

Women Who Move the City 2009

Written by Written by Amy Strand

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These passionate and successful women have outdone themselves, all in different ways, to make significant contributions to our community. Here, we've laid out the inspiring stories of several remarkable women who help to make Tucson the fantastic place we call home.

Jacki McCue



Jacki McCue provides a breath of fresh air as someone who truly loves what she does—both her career and what she deems her “second job.”

As president of the Executive Women's Golf Association, Tucson--Old Pueblo Chapter, McCue is passionate about how golf positively affects women's lives; and she knows it's not just the game that women enjoy. “[The EWGA is an] organization that gives you every opportunity to network with other businesswomen around town and make contacts,” McCue says. “I have acquired wonderful friends...It's really enriched my personal life as well as my business.”

The EWGA includes more than 120 chapters in the United States, Canada and France; and each chapter offers networking opportunities, clinics, skill challenges and monthly events to its members.

Having been recently elected for the second time around, McCue is no ordinary president. She admits that her organizational skills and flair for planning have helped make the Tucson chapter a success.

McCue's love for the EWGA began when she joined the organization more than four years ago. She got involved volunteering and coordinating events, and eventually served one year as vice president before being elected president.

McCue is adamant that you don't have to be a first-rate golfer to join. “I'm not a great golfer; I'm average. We've got great golfers, and we've also got beginners,” she says. “We promote women in golf and in life; we try to encourage them to get out and learn.”

The EWGA Tucson's 108 members are a varied group, from fields of accounting, realty, finance, design and other industries; and McCue makes a point of frequenting fellow members' businesses. She encourages others in the organization to do the same, rendering the greens a good place for women to network.

McCue's own work doesn't stop when she steps off the links. She owns an interior design business, Continental Design, Inc., in Green Valley with her husband.

But the group is not all business. The EWGA Tucson participates frequently in charity events like Rally for the Cure, which benefits breast cancer research; and First Tee, a national children's organization.

McCue truly personifies the expression “balancing act”; but with her magnetic energy and evident zest for life, we don't think she minds one bit. And with the fantastic job she does, we don't either.

June Webb-Vignery



June Webb-Vignery is not afraid to instigate change. In fact, she's been at the forefront of educational advancement since the start of her

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career.

As executive director of the Metropolitan Education Commission, Webb-Vignery's job is a little different every day, as she helps to oversee the education activities and programs in Tucson. Webb-Vignery is one of 34 MEC commissioners who work with businesses and governmental agencies to promote high school graduation and higher education.

This education enthusiast began her career in 1968 working with diverse populations in the Houston School District. "We were trained and plopped down in schools that hadn't yet been integrated," she says.

This early experience sparked a passion in Webb-Vignery for working in education and with different cultures, as well as with women.

"When I first started working with African-American students, I could see the connection between what was happening to them and what was happening to me in my life," she says.

Throughout the early years of her career in the 1960's and 70's, Webb-Vignery was frequently singled out as one of the few women in her workplaces. Her work with the City of Tucson's affirmative-action team and her role as professor were just a few such instances.

Instead of feeling discouraged, though, Webb-Vignery created exciting opportunities for women. She developed the first Women in Management college course in the United States, and she then taught it. She also co-established the Arizona Women's Hall of Fame in 1981.

Today, Webb-Vignery's objective at the MEC is to promote education for teachers, students and families in Pima County through various programs and government initiatives. Teen Town Hall, Summer Leadership Conference, Outstanding Teen Citizen Awards, Career Fair and Academy Without Walls are just a few of these. One program that Webb-Vignery is particularly passionate about is the Regional College Access Center, which promotes higher education for first-generation students or those from low-income households.

Some of Webb-Vignery's many honors over the years include the Arizona Political Caucus Woman Making History Award, the League of United Latin American Citizens Community Service Award and the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission Community Award.

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Despite her many public recognitions, Webb-Vignery's chief professional rewards stem from simple but meaningful everyday acts. "Working with the youth and especially having contact with young people [is my favorite part of my job]," she says. Undoubtedly, this enthusiasm is what makes Webb-Vignery so influential here in the Old Pueblo.

Jessica L. Andrews



Performing is a part of her family history, but Jessica Andrews never felt quite comfortable in front of the camera. Andrews comes from an actor-director father and a dancer mother, but behind the scenes is where she shines. As executive director of the Arizona Theatre Company, Andrews uses her innate show-business savvy to help create one enjoyable experience after another for Tucson theater-goers.

Until two years ago, Andrews served as managing director, the top administrative role in the company. Still considered one of the top executive leaders, Andrews now spends most of her time in Tucson, centering her efforts on A Time to Act, a fund-raising campaign she helped to develop a year and a half ago.

"[The campaign] is really focused on the financial end of things: establishing a cash reserve and also the idea of purchasing our office building in Tucson, which is housed in a historic hotel," she says.

Although Andrews continues to serve as the public face of Tucson theater, generating funding for it may be what she does best. The campaign, which has a \$2.9 million goal, has already raised \$2.1 million to go toward the theater's expansion.

Andrews spent many years working her way to this influential position in the community. Finding herself a single mother at 20 years old, Andrews took a job at a Hartford, Conn. theater to support her children. She worked her way up the career ladder for 10 years, and in 1995, Andrews proudly became the managing director for the ATC.

Andrews is now an integral part of the Tucson community, both in the arts and in her involvement about town. She is a member of Women at the Top, a Tucson-based women's business and networking club; she has guest-lectured for the U of A; and she has been honored with numerous awards including the esteemed 2008 Governor's Arts Award.

Although her job entails significant attention to detail, it is obvious that Andrews's true rewards stem from the people she works with. "I feel very connected to the actors, even in my position," she says. "I like making sure the actors know they are being supported by the organization."

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As for the theater's potential? "Someone [once] said to me, 'Anything is possible in Arizona,' and I still think that's true," Andrews says. "We're at a moment where we can begin to dream, and that's exciting for the theater."

Keri Ruffell



Keri Ruffell wants to improve the health of our community, stopping disease before it even starts. Since opening Tucson's first 1-2-3 Fit gym in July, she's already proving herself to be a new health leader and master entrepreneur. The fitness franchise recently secured a spot as an official wellness partner for the Northwest Hospital Oro Valley location's employees and experienced record-breaking growth for the company in August.

Ruffell is the recipient of two master's degrees and an ACE personal training certification, and she believes that prevention is key to creating longer, healthier, disease-free lives. For the sake of a healthy change, at the beginning of 2008, this wife and mother of two took a risk and left behind her corporate career as a management executive in the health care technology industry. She established 1-2-3 Fit in Tucson, determined and inspired to change people's lives and health, starting in her own community.

For Ruffell, it was important to target a more mature generation. During her years in the health-care business, she discovered many diseased patients who could have lived long, fulfilling lives had they kept active. "I became very endeared to the challenges that these patients faced, living with chronic disease for the last 25 years of their lives," she says.

Ruffell says that if patients suffering from debilitating diseases would remain active, they would be healthier and happier. Therefore, she is adamant about reaching baby boomers to prevent future disease in that generation.

Enter Ruffell's health strategy: The studio-size 1-2-3 Fit gym reaches out to men and women ages 45 and older who want a personal approach to exercise. Although she targets middle-age Tucsonans, some clients bring their children and grandchildren into her studio seeking all-around fitness advice too. Ruffell continues to work with adults, but is interested about involving herself in children's organizations to better the overall well-being of our community. In fact, she recently accepted a position on the Junior Achievement of Arizona Southern District Board of Directors, a nonprofit organization that teaches children real-world skills in business and economics.

Not only do the convenient, 30-minute workouts fit into a busy lifestyle, but clients are also offered personalized workouts, nutritional reviews and meal planning, blood pressure checks and body composition analysis from Ruffell and her staff.

"All the president's challenges for activity in the world [aren't] going to make a [difference] if we don't have support systems in our own communities helping people one person at a time," she says.

The addition of this fitness locale may be the beginning of a healthier, disease-free Tucson. Ruffell says she has always been the caregiver type as well as a business role model; and it's clear that combined with her undeniable energy, she is inspiring the community, one situp at a time. "My motto is: Let's try to be a little better tomorrow than we are today," she says. We'd say Ruffell is off to a fantastic start.

Lori Carroll



Even as a child growing up in Iowa, Lori Carroll knew she wanted to be an interior designer when she grew up. After earning an interior design degree at the U of A, Carroll started her own business at the ripe age of 23; and there was no turning back.

Carroll's company soared to new heights after she had the opportunity to design a home for Tucson's 1998 Street of Dreams. "I was able to do a whole entire house, and that way people could really see how a designer could take something and have it all flow," she says.

Carroll has been recognized frequently for her unique talents over the years (the prestigious 2006 Pinnacle of Design honor, awarded by the National Kitchen and Bath Association is just one of these awards) but she admits that the recognition she receives only spurs her to do more. "Every time I'll win a design award...it's wonderful, but then when I go home [I think] 'O.K., how can I do better next time?'"

Much of Carroll's creativity stems from her travels, where she always makes sure to tote along a camera in case any unexpected inspiration pops up.

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"I love the creative part, when you have to come up with something new, and that's one thing I always strive to do is do something different; not necessarily repeat what's been done before," she says. "Personally, I like a simplistic approach. I don't have a lot of clutter in my design."

Carroll has been transforming our houses into homes by bringing a wash of elegant comfort—not an easy combination to achieve—to Tucsonans for more than 25 years; and her impressive portfolio says it all. Her services include residential interiors, commercial interiors, special product design, remodels, outdoor living spaces and more, setting her in a class all her own.

Carroll has been recognized all over the world for her innovation, but her love for the Tucson community keeps her close by, polishing and perfecting our homes. "I love the friendly people, the mountains and just meeting all the different people that come into Tucson," she says.

As a mother of two, Carroll also makes it a priority to remain connected to the Tucson community. She serves on the silent auction committee for the Parseghian Medical Research Foundation and regularly donates to the Boys & Girls Club and the Angel Charity for Children.

Carroll acknowledges that personal time is hard to come by, but says the team she surrounds herself with makes all the difference. "I've been more than blessed," she says. "It's not about me. It's about my team, my group of people [who are] here for me."

Josefina Ahumada



Ahumada has dedicated her life to helping others; today, she works as the field education coordinator and instructor for the ASU College of Public Programs School of Social Work's Tucson component. After two hospital-based internships, Ahumada's professional career began upon graduating from the UCLA social work graduate program, when she was hired to help mentally ill patients at Tucson East Community Mental Health Center.

Many of Ahumada's achievements stem from her emphasis on cultural integration. "[At Kino], we [developed] multicultural teams. A lot of the clients that we worked with were Spanish-speaking or Native American or African-American or Asian, and we felt very strongly that we needed to hire staff that also represented the diversity of the community," she says. "My goal in life has always been, 'Let's have a diversified workforce that can be there to serve our clients.'"

Ahumada later worked with the Arizona Center for Clinical Management as well as the Southern Arizona Mental Health Corporation. Serving the community in such ways led her to begin her work as educator for ASU in 1998, where she further stressed the importance of diversity. "[The faculty] has also seen a need for more bilingual, bicultural students into social work," she says. This fall, the Latino Cultural Competency Certificate Program, a curriculum Ahumada led with other faculty in development, was adopted. Its intent is to create bilingual, culturally competent social workers who are prepared in dealing with the Spanish-speaking public.

Ahumada says she loves operating on the front lines of social work, but she is also passionate about inspiring students. "I want to make a difference. Now the way I'm making a difference is through others," she says.

Although she confesses that social work is not a glamorous job, Ahumada's contributions have not gone unnoticed. Among her many recognitions, Ahumada received the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005 from the state chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, a YWCA "Women on the Move" award in under the health category in 1985 and the student-nominated ASU Ubiquity Award for Academic Contribution in Teaching.

"It's a good time in my life," Ahumada says. "Passing on the excitement about being a social worker, the ethics of being a social worker, the dedication to advancing social justice, to advocate for those who live on the margin; that still excited me after all these years."