NYX Cosmetics



After 13 years running NYX, Toni Ko has successfully grown a small 600 square foot showroom into a cosmetics powerhouse. NYX products are sold nationwide in Ulta Beauty, Urban Outfitters, Nordstrom's, Bed Bath and Beyond, Hot Topic, and in over 10,000 professional beauty outlets throughout the United States. Additionally, NYX is sold around the world in beauty retailer such as Douglas, Germany and Beautik, Spain, and in countries such as Canada, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, Dubai, United Kingdom, Switzerland, and many more. Today, NYX is known as the professional makeup line that offers a full assortment of "affordable luxury" makeup products. The passion that NYX customers' exhibit has resulted in 50% sales increases in each of the past 2 years. NYX continues its strong growth pattern with additional store placement to coincide with the launch of their Summer/Fall 2012 assortment.

### Linda Lau Global Law Group



Global Law Group was established by Linda Lau in 1994 and specializes in US immigration strategies for high net worth individuals who are looking to invest in new commercial enterprises in the United States. In 2011, the South Pasadena-based firm launched its representative office in Shanghai, China. Lau also serves as the founder and director of Global Dreambuilders Foundation, a non-profit organization benefiting several charities around the world. Since its inception last year, Global Dreambuilders Foundation has focused on the needs of women and children living in poverty throughout the globe.

### Lauren Leichtman Levine Leichtman Capital Partners



Lauren Leichtman co-founded Levine Leichtman Capital Partners in 1984, when very few women were founding their own firms. Within six years, LLC was managing over \$100 million. Today the company is among the largest private equity firms in Los Angeles. Under Leichtman's guidance and vision, LLC has grown to in excess of \$5 billion in investment capital under management via five funds across a variety of industries. She is chairperson of the Investment Committee of the Fund. Despite the financial services industry being predominantly a male workplace, Leichtman has carved out a successful place in the boardroom. She is responsible for the strategic planning and growth of the firm. In the last two years, LLC has opened both New York and London offices, bringing their global footprint to a total of five locations. She is actively involved in institutional fundraising, investment due diligence and portfolio management as well as continuing to oversee potential investment opportunities.

