

The Influentials

AUTHOR: KRISTIE ARONOW, PHIL BORCHMANN AND AC SHILTON

In Southwest Florida business circles, women like Samira Beckwith, Sandy Stilwell or Gail Markham shine as examples of leadership and success. And thankfully for our community, there are scores more. They may differ in style, from high-profile to low key, but their common quality is that they wield the influence to get things done.

So, who are these women power players? We consulted with a number of sources and came up with the following list of 29. Of course, listings of this kind are subjective, and we realize that there are others who may have been missed. We also left out elected officials because of races coming up this summer. But this isn't intended to be a roster of the most popular or recognizable figures; rather it's meant to celebrate Southwest Florida's powerful women.

Samira Beckwith

President and CEO, Hope HealthCare Services, Fort Myers

Beckwith has received recognition from a variety of organizations in Southwest Florida and across the country for her work, but perhaps one distinction most aptly describes her strength: She is a National Association of Social Workers Social Work Pioneer. "Regardless of the scale of her work and her accomplishments, Samira Beckwith maintains her focus as a social worker," according to the NASW. The observation undoubtedly stems from her 20-plus years at Hope, which serves more than 2,400 people nearing the end of their lives.

Samira Beckwith

Lydia Black

Lydia Black

Executive Director, Alliance for the Arts, Fort Myers

A self-confessed nonprofit junkie, Black has reigned in her position at Lee County's Alliance for the Arts for nearly four years. During that time, the organization has seen significant growth in membership and community arts programming. Outside of the organization, Black volunteers as a member of Rotary Club of Fort Myers, the Junior League of Fort Myers and Women's Community Club. In acknowledgment of her work, Black boasts various accolades including a *Gulfshore Business* 40-under-40 award.

Susan Bridges

President, Center for the Arts of Bonita Springs, Bonita Springs

Growing things is Bridges specialty, whether it's planting a new flower in her garden or cultivating the Center for the Arts of Bonita Springs to its—now—10-acre campus. Bridges was responsible for helping launch the Bonita Springs National Art Festivals, which consistently rank among the nation's best; creating the Art and Academics connected program, which serves thousands of at risk youths; and establishing the center's college scholarships programs.

Susan Bridges

Mei-Mei Chan

Mei-Mei Chan

President and publisher, the News-Press Media Group, Fort Myers

A successful newspaper publisher is part community leader, part marketing innovator and part profit-driven CEO, roles that Chan has excelled at since arriving in March 2010. She connects with people through outreach, speeches and board memberships. She's leading a new education task force with the Horizon Council that grew out of *The News-Press* Market Watch Education Summit last fall. And she is helping transform the region's largest and oldest media company, leveraging new media to extend their trusted local brand.

Tracey Galloway

Chief Executive Officer, Community Cooperative Ministries Inc., Fort Myers

Tracey Galloway

After 16 years of service at Edison State College, during which she led a fundraising division that managed \$45 million in assets, Galloway has taken the helm at local not-for-profit group Community Cooperative Ministries Inc. Active in many community organizations and with a wealth of knowledge on fundraising and development, Galloway is poised to bring Community Cooperative Ministries Inc. closer to its goal of ending hunger and homelessness in Lee County.

Meg Geltner

Meg Geltner

General Manager, The Salvation Army, Fort Myers

Geltner has advanced the nonprofit from its modest staff of 14 with a budget of \$490,000 in 1984 to it's now robust roster of 175 and \$14 million budget. She has led a life of quiet dedication to those in need, opening the area's first food bank, now known as the Harry Chapin Food Bank; developing the first Medical Respite Care Center for the homeless; and supervising the fund-raising for the capital campaign that opened the Central Lee County Social Services Campus.

Katherine "Kitty" Green

President and CEO, Habitat for Humanity Lee and Hendry Counties, North Fort Myers

Katherine "Kitty" Green

Green has spent several years in the residential real estate industry—first at Bonita Bay Group, where she once served as CEO, and now at Habitat. At both organizations, she's worked with passion and professionalism to help them succeed. At Habitat, for example, when Green learned that Chinese drywall had been used in Habitat homes, she took it upon herself to find and address the problem, at no cost to the families. A Fort Myers native, Green also lends her strong support to a number of local groups such as Lee County Horizon Council and the International Women's Forum.

Elaine Hamilton**Elaine Hamilton**

Executive Director, United Arts Council of Collier County, Naples

For nearly a decade, Hamilton's leadership at the council has ensured that the community is exposed to rich offerings of culture. They include classes for at-risk students; exhibits and entertainment; and support for those who create the art, music, dance and other creative forms that people want to soak up. The marketing and PR veteran has served on the grant committees for both the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Education Foundation. She also has been active in Rotary and has served on the board of directors for the Literacy Council and the Bonita Assistance Office.

Teri Hansen

Founder, President and Creative Director, Priority Marketing of Southwest Florida, Fort Myers

Teri Hansen

Fancy footwork has kept Hansen, a national ballroom dancing champion, poised and professional on and off the floor. Hansen has helped Southwest Florida flourish by founding clubs such as the Southwest Florida Public Relations Association and Lakes Park Enrichment Foundation. She serves on the board of Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties, and she is a charter member of the Tiger Bay Club and on the Builders Care board.

Colleen Kvetko**Colleen Kvetko**

President and Chief Executive Officer, Shamrock Bank of Florida, Naples

The former president, CEO and chairman of the board for Fifth Third Bank's Florida operations has been named on U.S. Banker's list of the Five Most Powerful Women in Banking not once but twice. And she's not only a force to be reckoned with in the banking world; Kvetko is active in community service, aiding numerous charitable and nonprofit agencies such as the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and on the President's Council at Ave Maria University.

Jennifer Languell

Founder and President, Trifecta Construction Solutions, Fort Myers

Jennifer Languell

With a Ph.D. in civil engineering and more than 15 years of experience integrating green and sustainable practices into construction, it's no wonder that Languell is Southwest Florida's leading authority for green building practices. In her career, Languell has certified more than 5 million square feet of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Florida Green Building Coalition and Green Globes buildings.

Simone Lutgert**Simone Lutgert**

Community Philanthropist, Naples

Lutgert, a kid at heart, thinks providing children with places to learn, play and grow should be a priority in every town. Her work with various organizations, including the Naples Children &

Education Foundation (NCEF), the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples (C'mon) and the Kid Powerment Institute, reflects this belief. Lutgert, a former marketing professional, has a knack for raising the funds; she played a fundamental role in raising \$20 million of capital campaign cash for C'mon and initiated an outreach program for the Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

Gail Markham

Founder and Partner, Markham Norton Mosteller Wright & Co., Fort Myers

Gail Markham

Markham is the founding partner of Markham Norton Mosteller Wright & Co., a certified public accounting and business consulting firm with offices in Fort Myers and Naples. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Lee County PACE Center for Girls in 2006 and has been involved with its success and continued growth as the board chairwoman. Markham also serves on the Lee County Industrial Development Authority and Horizon Council.

Tina Matte

Tina Matte

Partner, Gravina, Smith, Matte and Arnold, Fort Myers

Matte is well-known in local circles and around the state after serving more than 20 years in professional communications, marketing and public relations. Matte, who joined the firm in 1999 and was named partner in 2001, has received numerous awards for her work, and is a 1999 graduate of Leadership Lee County. She also serves on the board of directors of Floridians for Better Transportation. In 2004, Matte was appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush for a second term to the Supreme Court Judicial Nominating Commission.

Jacke McCurdy

Retired Vice President, Joseph E. Seagram & Sons Inc., Bonita Springs

Jacke McCurdy

A trailblazer to her core, McCurdy changed how women are viewed in the professional arena. She began her law career as the only woman in her class at the University of Maryland. She went on to be the first woman admitted to the Baltimore County Bar, the first woman assistant state's attorney for Baltimore County, the first woman vice president of Joseph E. Seagram and Sons and the first woman to lead the U.S. Distiller Industry. Locally, she's been named Citizen of the Year and won the Bonita Springs Community Foundation's Love of Bonita award for her support of local charitable organizations.

Neale Montgomery

Neale Montgomery

Partner, Pavese Law Firm, Fort Myers

Laws are complex, but land-development and real estate laws are triply so because they require traversing a sea of local, regional and federal regulations. Montgomery, a partner at Pavese Law Firm for more than two decades, has guided projects such as the Gulf Coast Town Center and Miromar Lakes through the various regulations. She has achieved the LexisNexis Martindale-

Hubbell AV Preeminent rating. Montgomery sits on the executive board of Tiger Bay, on the board of Verity and supports PACE for Girls.

Colleen Murphy

President and CEO, Community Foundation of Collier County, Naples

Colleen Murphy

She's been an accountant, financial advisor and wealth manager, and through it all community service has remained central to Murphy's life. For example, she serves on several boards and committees, such as the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce and Lee Memorial Hospital Foundation. And that doesn't count several other past commitments. That rich experience prompted the foundation's board to hire Murphy in 2010, which she said was an opportunity of a lifetime.

Sarah Owen

Sarah Owen

Chief Executive Officer, Southwest Florida Community Foundation, Fort Myers

After six years of success as the CEO of hunger and homeless relief organization Community Cooperative Ministries Inc., Owen is now bringing her passion, energy and experience in nonprofit management to the Southwest Florida Community Foundation. The former communications executive has won numerous awards, including being honored in the White House Rose Garden by former President George H.W. Bush. She also is the founder and co-author of *What's Next, A Guide for Single Mothers & Their Children*.

Kamela Patton

Superintendent, Collier County Schools, Naples

Kamela Patton

When Patton arrived in town last summer, she hit the ground running. Since then she's had nearly 90 meetings, including six town-hall-style events, and has visited roughly three-quarters of the district's 48 schools. (She vows to see the rest by the end of the school year.) Patton, a Ph.D. and 24-year-veteran of the Miami-Dade County Public School, also has been talking to legislators about public school funding and led successful negotiations with three unions, including the new state-required teacher evaluation system.

Lou Pontius

Lou Pontius

Community Philanthropist, Fort Myers

Many people donate their time to important causes, but few do it like Pontius. When she and her husband, Steve, moved to Fort Myers in 1985, the one-time high-school math teacher decided to focus solely on volunteerism. Over the years, she's served the Alvin B. Dubin Alzheimer's Resource Center, Susan G. Komen of Southwest Florida (she is a breast cancer survivor) and many others. Her work has garnered recognition, such as the Red Cross Clara Barton Award and the Junior League Community Award. She is now a founding member of the Women's Fund of

Southwest Florida, a new nonprofit that will give grants to groups working on major issues facing women and girls.

Robbie Roepstorff

Founding Director and President, Edison National Bank, Fort Myers

Robbie Roepstorff

Roepstorff recently received the 2012 honorary life membership for the Uncommon Friends Foundation, based on her commitment to helping friends, unending personal growth, a spirit of adventure and a sense of purpose. Roepstorff's brings those qualities—and more—to many other community and business activities in which she is involved. She serves on boards, too numerous to name, and has been honored with many other awards on local, state and national levels. And, of course, she continues to grow the

Mayela Rosales

Mayela Rosales

Vice President, Media Vista Corp., Naples

She arrived in Southwest Florida with her husband, Orlando, from their native Venezuela in search of the American dream. They found it, and now Mayela relishes her life here in business and the community. She is the host of the popular TV show *D'Latinos al Dia* and helps oversee other parts of the media company's operations, including the lifestyle magazine *D'Latinos*. Plus, she sits on several boards of organizations and companies. Rosales also is committed to celebrating diversity, which is the aim of The Face Awards that she co-founded nearly two years ago.

Jeanne Seewald

Managing Partner, Hahn Loeser Attorneys at Law, Naples

Jeanne Seewald

Seewald knows a thing or two about raising the bar. In 2011, the intellectual property law specialist—one of only 124 in the state of Florida to hold that certification—was voted president-elect of the board of directors for the Collier County Bar Association, a position she'll assume in July. Seewald is also currently president of the Collier County Bar Foundation and has been listed repeatedly in *The Best Lawyers in America*.

Sheryl Soukup

Sheryl Soukup

Executive Director, Naples Equestrian Challenge, Naples

Soukup's heart lies in helping the special needs population, which led her to the executive director position with Naples Equestrian Challenge (NEC). Now in her second year, Soukup has increased the success of NEC's annual fundraiser and hopes to transition the organization from grant reliance to self-sufficiency. She also is starting a Horses for Heroes program, which will work with veterans. She is a Rotarian and volunteers with the Foundation for the Developmentally Disabled in Collier County and Peace Lutheran Church's Early Learning Center.

Suzanne Specht

Assistant Director, Small Business Development Center at Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers

Suzanne Specht

A former loan officer for a major bank, Specht has been counseling small-business owners in Southwest Florida for more than 12 years. Recently selected as a Women Making History honoree from the American Business Woman's Association's Neapolitan chapter, Specht's counseling has resulted in more than 140 business startups and capital formation of more than \$15 million dollars.

Jackie Stephens**Jackie Stephens**

Chief Executive Officer, Children's Advocacy Center of Collier County, Naples

Devoting two decades of her life to the Children's Advocacy Center of Collier County as its CEO, Stephens has ushered in a new era a child advocacy in the region through the establishment of several services, including abuse determination, therapeutic counseling, parenting education and prevention programs. She also gained accreditation for the center through the National Children's Alliance. Stephens serves on the boards of Florida Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, the Montessori Academy of Naples and the Safe & Healthy Children's Coalition of Collier County.

Sandy Stilwell

CEO and Founder, Stilwell Enterprises, Captiva Island

Sandy Stilwell

When Stilwell is not busy tending to her collection of businesses, or introducing a new one, she's seemingly all over Southwest Florida lending her hand to a variety of causes, such as Hodges University and Lee County Pace Center for Girls. Why so many? Likely because others welcome a talent like Stilwell, who has created such thriving enterprises as Keylime Bistro, Latte Da Coffee and Paradise Shopping Center on Captiva, and Sunshine Grille in South Fort Myers.

Vicki Tracy

Director, The Arlington, Naples

Although The Arlington, a continuing-care retirement community, has yet to be built, Tracy isn't short of work to do. One minute she can be found in a meeting with estate attorneys; the next pitching to prospective investors; then she switches gears and becomes the marketing director, planning events for clients and printing up press releases. Tracy, offering a seemingly endless supply of energy, devotes time to several community organizations. Among her favorite causes are Volunteer Collier, SCORE and DOCS. Her most recent project is co-chairing the Friends of Foster Children's Boots & Boogie Bash.

Kathleen van Bergen

CEO and President, Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Naples

Van Bergen arrived on Sept. 1 to lead the Phil, a role that will undoubtedly cast her performance against that of powerful founder Myra Daniels. Judging by van Bergen's résumé, she has the right stuff to get the job done—and then some. She served for more than three years as artistic and executive director of the acclaimed Schubert Club in St. Paul, Minn. And she worked as an executive with Philadelphia and the St. Louis Symphony orchestras. She also knows what it's like to be on the creative end: She began playing the violin at age 4, and music has been a central part of her life ever since.