



W Influential WOMEN 2021

KPC MEDIA GROUP, INC. TM



WOMEN 2021

KPC MEDIA GROUP, INC. TM

KPC Media Group Inc., publisher of 13 newspapers in Northeast Indiana, is pleased to share the stories and professional experience of 12 influential women in our area, chosen by KPC’s Editorial Board, selected based on their contributions in business, politics, nonprofit organizations and government. Join with us at 11 a.m. Oct. 28 for a free live chat to be inspired by their experiences and have the opportunity to ask them how they built their careers. Visit kpcevent-buzz.com to register for the Free Chat event!

Sherri Berghoff.....	3
Shanna Bradley	4
Tehesha “Tee” Cook	5
Rebecca Essig.....	6
Andie Hines-Lagemann.....	7
Kristen Marcuccilli	8
Virginia Richardson	9
Amanda Shepard	10
Christina Ray-Durnell	12
Churubusco Chamber Board.....	13
Sue Ralston	14
Sharon Tucker.....	15

kpc MEDIA GROUP INC. TM
102 N. Main Street,
Kendallville, IN 46755
(260) 347-0400

Lou Phelps
loup Phelps@kpcmedia.com
CEO

Ann Saggars
asaggars@kpcmedia.com
Print & Design Manager

Stevie Lockridge
slockridge@kpcmedia.com
Special Sections Graphic Designer

Sue Carpenter
scarpenter@kpcmedia.com
Special Sections Editor

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES
Michele Trowbridge
Machele Waid
Tracy Yontz
Mitch Anderson

Influential Women is a special publication of KPC Media Group Inc.
©2021 All rights reserved

One Hundred Years

BOLD



FWMA

FORT WAYNE MUSEUM OF ART

FWMoA.ORG

Berghoff has passion for supporting seniors

BY KATHRYN BASSETT

kbassett@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE —Sherri Berghoff is clear when sharing her philosophy on life.

“Be better today than you were yesterday and better tomorrow than you are today,” Berghoff said.

Berghoff currently is focused on growing her three businesses and one non-profit organization from the ground up: One Purpose Senior Healthcare; One Purpose Senior Services; One Purpose Marketing; and the non-profit One Purpose Senior Adventures.

“I have been working in the healthcare industry now for about 18 years,” Berghoff said.

“I was looking to redefine who I was and what I wanted to be and started working in the healthcare industry and fell in love with long-term care.”

On establishing her three new businesses and non-profit, Berghoff said, “There was an opportunity that presented itself and I just had some ideas about how I could turn these opportunities into some businesses. So I took the leap of faith the first part of June and jumped off and started three for-profit businesses and a non-for-profit organization.

“My goal with these three for-profit businesses is that eventually I’ll get them to the place where they’re running successfully and making some money so that I can really focus on the not-for-profit, because that’s where my heart is really at,” she added.

Berghoff’s non-profit, One Purpose Senior Adventures, works to grant bucket-list wishes to seniors in need. The seed that led to the creation of the organization was sown about five years ago.

“My mother lives in southern Tennessee. She was 78 at the time ... At least once a year I made a point to go and spend some time with my mom. And normally when I would go visit, we would go shopping, go out to eat, those kind of things. But on this visit I asked her, ‘Mom, what would you like to do while I’m here this time?’ And she said, ‘Well we don’t have to do it this time,

but I saw some pictures you posted, taking your kids zip lining and I’d kinda like to try that.’”

Berghoff said she told her mother there would be no waiting until next time, and, thanks to Google, was able to find a place nearby and the mother-and-daughter duo went zip lining the very next day.

That started an annual tradition, and subsequent adventures have included white water rafting, attending opening day of Dollywood, and a hot air balloon ride.

Berghoff also took her father zip lining after he saw photos posted on social media that showed Berghoff and her mother on their adventures.

“So at 82 I took my dad zip lining for the very first time,” she said.

Checking off things on her mother’s bucket list got Berghoff to thinking that there were other seniors who had things on their bucket lists that, due to timing or finances, they had never been able to do.

“Through our non-for-profit agency, our goal will be to fulfill some of bucket list wishes for individuals — primarily focused on low-income individuals living in a long-term care setting. And it doesn’t have to be adventurous. It doesn’t have to be zip lining and white water rafting. But whatever it is that’s on their bucket list,” Berghoff said.

Berghoff went on to describe her three business ventures.

One Purpose Senior Healthcare aims to provide personalized healthcare coordination for seniors.

“Basically what that is is an attempt to improve communication between all providers that are involved in the care of an individual,” Berghoff explained.

Berghoff said working in healthcare, she has seen there is a lot of disconnection between providers and her business attempts to involve everyone that is involved in the care of a senior in the communication of what is going on with that individual.

One Purpose Senior Services offers consulting services for health care organizations.

One Purpose Marketing offers



Sherri Berghoff

services such as sales coaching, sales training, website design, logo design, branding and social media management.

Berghoff said her passion for serving seniors probably stemmed from the relationship she had with her grandmother.

“It was such a special relationship .. It was just such a positive experience in my life ... It felt like a way that I could honor her,” she said.

“I feel like if I just live my own mission, which, I say, is be better today than I was yesterday and better

tomorrow that I am today, my only hope is that people won’t be afraid to step out of their comfort zone and really go for the things that they want. I think if I could say something to anyone it’s to not be afraid. And I think it holds us back. So often in our lives, the fear of what other people will think or the fear of failure or, I think, fear in general just holds us back and I am inspired by the women who have been in my life and just can only hope that I can be half of what those women have done for me for someone else.”

Birth coach walks beside minority mothers-to-be

BY SHERYL PRENTICE

sprentice@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — Shanna Bradley once lived in the most diverse square mile in the United States, Clarkston, Georgia, for three years. The town of 7,554 residents is known as the “Ellis Island of the South” for its absorption of refugees from all over the world for resettlement into a new life in America.

“Hundreds of people groups live there,” Bradley said. “There are 157 languages spoken at the high school. Every people group in the world is there. The five world religions live on the same street.”

In Georgia, Bradley had the chance to work with a local birth ministry for refugees and became a trained and certified doula. A doula is a non-medical birth professional and companion who

comes alongside a woman to support her through pregnancy, labor and delivery and post-partum.

The mother of five found a way to connect her two passions — helping women through the birth process into motherhood and working in cross-cultural ministry — by returning to Fort Wayne to start Journey Birth and Wellness. The organization provides education, advocacy and support to women of all nationalities and cultures.

Bradley is a 2021 Influential Women Award recipient for her birth ministry to Burmese, Latina and Black women in their own communities with doula services, birth and child care education and access to resources.

Bradley said the concept of having a doula to support expectant parents through



Shanna Bradley

the birth process is growing in popularity.

“‘Doula’ is a Greek word for ‘woman serving woman,’” Bradley said. “She is a birth coach or companion.”

Journey Birth and Wellness “comes alongside” women in Fort Wayne’s refugee and immigrant communities, Bradley said. She started her organization in the 46805 ZIP code, which has the highest infant and maternal mortality rate in Indiana.

Bradley said her organization works with women in their own homes and community to eliminate language barriers and lack of access to resources. The doula provides support according to the woman’s needs, so she isn’t going through

the experience alone.

Bradley seeks women from within the minorities’ communities to recruit and train them to be certified doulas. To be certified, a doula completes 16 hours of in-person training, various assignment, and takes exams.

“Then the support can come from within their own communities,” Bradley said.

Bradley’s success in Fort Wayne has led to other opportunities to bring professional birth services internationally. She will travel to Kyrgyzstan in October to work with birth services providers there to train and certify doulas for work in hospitals.



Entrepreneur overcomes obstacles in life's path

BY SUE CARPENTER

scarpenter@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — Each life obstacle Tehesha “Tee” Cook has faced has made her stronger.

“Every one of them. I can take it as a failure or a lesson. Lessons are easier to swallow!” she said.

A registered nurse for 17 years, Cook was injured at work and denied disability after many attempts.

“My mom goes, ‘well better sell some of those cakes you bake.’” she recalls.

That was the impetus for Cook to open her baking and catering business, All-in-1 Cakes & Events, in 2012, baking cakes and desserts for special occasions and also officiating weddings.

“I always start with my roots” she said of her love of baking. “I spent a lot of time with my grandparents and we would bake. I learned so much about baking from her before I was 10. The nurse in me loves alchemy and I just experiment.”

Cook’s signature cake is her own Caramel Apple Cake, along with her cinnamon roll cheesecake or banana nut bread.

As the business grew, she began checking out sites to open an event center of her own.

But when another roadblock in the form of a cancer diagnosis came along, she decided to scale down on the events a little. She is currently taking chemotherapy for a form of skin cancer.

“It’s horrible but I’m grateful I am still here. It’s a hard battle. Having sarcoidosis, an auto-immune disorder, I have been dealing with issues all my life.

“But I don’t give up. Even when everything is screaming in me to just get in bed. I go harder. I am still baking fabulous cakes and officiating,” she said.

Cancer didn’t place an immovable barrier in her path. Instead of looking inward, Cook wanted to help those who are seeking help with their own careers.

Last year, she completed her Master of Social Work degree and is focusing on opening Praying Hands Health Education & Wellness Center in Fort Wayne. On the education side, the center will offer American Heart Association, CPR Classes, Home Health Aides classes, CNA and entrepreneurship classes. On

the wellness side, classes will focus on meal preparation and planning, support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, groups for moms and dealing with depression, among others.

Her advice to those seeking guidance for a new start?

“Sign up for my entrepreneurship class! Even if my class is full, do it!” she said of stepping out and trying something new. “It’s hard but nothing worthwhile is easy!”

In addition to being named one of KPC Media’s Influential Women in 2021, Cook was presented an honorary doctorate for her work in Haiti during the earthquake of 2013 and her work for Suicide Awareness and Prevention.

She has been featured in various national publications and has participated in events all over the country.

Cook was the first person to host a black business vendor event, “Events in Color” and travels the US talking about black women’s rights and mental health.

Cook was recently invited to attend Engage! — a summit of only the best-of-the-best and up-and-comers that they have noticed.

“I was noticed and invited! It was a four-day retreat in Toronto, Canada and all of my idols were there, Kathy Romero, (who invited me!) Preston Bailey, David Tuttera and so many others!” she said.

Cook is a native of Fort Wayne and a graduate of Northrop High School and still cheers on the Bruins.

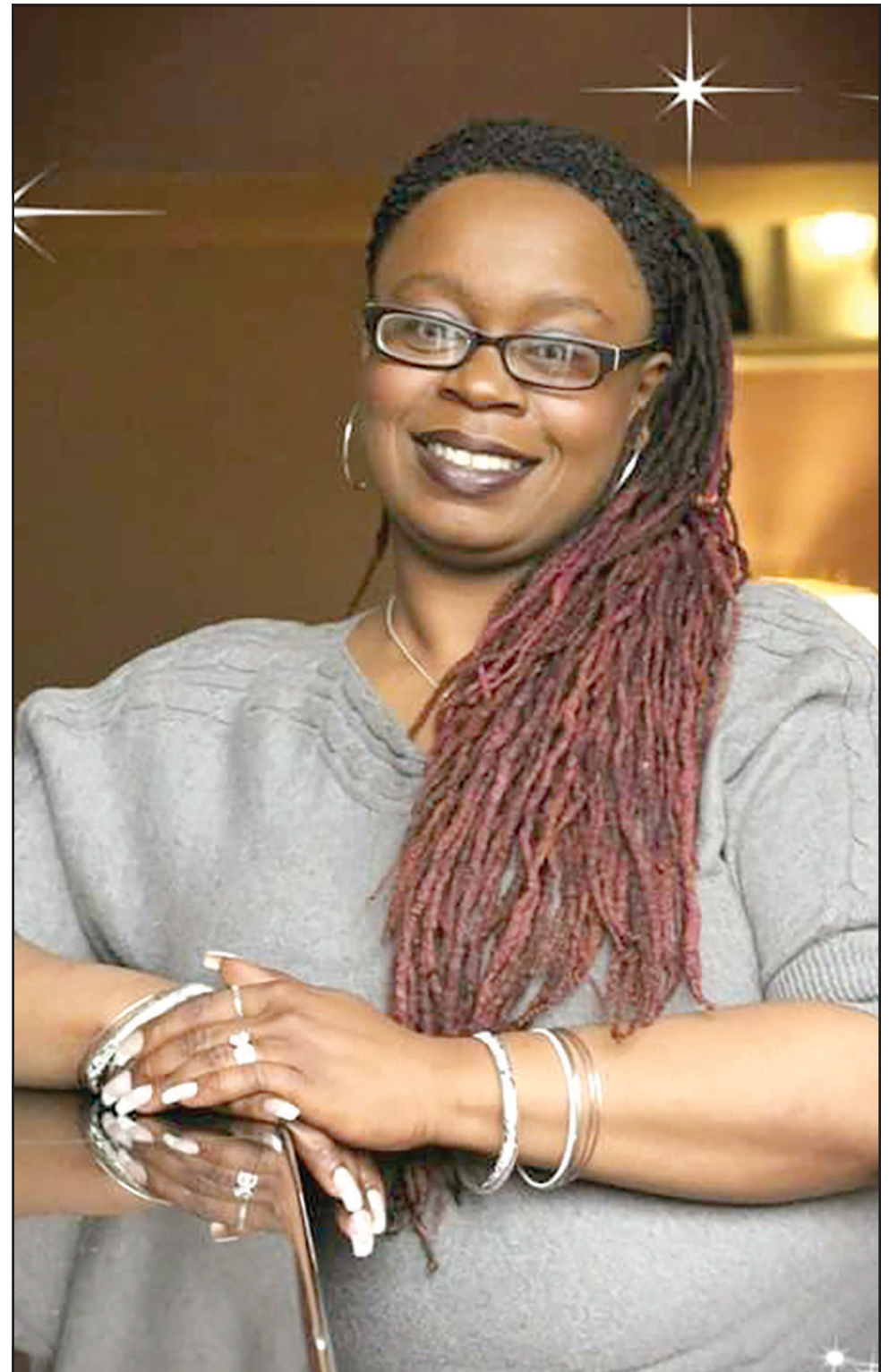
She also has a supportive family.

“I have an amazing husband of six years and six sons — all adults except one, and 3 ½ grandchildren — one is on the way!”

Even with all of the detours in her path, Cook has been able to put life’s challenges in perspective.

“Being an entrepreneur is hard! Being a Black, woman entrepreneur with health challenges, well — let’s just say you’ve never seen me and Wonder Woman in the same room!

“To say it’s challenging is an understatement,” said Cook.



Tee Cook

Purdue professor inspiring next generation of women engineers

BY MATT GETTS

mgetts@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — It happened to her. And she is doing her best to not let it happen again to the next generation.

Purdue Fort Wayne engineering professor Rebecca Essig recalls doing her senior group project in an engineering class at Purdue's West Lafayette main campus. One of the male members of their group told her that she didn't need to worry about contributing to the actual engineering of their joint project. She could concentrate on what the group should wear for their formal presentation.

"It's mind boggling," Essig said.

Helping to change that stereotype of male-dominated engineering has become her passion, and in no small part led to her selection as a 2021 Influential Women recipient.

"It was a very welcome surprise," Essig said of receiving the honor.

Essig is First-Year Engineering Program Coordinator at Purdue University Fort Wayne and an assistant professor of engineering at the university.

Professor Nash Younis, chair of Purdue Fort Wayne's Civil and Mechanical Engineering Department, nominated Essig for the award.

"She is an outstanding educator who has worked to encourage the next generation of engineers," Younis said. "Her high performance in the classroom has been rewarded multiple times at the college and university levels."

In 2017-2018, Essig was awarded the Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award for the College of Engineering, Technology and Computer Science at Purdue Fort Wayne. In 2020, she was selected for the position of Teaching Fellow for the Purdue Fort Wayne Center for Excellence in Learning & Teaching. She was awarded the 2021 Sigma Xi Science Teacher of the Year for her dedication to excellence in STEM education in and out of the classroom.

Outside of her day-to-day teaching obligations, Essig volunteers for K-12 engineering outreach programs FIRST Lego League, Future Cities Competition and Sci-TEC Academy. She serves as the faculty mentor for three PFW student organizations.

In 2019, Essig founded the Future Girls of STEM summer camp for girls in second to fifth grade. When the pandemic hit a year and a half ago, it didn't stop the program. She quickly adapted it to a virtual format "because she believed it was important to continue engaging the young girls with fun and educational activities and connecting them with mentors, especially during those overwhelming months," Younis said.

In October 2020, she began to work on establishing a chapter of Phi Sigma Rho, a sorority for women in engineering at Purdue Fort Wayne.

It was the Phi Sigma Rho chapter on the West Lafayette campus that helped her greatly when she was a young engineering student herself on the West Lafayette campus. Being able to network with other women studying engineering helped her greatly.

And that overt slight of her abilities on the senior group project? It drives her to this day.

"It's still in the back of my mind," Essig said.

When Essig graduated with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, there were 115 graduates. There were perhaps 10 women among that group.

Essig first taught at Purdue Fort Wayne in 2016. At that time, women made up between 5-8% of the students in the engineering program. Today, that number campuswide is nearly 14-15%.

In the section she teaches, nearly 20% of the students are women.

"We're getting a little better every year," she said.

Many students come to Purdue Fort Wayne with misconceptions or no true conceptions of what a career in the various engineering disciplines could look like. All freshmen come with their own challenges, like living away from home or the rigors of university-level engineering courses.

As First-Year Engineering Program Coordinator, Essig relishes addressing those issues.

"I really like getting to help students get through that transition," she said. "It's really exciting."

Not only is Essig eager to help increase the number of women in engineering, she also wants to bring



Rebecca Essig

everyone to the table, including minorities and the LGBTQ+ community.

"She believes the engineering discipline can't truly reach its potential until a diverse group of voices are present at the table," Younis said.

In 2021, the Girl Scouts of Northern Indiana-Michiana awarded her the community partner recognition award for her exceptional work with the Future Girls of STEM summer camp.

Essig did not go to college wanting to become a teacher. Instead, she enrolled in Purdue's Civil Engineering program with the hopes of figuring out ways of providing cleaner air and water as an environmental engineer.

But when working toward her master's degree, Essig was assigned to teach a fluid mechanics course.

"I fell in love with being in the classroom," she said.

Helping people better understand themselves

BY PATRICK REDMOND

predmond@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — Somewhere late in her 20-year career working in marketing and corporate events, Andie Hines-Lagemann started to develop a new vision as to how even seemingly highly successful people sometimes let issues born from their personal lives interfere with how they act with others and conduct their businesses, and vice versa.

So Hines-Lagemann launched Tidewater Coaching, now a highly successful organization dedicated to helping people who are seemingly drowning in their careers find success.

“I help people reach their personal and professional goals by leveraging their emotional intelligence she explained. “I am an emotional intelligence practitioner.”

If most of that sounds unfamiliar to you, you’re not alone.

The term first appeared in the early 1960s, but only started to appear in the general conversations in the mid-1990s, when the best-selling book “Emotional Intelligence”, written by science journalist Daniel Goleman, was released. He defined emotional intelligence as the array of skills and characteristics that drive leadership performance.

Twenty-five years later, Hines-Lagemann offers a deeper, more detailed definition of what emotional intelligence means.

“The way I summarize it when I’m coaching, emotional intelligence is how we think and feel about ourselves, the way that comes out to the outside world, the way we develop and maintain relationships, the way we solve problems, and the way we cope with stress,” she said. “That covers 15 different emotional skills.”

Believe it or not, but emotions, and sometimes a lack of emotions, affect how decisions, both big and small, are made.

Hines-Lagemann said it was a concept she first started to explore in 2014 when she founded Own Your Success Fort Wayne, an organization dedicated to providing a supportive community for women entrepreneurs in Northeast Indiana.

“That’s an organization I founded to support women entrepreneurs and we are at about 700 members right now. And it’s a peer-to-peer networking and mentoring community,” she explained. “I knew that when I founded Own Your Success back in 2014, I became, sort of, the unofficial coach of all women entrepreneurs in northeast Indiana.”

She said helping people succeed is now her mission.

“What gives me energy more than anything is helping other people, and nothing more than when I am helping them be more successful,” Hines-Lagemann explained.

Much of her work is helping people better understand those softer issues in life, things not taught in most MBA courses. They include interpersonal skill, like empathy, trust, and decisiveness

She said her work was born out of positive psychology that differs from traditional psychology. Where the goal of psychology might be helping a client move from crisis back to normal, Hines-Lagemann said she works to help professionals move from good to better.

“The work that I do spans 15 different emotional skills that we work on, so everything from empathy to problem-solving”, she said. “Every client is different in what they’re trying to achieve.

Despite the pandemic, Hines-Lagemann said she’s watched her business grow rapidly because of digital innovations such as Zoom. That allows her to meet and talk with clients hundreds of miles away.

As an example of her work, Hines-Lagemann talked about a recent client she just finished seeing.

“He’s the leader of a large company, with a lot of people under him. He came to me with the goal of working less in the business. He was spending 60 - 80 hours a week working,” she explained. “Through his assessment, we could see that his interpersonal skills had some room for development and I said to him if you can learn how to bolster these interpersonal skills through some of your other skills like problem-solving or stress tolerance, then you can lead the leaders in your company more effectively, enabling them to do their job better and show them you trust them to do good work. That allowed him to stop trying to do everybody’s job and just focus on what he was doing, freeing up his time. I would say that was a very successful engagement with a successful resolution to the issue he was having.”

Her goal is to help people better understand those emotional triggers that can sometimes hinder their success. Emotional Intelligence coaching provides people with the tools they need to overcome shame, doubt, and limiting beliefs in exchange for joy, fulfillment, and accomplishment, she added. One problem facing most business professionals she explained is that people believe what happens in their professional lives is separate and distinct from what drives them in their personal lives. That, Hines-La-



Andie Hines-Lagemann

gemann said, isn’t realistic.

“Everything is intertwined,” she said. “We don’t go to work and not feel our feeling anymore. Or go home and not think about work anymore. It’s all twisted together.”

That intersection of professional and personal lives is even greater now, Hines Lagemann said, because of the coronavirus pandemic. She said many problems that already existed were simply amplified by the pandemic when more people started working at home.

“Talk about no separation of personal life from professional life,” she explained. “That’s where we live all day, and never more than during COVID.”

Hines-Lagemann just launched TideWater Coaching a year ago but is sometimes amazed at how quickly it caught on.

“It’s been an amazing year,” Hines-Lagemann said. “It feels so good to be on the right path.”

She said her success has opened new doors for her, including speaking engagements.

Hines-Lagemann said when she first

launched Tidewater, she believed her clients would be almost exclusively women, but quickly saw a large number of men seeking her help.

“The fact of the matter is, emotional intelligence impacts everyone, regardless of gender, so I’ve been seeing entrepreneurs, people who work on large corporate teams, a little bit of everything,” she explained.

While word of mouth advertising has been important to the growth of Tidewater, Hines-Lagemann said important professional network connections she created during her 20 years career in marketing have played a large role in the steady growth of her company. Resources like LinkedIn have helped her reach out to potential clients as well.

“More and more, emotional intelligence is on people’s radar. I’m seeing a lot of articles starting to talk about it,” she said. There are companies, big and small, looking at this as an indicator of success, and positive corporate culture.”

Marcuccilli continues to thrive in predominately male work environments

BY JOE MCQUEEN

jmcqueen@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE – Working in a predominately male environment has always been a part of Kristen Marcuccilli's life.

While attending Marion High School, she played on the boy's soccer team since her school didn't have a girl's team.

"I also became the placekicker on the high school football team and was the only girl attending football camps," Marcuccilli said.

When she went off to college at the University of Notre Dame, she worked for the university's football program as a student in recruiting and football operations.

"I've been surrounded by men in many settings for most of my life," she said.

She is now the chief operating officer and executive vice president of STAR Financial Bank, which has more than 45 locations across Indiana.

She was recently nominated for KPC Media's 2021 Influential Women of Northeast Indiana, which highlights local women who have been successful in their careers.

Marcuccilli grew up in Marion, where STAR Financial Bank was originally headquartered until it relocated to Fort Wayne in 2000.

STAR Financial is family-operated and has always been in Marcuccilli's family since her grandfather, Tom Marcuccilli, was one of the founders of the bank in 1943.

Her grandfather helped open the first branch that was located in Upland.

Her family is still involved with STAR today with her father, Jim Marcuccilli, being the company's chairman and chief executive officer and her brother, Thomas Marcuccilli, being the company's vice president of retail sales and customer solutions.

She graduated from Notre Dame in 2005 with a bachelor's in pre-med and psychology with the intention of getting into the medical field. After graduation, she was offered a full-time position with Notre Dame's football program under then head coach, Charlie Weis.

Working for the football program made her more interested in sports and business administration.

"I really started to fall in love with the business world," she said. "When I finished

my degrees in pre-med and psychology, I decided to not pursue medicine."

She said working for the Notre Dame football program was an incredible first job out of college and led her to go pursue a master's in business administration (M.B.A.) at Indiana University.

She finished her M.B.A. at IU in 2010.

She spent about a year working as a data analyst at Peyton Manning Children's Hospital in Indianapolis before going to work at her family's company.

"Everyone always asked me, did your family pressure you to join the family business and I said they never did," she said. "They always told me to pursue what I love."

She joined STAR in 2008 as a project manager and spent much of her early time at the company working on digital banking.

She was named chief operating officer of the bank in 2013.

Her tasks as COO are more internally focused from an operational standpoint and externally focused when it comes to the company's community partnerships.

"I'm in charge of bank operations, managing the information technology team, building and project management and business analysis," she said.

She also manages the bank's security wing which includes cybersecurity and fraud investigation.

She said what she loves about it is that no day is ever the same, there are constantly changing elements to the areas she's in charge of.

At STAR Financial, only two women, including Marcuccilli, are in executive positions and only two women serve on the company's board of directors.

She said while there may not be many women in high-level positions at the company, there are women who are in the room making decisions that don't have an executive title yet.

"It's something that we're cognizant of. I personally haven't witnessed where someone couldn't do it because they were a woman, it was more of the person with the best skillset," she said. "Undeniably, you do see far more men in this field than women."

She believes the banking industry is shifting and is starting to see more women pursue and compete for positions in it.



Kristen Marcuccilli

Being around mostly men throughout her life and career has helped her get to where she is today and she thinks it's great to have diverse perspectives in the room.

"It can help you gain confidence, helps you have thicker skin," she said.

Marcuccilli said she is starting to see fewer barriers for women wanting to enter the industry and that she sees more people in the community starting to put gender aside and focusing more on the types of combined skillsets they need for the company.

Being in an executive position, she said she's had many women throughout her

career who have served as mentors for her and wants to use that advice to pass on to other women in the industry.

"I love connecting with the various women in our community on projects whether it's entrepreneurship or innovation," she said.

Her advice for young women is to have the confidence and belief that you can overcome any barrier if you want to.

Outside of STAR Financial, she also serves on the board of directors for the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the state chamber of commerce and the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo.

Richardson overcame many obstacles to become business owner

BY KAYLA BRENNAN

kbrennan@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE –The road to success for Virginia Richardson was not easy, and a professor told her that she would not make it in business.

So she set out to prove her wrong.

Richardson, a Fort Wayne native and Snider High School graduate, is the chief multimedia analyst and advisor for Tilde Multimedia Firm. In her early adulthood, she suffered through medical issues that forced her to delay her schooling.

“I kind of had what COVID is now,” Richardson said. “They didn’t know what was wrong with me. They didn’t think I was going to live. It was just a very rare virus or flu.”

Once she recovered, she decided to earn her degree. A creative and technology-focused career was what she set her goals on.

While attending Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, she launched an internship with Viacom approximately two years into her degree.

“I was working on things with BET, VH1, and I went from an internship to managing on-air promotions,” Richardson said. “Long story short, I ended up working with ESPN, MTV and a lot of those big markets.”

Her time there took a sudden turn when she learned she would be laid off.

She moved back to Fort Wayne from Indianapolis and worked for WPTA, but was laid off when the station was sold.

“At that point, I realized that I wanted to start my own business,” Richardson said. “That’s where it all launched from. Getting laid off and acquiring skills in the industry, that is how I started Tilde Multimedia Firm.”

In her role, she primarily provides IT solutions and digital advertising services. She helps businesses have a digital footprint so people can find them online.

“That is what I specialize in, just digital media and getting businesses on Google and SEO for search engine optimization, helping them advertise their businesses to their target audiences,” Richardson said. “So I feel that it’s important, especially in this day and age. A lot of people don’t understand digital

media and how it can reach their potential clients.”

Richardson said she helped launch IUPUI’s school of technology in 2003, so she understood how to set up an infrastructure and create online classes. Then, Timothy L. Johnson Academy reached out to her and asked if she provided IT solutions, and she explained that she was able to help.

“I started here last year at Timothy L. Johnson Academy, and basically, what I do is provide technical support to the school for students, so they are able to learn remotely when something happens where the school has to quarantine or the weather is bad,” Richardson said. “I help with online classes and just making sure that everybody’s devices work properly so they can function in an educational environment every day.”

She works for them pro bono.

What were Richardson’s motivations that helped make her career successful? She explained.

“What motivated me was just struggling, and instead of looking at it as a dead-end, utilize moments where it’s a downer, or it’s a pandemic or a crisis, utilize that to give people what they need,” Richardson said. “If there is something that’s down, it eventually has to go up. Just take advantage of the negative aspects or pandemics in life and make the best out of that.”

Judy Loomis of Strategic Partners LLC nominated Richardson as an influential woman because she feels that Richardson has done a superb job in the short time this business has been running.

“Virginia started her business three years ago,” Lumis wrote on the nomination form. “She has made incredible strides in her multimedia field. She is an awesome example of a female minority who struggled initially, made her way through college and pulled herself up to be a mentor to others.”

Richardson met Loomis because they share a client. Richardson says she is on the digital side for their client, while Loomis adds the analog component.

“Judy and I work very closely together,” Richardson said. “I do all of the digital



Virginia Richardson

media and advertising, and she does things like partnerships and grants. Just building different initiatives for the community.”

According to Richardson, since Loomis has been in the industry for a while, she became a mentor to Richardson.

“Together, we make a great team,” Richardson said. “We only have one client together, but I look up to her as a mentor. She’s a very positive person. Even with things that I don’t understand, she will break it down for me and get my mind in the right place. As a woman business

owner, sometimes it’s hard when you are reporting to men. They don’t really buy what you do as it was another woman you would report to.”

Her business name came from the most challenging class she took in college, Finite Math.

“I remember that in Finite Math, there is a symbol called the tilde symbol,” Richardson said. “That’s what I named my business after. Tilde means approximately perfect. There is nothing that is really perfect, and I never forgot that.”

Shepard proud of roots, work in her field

BY JEFF JONES

jones@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — It's pretty easy to see that Amanda Shepard wears many hats as vice president and chief operating officer at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art.

She's extremely proud of her northeast Indiana roots and being able to pursue a career she thoroughly enjoys.

She has been with the museum since 2008, after serving a college internship at the museum the previous year.

"My job today is a management position. I manage the teams that take care of facilities, development, marketing, education and the Paradigm Gallery shop.

"I am in everybody's business," she said. "I describe my job as a problem solver and decision maker. I help other people make decisions, I weigh in when an executive decision is needed, and I basically do that all day long."

Her role also includes seeking funding — amounting to about \$700,000 each year — and marketing visual communications and media.

"Growing up, a lot of people, a lot of young kids might have this vision, 'I'm going to go somewhere, do something big and meaningful, and you think that's what

gives you purpose to your life.

"Certainly going places and doing big things can give life a lot of meaning, but when I realized going places could mean staying in place and doing big things did not mean they had to be done in a distant land, an exotic place or a major metropolitan area.

"You have to be able to see what you can do in your surroundings, no matter your life circumstances rather than constantly dreaming about the next thing," she said. "Once I saw how many challenges and excitement awaited me right in my home state and my home area, I really got excited and feeling blessed that this is the place I'm supposed to be."

Shepard identified Karen Kasper, Charles Shepard and Nancy Stewart as having influenced her professional career.

Kasper was the museum's capital campaign manager when Shepard's career began, during a multi-year renovation project completed in 2010.

"Karen had come up as a professional woman in the '80s and '90s, and she would sometimes would talk about what she had faced as a woman, especially in a corporate environment such as banking," Shepard said.

"She wasn't bitter by any means, but she just kind of had a resolve about her that I really admired," she said. "She was



Amanda Shepard

very organized, very decisive, and pretty black-and-white, which I admired when it comes to decision-making.

"Not every decision is black-and-white, but she was able to make decisions, and stick with them and execute them," Shepard said. "I liked that in her."

Shepard, Amanda's husband, is the museum's chief executive officer. "He gave me a lot of opportunities to do what I'm doing now," she said.

Stewart, a longtime museum volunteer and board member, "taught me so much about working with others, handling myself with grace, professional etiquette, and the practicals of running a meeting and working for consensus," Shepard stated.

Describing herself as an "excessive worrier," she remembers a conversation with a colleague. "I was worried about something, and she said, 'You're being myopic.'"

"I didn't really even know what the word meant. I looked it up, and basically what she said was stop thinking about yourself too much. You're thinking that this issue that's so important to you is a lot more life-al-

tering than it is.

"When somebody cuts through the fog and gives you something straight, it can be a little hard to hear, but that helped me put things into perspective.

"I was at the beginning of my career, and everything seemed so big and pivotal," she said. "Then, you experience more things and you kind of get your sea legs.

"That's helped me help other developing professionals to have some perspective on things."

Growing up, Shepard had a love for art, but initially chose a medical path in college.

"I loved science, but when I got to the college level, I couldn't quite cut it," she said. "I thought, 'I'm good at art, I love it.' Those were two indicators to me that I should really try and make a go of this.

"I have never really questioned that I attempted to make a career out of art," she stated. "I feel now and I felt then, that being able to work in my field, in my home state and area, I feel like I'm in such a unique and lucky position."

CONGRATULATIONS



SUSAN RALSTON

Named by KPC Media and The Regional Chamber of Commerce as
ONE OF 16 INFLUENTIAL WOMEN OF NORTHEAST INDIANA



From the Staff of
JACOB INSURANCE SERVICE, LLC.
Eric Trabert, Geri Garrard,
Heather Hanna, Megan Poe
and Barb Hammond.



We care deeply for our team, for our clients, and for our community!



one purpose
marketing

Fellow women in business,

We understand what it means to have big dreams that seem hard to reach with a small budget. We offer personalized service plans that focus on getting the most out of your budget. Our services range from full brand consulting to one-on-one leadership coaching, this means we can help your business grow from the ground up. We would love to meet with you and learn more about you and your business with a FREE marketing and sales consultation. **Email us today!**

Your partners in business,
the one purpose family ❤️



onepurposemarketing@gmail.com

The One Purpose Family -

One Purpose
Senior Healthcare

One Purpose
Senior Services

OPS
ADVENTURES

Ray continues to inspire so many

BY ANDY BARRAND

abarrand@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — Christina Ray-Durnell describes her mom, Juanita Ray, as a humble individual who has inspired so many over her 47 years as a businesswoman.

“My mom is not a fan of being recognized,” Ray-Durnell said. “I am beyond proud to call her Mom.”

Ray, along with her husband, sister and brother-in-law, took a chance some 47 years ago when they set out to bring quality Mexican food to Fort Wayne. In 1973 the two couples opened el Azteca — which became a fixture in the restaurant scene in Fort Wayne.

Ray, who will turn 80 this month, continued to work at the restaurant until it was sold this fall, marking Ray’s retirement.

Ray credits hard work for her success, along with the quality of food and service the restaurant has provided over the years.

That work ethic was instilled in Ray at a young age. The oldest of 14 children, She began working at the age of 12 as a migrant worker alongside her parents. She later worked at St. Joseph Hospital as an accountant and at the Hotel Keenan as a cocktail server.

It was those two jobs that gave her the passion for business.

Ray-Durnell said her mother’s love for the service industry is what ultimately pushed her into opening el Azteca.

“There was no hesitation, whatsoever,” Ray said on opening the restaurant in 1973. “I had already experienced the hospitality industry. I would do it all over again if I

were 40 years younger.”

At almost 80 years old, she said her love for working with the public kept her coming back to work day-in and day-out.

Ray-Durnell said her mother has given back to the community she calls home in many ways over the years. She has donated food and gift certificates to many organizations, including local schools and churches.

“She has inspired many of her employees over the years,” Ray-Durnell said.

She said her biggest accomplishment was sharing her love of the business and teaching so many people over her 47 years.

“Some have become business owners themselves,” she shared.

She said the last couple of years with the pandemic among us has been the biggest challenge. The extra government requirements have made it a challenge.

The biggest change, simply put, technology.

“Social media and marketing have changed so much,” she said.

She went on to say that another challenge has been finding teen workers to help keep the restaurant operational.

Her one piece of advice to people looking to start a business.

“Do your homework,” Ray said. “Find something you enjoy and it won’t seem like work.”



Juanita Ray

Solutions for Your Business!

Let Tilde Multimedia help accent your business needs!

Creative Digital Marketing, Advertising, Design and Media Production



- Marketing/Advertising
- Reputation Management
- Business Listings and Reviews
- Digital Display Ads
- Geo-Fencing

- Social Media Management
- Audio/Video Production
- Website Development
- Ad Sales Initiatives
- Branding

DIGITAL ANALYSIS SPECIAL OFFER:

Analysis of Digital Footprint and performance plus one hour consultation

Specially Priced \$99

Now through December 15, 2021

Clients include:

- SEED Fort Wayne - Summit City Entrepreneur & Enterprise Distract
- Purdue-Fort Wayne: Special Events (Audio Engineer)
- Windrose Urban Farm
- Madam Walker Legacy Center
- Sodexo Fort Wayne
- Spiece Fieldhouse
- Tilde Multimedia provides IT support at Timothy L. Johnson Acacamy

Owner Virginia Richardson is launching an Institute for students and people with disabilities. They will learn fundamentals of technology and media (video production, audio production, web design, graphics, animations and basic computer skills, just to name a few).

Let Tilde Accent Your Business Needs...



Churubusco Chamber Board working together to better the community

BY RACHAEL HARTMAN

rhartman@kpcmedia.com

CHURUBUSCO — “Women get stuff done.”

Each October the nation celebrates women in business, and it is a perfect time to highlight the women that are “getting stuff done” for the town of Churubusco. There’s something unique going on there with the Churubusco Chamber of Commerce. This Chamber is served by an executive board made up entirely of women.

These women are Nicole Keister, who serves as president; Madalyn Sade-Bartl, vice-president; Nila Duffitt, treasurer; and Sara Hughes, secretary.

All four of these women have grown up in Whitley County and Churubusco, and all can agree that having that small town-feel is what makes Churubusco home.

“Churubusco is a fantastic small community because we all come together to support each other,” said Hughes.

“No matter where I am around town, I see people that I know,” said Duffitt. “The community is full of generous people who care about and look out for one another.”

“I love that we are only 15 minutes from a big city with big city amenities, yet our community still has a small town vibe where everyone knows everyone else, and we all come together as a community in times of need or times of celebration,” said Sade-Bartl.

“Personality abounds in Churubusco – whether it’s the personality of a restaurant, a business owner or a neighbor. Churubusco is a place full of unique characters and places,” said Keister.

Keister taught language arts for 11 years before opening 46 Graphics with her husband.

After graduating from Purdue University, Duffitt became a missionary for Worldwide Discipleship Association (WDA), and still serves as the chief editor for publishing. Duffitt joined her husband Scott in 2019 after he purchased the accounting firm she worked for. She now serves as the marketing manager for Duffitt & Associates.

Hughes is also a Purdue graduate, and for the last 18 years has worked for STAR Bank in Churubusco, 13 of those years in management.

Sade-Bartl earned her bachelors in business administration from Indiana Tech, as well as a master of management from Indiana Wesleyan and master of public administration from Indiana State. She has been serving as the Churubusco Clerk-Treasurer since 2012.

Each of these women have their own story to share about what led them to

serving on the Chamber board.

“I became involved with the Chamber after being elected to my position in 2012,” said Sade-Bartl. “At that time, the Chamber was facing some big struggles, and I became involved with a few other forward-thinking members who looked at other thriving communities to see what their chambers were doing, and our group tried to replicate those things such as holding community events and organizing different fundraisers. I became a member of the Chamber board in 2015 and have served as the vice-president of the Chamber since 2016.”

“As a new (STAR) manager, I wanted to get involved in the community,” shared Hughes. “Another STAR manager invited me to a few Chamber meetings and I decided helping our small town and the businesses in it was a passion for me.”

“When we became business owners of Duffitt & Associates we decided we wanted to be a part of the Churubusco Chamber,” said Duffitt. “Even though the business is located in Columbia City, we wanted to be more visible in the community where we live. Shortly after joining the Chamber, I decided that my math skills might be helpful on the board as treasurer.”

46 Graphics has been a member of the Churubusco Chamber since opening. Keister said she felt called to join the board after finding out there wasn’t someone to lead the Small Business Saturday event in

town one year.

“I thought to myself, ‘I could do that for the Chamber.’ Then I thought ‘I should do that for the Chamber,’” Keister recalled. “I felt regret for not taking an active role in our community. After that, I helped wherever I could. I’m grateful for that epiphany. I’ve made some great friends and, hopefully, done some good in our community.”

The mission of the Chamber is to bring commerce and community together. It also supports local business owners and hosts several community events. It hosts monthly meetings, offering business owners the chance to network and support one another.

And efforts made by the board seem to be paying off, with this year alone seeing a growth in membership by 21 %, and the Chamber now having around 75 members. It’s growth can certainly be attributed to a network that supports the community and its members.

“The Churubusco Chamber is ever-evolving. We have accomplished so much the past several years and are looking forward to accomplishing more,” said Hughes. “I enjoy showcasing the great features on our town such as our beautiful park and ball diamonds, the incredible splash pad, our specialty retail shops and locally owned eateries. Many of the events the Chamber sponsors do just that; bring people into town to enjoy our amenities.”

Like any Chamber though, it has its

challenges. The biggest of which, they all agree, is having enough volunteers.

“There are so many exciting avenues to explore and great events going on that we don’t have enough time or volunteers to do them all,” said Keister.

The Chamber continues to grow despite the challenges, and has seen several success stories in its projects including the annual Chamber trick or treat event, Block Party and Small Business Saturday events.

It also has plans for the future.

“For 2022, the Chamber will be working on a strategic plan to give us a better roadmap to work from in addressing what our organization and our members need to be successful,” said Sade-Bartl.

Though the Chamber’s success is worth celebrating, its board members are quick to highlight the other community organizations that make Churubusco great.

“The Churubusco Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Churubusco and Churubusco Main Street Association work well together to bring events to the town, beautify the town and encourage people to visit our great town,” said Hughes.

Through it all this group of women have worked together to help grow the organization and community, and their support one of another is something truly special.

“Something I cannot stress enough is how effective Niki has been as the

SEE BUSCO CHAMBER, PAGE 14



Churubusco Chamber Board

First job turned into lifelong career for Sue Ralston

BY DAVE KURTZ

dkurtz@kpcmedia.com

ANGOLA —Susan Ralston's very first job turned into a lifetime career.

Ralston started working at Jacob Insurance Service as a part-time employee during high school. Today, she is the managing member and primary owner of the longtime agency in Angola.

"I thoroughly enjoy what I do for my career," Ralston said, explaining her love of helping people, solving their problems and guiding them in their insurance needs.

Ralston sees her role as like a teacher, "just trying to help people understand what insurance is all about ... the importance of insurance, the value it brings, what it can do for you, why it is necessary."

An Angola native, Ralston lived just down the street from Wendell Jacob, one of the insurance company's leaders, when she came to work at the agency through a high school program.

"They were just the most friendly and welcoming people I had ever met," she said about the Jacob family. "They welcomed me with open arms and treated me so very well."

Ralston said she worked for great people at the agency, including Loyd Jacob, who started the business in 1945, Wendell Jacob, Ray Tubergen, Kim Tubergen and Dick Hickman. Wendell Jacob served as Angola's mayor from 1961-65, and Hickman has been mayor since 2002.

Now, with 44 years at the agency, Ralston is grooming her partner, Eric Trabert, to leave it in good hands "when the time is right" for her to retire. She said she is emphasizing the importance of clients.

"I value the relationships, and I want

him to understand the value they bring to us," she said about customers. "We're not here unless we have them."

As for the agency's staff of six, she said, "We truly consider ourselves one big working family. We have a great staff at the agency that I treasure, and I do thank my lucky stars every day that I have them."

The insurance industry is predominantly male, Ralston said, and while women are making gains in ownership and management, it is "still not where it should be."

Ralston is doing her part to promote the insurance industry to its future leaders.

She serves on the board of directors of the Independent Insurance Agents of Indiana, recently rebranded as "Big I." It helps to bring agencies and insurance companies together, she said.

"We feel that independent agencies have choices" to help keep customers' rates low, she said. However, "Our focus will always be on coverage, and then we look at price. We want to make sure you are adequately protected for the best price. We do not sell price only."

Ralston has traveled five times to Washington, D.C., to promote insurance regulations and keeping crop and flood insurance in force.

She serves on a committee for Ivy Tech to keep insurance courses active and promote them to students.

Ralston's involvement doesn't stop at the office door.

With the Steuben County Community Foundation, Ralston focuses on scholarships, and she serves on the Steuben County Council on Aging board to promote its new facility to the senior community. She is vice president of the Angola Professional Business Women's



Sue Ralston

club and is active in the 101 Lakes Kiwanis Club.

She supports Trine University hockey and for 30 years has supported the professional Fort Wayne Komets hockey team.

Ralston also volunteers for Refugees

Read Inc., a charity founded by her son, a high school principal in Washington, D.C., that ships books to refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda.

"I've been given so much," she said, "and now it's my turn to give back."

BUSCO CHAMBER:

FROM PAGE 13

Chamber's president," said Sade-Bartl. "She has reset the direction of the Churubusco Chamber and helped to further the Chamber's mission and vision. She honestly makes me want to be a better, more effective leader."

"I am still fairly new to the Chamber and this is my first year serving on the board," said Duffitt. "I am so impressed with these

other three ladies. They are visionaries, they love this community and the get things done. It is a joy to serve with them."

"Madalyn creates and executes innovative ideas that draw business and community together like our Busco Block Party. Nila holds ideas and numbers accountable with a positive attitude, and Sara uses her organization as well as authentic voice and perspective to keep

everyone in the loop. I am grateful to be part of such an inclusive and extraordinary group of professionals," said Keister.

"Madalyn, who is the town clerk, has been very influential in bringing many events and improvements to Churubusco. She works tirelessly to make 'Busco a better place, to live, work and play. Niki has the biggest heart and the most patience. She had been the best president the Churubusco

Chamber has ever had. Her ideas and implementations add value to our members. Nila is newer to the executive board scene yet is making our budgeting and reporting processes much easier to understand. These ladies are invaluable not only to the Chamber, but to the whole community," said Hughes. "We are lucky to have such a dedicated, community-focused team who also run their businesses and families."

Tucker's dedication to the people of Fort Wayne inspires others

BY KAYLA BRENNAN

kbrennan@kpcmedia.com

FORT WAYNE — Current 6th District Fort Wayne City Councilwoman Sharon Tucker lost her first election in 2012 when she ran for an at-large Allen County Council seat, but that did not stop her from pursuing her dreams.

"I came back the next year, and I ran for district, and I won in the 1st District, which was the first time in a long time that an African American woman ran and won in that seat that had been held by the Republican party for such a long time," Tucker said.

Tucker knew one thing for sure — she loved being the only Democrat, female and African American woman on County Council at that time.

"I got an opportunity to make great relationships with people who probably otherwise would not have given me the time of day," Tucker said.

The dynamic of the people around her once she was elected began to shift. She described it as instant respect. Suddenly, doors to people were open, and the Council members she served with at that time became political friends and allies.

"I wasn't looking to be adversarial," Tucker said. "I was really looking to see how we can build bridges to help move the needle for people in the community."

According to Tucker, she wanted to change the narrative of what people think of politicians. She attended every legislative dinner she could, and in most cases, she was the only African American person in the room.

"I felt like a fish out of water, but I was very adamant about going because it's my district," Tucker said. "Even though they may or may not have voted for me, they still deserved my representation, and the only way for me to know what they were feeling, the pains that they were feeling, was to be in the spaces that they were."

Spending taxpayer dollars is not something she takes lightly, and she thinks that helped people see that she wasn't a "Democratic monster."

"As a leader, if you do what you say you are doing to do, then people are more willing to work with you," Tucker said.

After five years on the Allen County Council, the 6th District Fort Wayne City Council seat was vacant. She ran for it and won.

Leaving the County Council was bitter-sweet for her.

"I loved the County Council," Tucker said. "I had great relationships and respect,

but I also felt as if I would be able to have a greater impact for the community that I represent in terms of my neighbors if I went to the city and did city work."

She was an insurance agent for 30 years, helping people protect their assets by highlighting potential risks. Recently, she made the switch to executive director of Vincent Village.

"So I get to help in a different capacity," Tucker said. "I'm extremely excited about this because this puts me in the community even more."

As the executive director, her role is to create living spaces for people and their families if they become homeless.

"Now I get to impact change even more by being able to make sure that we have good housing stock, that families in the middle of an emergency have a safe place to call home, that they get to have a place where they can lay down their head and feel comfortable and protected," Tucker said.

Earlier this year, she launched Project Activate SouthEast (PASE), a pitch competition where entrepreneurs of any age or business have an opportunity to compete for grants, in-kind services and business partnerships up to \$150,000. The only condition is that the business needs to be located in southeast Fort Wayne.

"We are coming up with creative initiatives to be able to help spark change from within," Tucker said.

Tucker feels the challenge women will face is finding the space and support to start their businesses.

"Women have never, ever, ever failed from rising to a challenge that was given to them, well, not any that I know of," Tucker said. "We're caregivers. We're breadwinners. We're community bridge builders. We're save-the-world-from-itself-type people. But we also need space. We need space and support."

Another way Tucker helps women is from a program called Women in Politics.

"That space helped normalize women running," Tucker said. "That eventually merged in, I eventually merged in, with AVOW (Advancing Voices of Women), who does so much better than I did. I believe in creating opportunities and space for women. So part of the PASE program, we bring in women to be able to take part in that and making sure women know that space is available for them."

When mentoring other women, she wants them to know that whatever their dreams are, do them. But also, know who you are and who you are not.

"Without those two things, we're



Sharon Tucker

challenged," Tucker said. "If we don't know who we are and who we aren't, we'll allow people to define us. Men were trained to put definitions on women without even realizing it. It's just normal for them. So you have to know who you are so that when someone tries to say that you are something different, you can gracefully, respectfully educate them on who you really are."

She also said women should never doubt their place in the world, but also, do not get too comfortable.

"Everything works in seasons," Tucker said. "When a door opens for you, you do what you need to do during your season, and then you reach back and get another sister and bring her forward so the door can open for them."

Director of Intergovernmental Affairs at City of Fort Wayne Stephanie Crandall nominated Tucker.

"Councilwoman Tucker has a servant's

heart that benefits all in our community," Crandall said. "When she challenges people, she does it with love and respect, finding ways to focus on common ground that is needed now more than ever in a world where many prefer to see politics as a divisive force."

When learning Crandall nominated her, Tucker gushed at how great of a person Crandall is.

"She is one of the women we're reaching back to," Tucker said. "She is so intelligent it is just unbelievable. She's very reserved, very shy, and so I have been pouring in her to help pull out what's already there. She is a champion. She is a champion for women. She is a champion for this community. She is very powerful, and we are tapping into that power to help pull that out of her so she can see. I believe that we will see Stephanie doing some great things moving forward."



STAR Power.

**Congratulations to Kristin Marcuccilli
for being honored with a *2021 Influential
Women of Northeast Indiana* award.**

Kristin's bold vision and leadership have
helped STAR to meet customers wherever
they are, making banking faster, easier and
more convenient.

