

## Women Who Move the Valley 2012

Written by Written by Kirstina Bolton, Thuy An Bui, Melissa Larsen, Ashley Loose, Sarah Love and Ashley Pearlstein / Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

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Whether they are spending endless hours aiding those in need or making someone smile with one of their gorgeous cakes, these 11 remarkable women make the Valley a better place to live—plain and simple. Read on as AFM shares the stories of these extraordinary Women Who Move the Valley, and learn about the leading ladies in their lives who inspired them to be the local heroines they are today. (Also click [here](#) to view 2011, and [here](#) to view 2010)

*“The woman that has always been an inspiration is Julia Child. She was a pioneer in the kitchen and, truthfully, a cook in love with food. She was the one to follow when I was a child. ...I watched her and studied her.”*



### **TAMMIE COE Pastry Chef and Founder of Tammie Coe Cakes**

FOR VALLEY RESIDENTS WITH A SWEET SPOT for cakes and pastries, Tammie Coe might just be considered the first lady of Phoenix. Her love of pastry started when she was a youngster; she made her first wedding cake at 12. “I always loved sweets,” Coe says. “It is kind of ironic because I was raised not to eat sweets.” Coe’s “before-hertime” mother milled her own flour, insisted on whole grains and objected to sugar. So, Coe took any opportunity she was given to indulge, which might be why her first job was at Carvel.

After graduating from Johnson & Wales University and working in other warm-weather locales (like Palm Beach and Miami), Coe followed her husband MJ (of MJ Bread) to Arizona in 1993. Before founding Tammie Coe Cakes, Coe held pastry-making positions at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Desert Highlands Golf Club and the now-closed Michael’s at the Citadel.

When it comes to crafting her famous cakes, Coe finds inspiration in the simplest of things: the texture of sand, the curve of a wine bottle, the chocolate-y taste of Yoo-Hoo. “I am inspired by things that people take for granted,” she says. “I have a lot of respect for nuance and nostalgia.”

Apart from bringing a smile to people’s faces on a daily basis with her baked goods (“I make people young at heart,” Coe says), the pastry chef contributes to the community via her work with St. Vincent de Paul.

For Coe, the future hopefully holds the nationwide expansion of her brand, and a little more time for horseback riding and her family. And, of course, sampling sweets. “There isn’t a pastry I’ve met that I didn’t love.” —M.L.

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*“Treva Slote became a force for the animals in the 1950’s when she arrived in the Valley. ...She went on to be the founder of the Arizona Humane Society, Arizona Animal Welfare League and was behind much legislation. It was my privilege to know her.”*



### **BARI MEARS Founder of Phoenix Animal Care Coalition**

AFTER SPENDING 26 YEARS in the broadcast industry, Bari Mears’ life “went to the dogs.” Her lifelong love of animals drew her to the numerous animal rescue groups that had no connection to the community or one another. From that, she founded Phoenix Animal Care Coalition (PACC911) in 1999, hoping to become the voice for the Valley’s four-legged creatures.

PACC911 is the only organization in the country that has created a community of smaller rescue groups, holds adoption events, and provides an Emergency Medical Fund to reimburse more than 120 PACC911 partners for hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical expenses, thus saving countless animals from euthanasia. “Success didn’t come easily or overnight,” Mears says. “PACC911 dominates every minute of my time. People call me from across the country to learn more about us and how to create a model in their own community. I’m one little gerbil running around in my cage.”

Though she aspires to one day have the chance to relax and see a movie, busy Mears puts animals first and doesn’t plan on stopping anytime

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soon. Mears hopes to consult with groups around the country to help plan other mother organizations like PACC911, while continuing fundraising efforts and the other innumerable PACC911 events. She has written greeting cards, three cookbooks, two poetry books, one children's book and one hardback animal love story, all with 100 percent of profits benefiting PACC911. (All items are for sale at [www.pacc911.org](http://www.pacc911.org).) Mears has wholly dedicated herself to the organization and proudly supports all other efforts involved in the rescue movement. "If it's for the animals, we're willing to try anything." —A.L.

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***"Cheyenne...has been my greatest teacher of life and her brief presence has made my heart bigger, more spacious. I live my life as a memorial to her so that one day, when we're in each other's arms again, after too many years apart, she can look in my eyes and say, 'Momma, you did me proud.'"***



**DR. JOANNE CACCIATORE Founder of the MISS Foundation**

AS A MOTHER OF FIVE, "four who walk and one who soars," Dr. Joanne Cacciatore understands how parents are affected by the tragedy of losing a child. Cacciatore gave birth to Cheyenne in 1994. Upon Cacciatore's urging to the Arizona Senate, Cheyenne was the first baby who died during birth in the United States to receive a Certificate of Birth. After losing her daughter, she went into a dark place of depression. Yet, Cacciatore says, "I made a promise to my dead child that if I survived the pain, because I wasn't sure I would, I would make sure other families enduring this tragedy would not need to endure it alone."

She discovered that a way to heal was to show kindness to others; she started the MISS Foundation. This organization has grown from a small, local nonprofit, which Cacciatore founded in 1996, to a huge international nonprofit with 77 chapters around the world. The MISS Foundation C.A.R.E.S. for families who are enduring life's worst tragedy: the death of a child or another loved one. "We can't save children, so we help save their families. We focus our efforts on counseling, advocacy, research, education and support, thus the acronym C.A.R.E.S.," Cacciatore says.

Although she received the prestigious Hon Kachina Award in 2007 and the Sr. Teresa Compassionate Care Award in 2008, she never stopped caring for others once her work was recognized. Cacciatore, who is also a professor and researcher at Arizona State University, continues to create outlets, like the Kindness Project, for the bereaved. The Kindness Project is a way for families to honor their loved ones by performing random acts of kindness in memory of those who died. The idea is to show someone's life and death continues to matter, as Cheyenne's does. —S.L.

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***"My mother inspires me because of her positive outlook on life and because of her approaches and ways of overcoming obstacles."***



AFTER HER SON WAS DIAGNOSED in 1993, Denise D. Resnik co-founded the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC), a nonprofit, community-based organization that focuses on research services and support for those affected by autism. "Back then, when autism wasn't as prevalent, there was a hopelessness and doctors told families, including my own, to just love and accept them and plan to institutionalize them," Resnik says. She refused to give up hope and soon founded the SARRC to help families in her situation, which is now a nationally recognized nonprofit organization.

Aside from her work with SARRC, Resnik is also the founder of DRA Strategic Communications, an agency that provides marketing and communications support to nonprofit organizations. (The company also boasts clients in other fields, including entertainment, real estate and more.) Resnik also serves on the board of the Whispering Hope Ranch Foundation, which provides a camp and retreat to children and adults with special needs, as well as the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Arizona Community Foundation and Phoenix Community Alliance.

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In her free time, Resnik leads an active lifestyle and enjoys hiking, cycling, playing Scrabble and spending time with her family. Resnik and her husband, Rob, have two children, Allyson and Matthew, and a golden retriever, Mowgli.

Resnik, an Arizona native and graduate of Arizona State University, lives and breathes community service. With a never-ending list of community involvements and a passion for helping those in need, Resnik makes a difficult and busy job look effortless. "It's a privilege to be in a position to give and get involved with the community and, in many ways, you often receive more than you give," Resnik says. —A.P.

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***"My grandma...always felt that it was important to care for the earth, give back, put healthy food in your body, treat yourself well and to treat the earth well. My mom...was the one who taught me about balancing work and family."***



**BROOKE BOGART Architect and Principal of Ecological Environments**

"WE DO NOT INHERIT THE EARTH from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." Award-winning architect and principal of Ecological Environments, Brooke Bogart applies this inspirational quote to guide her passion in both her work and personal life.

Ever since she was 11 years old, Bogart has lived as a vegetarian and says her lifestyle has always revolved around her true passion for sustainability, green-building design and healthy living. "I think of how the earth was when I was a child and we've done so much damage since then," Bogart says. "I don't want to give my child a lesser earth than I had. I need to improve it, fix it. I know I'm just one small piece of it but I can do whatever I can do to improve it, I certainly will. It's definitely my goal."

Bogart graduated from Arizona State University with a master's degree in energy and climate design in 1997. She went on to be certified as the state's first female LEED Accredited Professional and continues to help other architects and designers with sustainable building consulting and educational services through her company, Ecological Environments. "What I love about architecture is how different every project is," she says. "It's not doing the same thing over and over again. Especially with all the new technology, there's always something to learn and with every project, there's always a new unique challenge."

While dedicating her line of work to sustainable design, Bogart is positively balancing her personal life as a happy bride-to-be and a mother of three precious children. In her spare time, Bogart enjoys bike riding, taking walks and has recently dabbled in painting. —T.B.

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***"[My mom's] strength paired with her insight and business acumen is unmatched. I know that much of my success has been because of how she raised me and the way she taught me to treat people."***



**GELIE AKHENBLIT Founder of NetworkingPhoenix.com**

GELIE AKHENBLIT BEGAN HER inspirational journey at just eight years of age. Akhenblit and her family were Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union who came to the United States in search of a better life.

Even at a young age, Akhenblit knew that many of her possessions were donated. It was then that a strong sense of community and a willingness to help others were established in her. After graduating from Arizona State University and obtaining a job in the business

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world, Akhenblit realized her true passion for networking and that there was no organizational system for business events. Thus, NetworkingPhoenix.com was born. Though she was faced with financial challenges and hackers, today, the company has almost 19,000 members and showcases at approximately 600 events in the Phoenix area.

With her company now a success, Akhenblit focuses her attention on giving back to the community. “We allow charities to compete in a contest and the charity with the most votes gets a complimentary exhibit table at our events, and we mention them in our weekly newsletter to our members. We try to support many charities, not just one or two.” Akhenblit works with Suns Nite Hoops, an organization that helps young men stay off the streets, and Friendship Circle, which pairs special needs teenagers with high school students. She also supports The Girls Rule! Foundation, Kicks-R-Us, Casting for Recovery, Jordan’s Jungle and more.

With a résumé that just keeps growing, Akhenblit has limited free time but enjoys spending it with her husband, Erin Johnson, playing racquetball, socializing, entertaining and networking. “Even when it’s not really work, it’s still work because of the nature of what I do,” Akhenblit says. “Everything to me is a networking opportunity.” —A.P.

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***“I’m inspired by the women who have fought through something courageously, women who are passionate about what they’re doing, and just believe in it so much with their core values.”***



### **GEORGANNE BRYANT Founder and Owner of Frances and Smeeks**

WHEN WANTING TO FILL A SWEETS or shopping craving, locals look no further than Frances and Smeeks, two adjoining one-of-a-kind shops tucked away in Central Phoenix. “[In Frances] I really wanted to bring items in that I loved. I love home items, I love accessories, clothing and style,” founder and owner Georganne Bryant says, “and I have a quirky sense of style and humor, so Smeeks is everything that embodies that part of me.” Frances—named after her grandmother—opened its doors in 2006 as partly a vintage shop, but as the business grew and more time was being spent on restoring vintage wear, Bryant decided to house boutique items from local and national designers instead.

The concept behind Smeeks—her childhood nickname (and, yes, her dad still calls her that)—is a combination between a walk-down-memory-lane candy and novelty store. It also serves as a birthday party center and, next month, will host a party for the Arizona chapter of the Children’s Alopecia Project.

Before Bryant found success as a small-business owner with Frances and Smeeks, the cancer survivor opened the first Victoria’s Secret in Phoenix and earned her realtor’s license. For 18 years, she was a stay-at-home mom. Alongside Frances and Smeeks, she promotes local business by co-founding the Small Wonder Map of Local First Arizona, and donates time and money to Valley schools annually.

As one of the Valley’s most prominent small-business owners, she shares her experience at the Thunderbird School of Global Management Thunderbird for Good program, speaking to women from Indonesia, Malaysia, Central Asia and the South Pacific about business operations and marketing skills, who in turn take the knowledge back to their homes. “I’m so excited about this because it’s exactly what I’m passionate about, a global village,” she says. —K.B.

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***“My biggest inspiration was my grandmother. She was an incredible woman who overcame great hardship and is a survivor of the Holocaust. [She] rebuilt a life and always opened her heart.”***



### **MARCIA MINTZ CEO of the John C. Lincoln Health Foundation**

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AS THE CEO OF THE John C. Lincoln Health Foundation, Marcia Mintz is in charge of creating philanthropic and business relationships, often times helping millions of dollars get into the hands of those who need it. "I'm very excited to lead the philanthropic support," Mintz says about being a part of the "very special" foundation by promoting healing and health to the community.

In the past, she worked for Valley of the Sun United Way in Phoenix and led the effort that secured a \$50 million campaign for the first time in the organization's history. She has spread her passion for philanthropy throughout the various countries she has lived in, including Cuba, where she focused on international development, health, education and more.

Outside of the John C. Lincoln Health Foundation, Mintz serves on many different boards including The Jewish Community Association, Human Rights Campaign Federal Club and she contributes to child-centric groups. Mintz provides advising to organizations that she cannot personally contribute to, still reaching out to the greater community when at all possible.

"I always want to continue to help fund important things in our community," Mintz says, who is a third-degree black belt and enjoys yoga. She believes that Arizona has hugely generous residents and hopes to see it as a nationally recognized place of philanthropy someday.

One recent collective community effort with the John C. Lincoln Health Foundation involved funding new mammography technology. Since April, the technology has diagnosed 15 cases of breast cancer that otherwise wouldn't have been detected. "I'm so lucky and grateful," Mintz says. "It's very fulfilling to see people have an impact on so many lives. Every little bit helps, and it's so powerful." —A.L.

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***"One of the reasons I know I have to survive this and change things is because of the strong women around me, who are holding me up and who refuse to let me fall. I am moved by all the women who love me for me, without any judgements, only kindness and support as they know I am doing the best I can."***



### **MAYA THOMPSON Founder of the Ronan Thompson Foundation**

MAYA THOMPSON STARTED WRITING a blog for her almost 4-year-old old son, Ronan, when he was diagnosed on Aug. 12, 2010 with Stage IV Neuroblastoma. Thompson continues to write for Ronan, even though he lost his battle with childhood cancer on May 9, 2011. Her blog, [www.rockstarronan.com](http://www.rockstarronan.com), has reached more than two million people, and she continues to inspire people to do good for others every day.

Apart from writing, Thompson uses her time and energy to build awareness for childhood cancer, even though she is in indescribable pain every day. In the memory of her son, Thompson started the Ronan Thompson Foundation, which not only raises money to find a cure for Neuroblastoma but also supports local charities like Ryan House, where Ronan passed away, and the MISS Foundation, which is helping Thompson with her insurmountable grief. Through the Ronan Thompson Foundation, Thompson hopes to donate to a family who has been affected by childhood cancer. The organization will help with the medical bills, groceries, travel expenses and household chores, from folding laundry to cooking dinners.

Of course, the foundation also serves as a way of reminding people who Ronan was and that he fought like a rock star, even until the end. Through her hard work, Thompson will continue to change the world because "Ronan is the reason behind this movement, he is the reason for everything I do. Everything I do for the rest of my life will be for Ronan," she says. —S.L.

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***"I'm truly inspired when I see any woman owner of a business because I know what they have to go through—their struggles and trials as well as the joys when it's a success."***



### **RUTH SIEGEL Founder and Owner of Serenity Hospice and Palliative Care**

Ruth Siegel has taken the common philosophy of hospice care and revamped it to fit in the everyday environment with exceptional supervision.

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"It's just beautiful when you walk in," says Siegel, founder of Serenity Hospice and Palliative Care. "It's not cold like you think a hospice facility would look like. It's just stunning, and the care is as good as the beauty."

Originally from the suburbs of Detroit, Mich., Siegel has worked within the hospice realm for 16 years. In 2004, she established Serenity Hospice and Palliative Care in Phoenix. Out of 74 hospice facilities in the area, Serenity has the third highest number of patients—300—with another facility opening in Sun City this spring. She credits her father for her knack in business. "He owned a nursing home, a bowling alley and a motel," she says. "I just admired him coming from nothing and doing extremely well."

Aside from spending her days running Serenity, she gives back to the community in more conventional ways. "I always help Fresh Start because coming in as a divorced, single woman, I understand why it's so important to have that support," she says, "and I give a lot of things from my home to Habitat for Humanity." (One of her favorite hobbies happens to be decorating.)

The nonprofit segment of Serenity also provides care to families who abandon their elders at hospices. During the holiday season, the care staff ensures each patient is honored and encouraged. —K.B.

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*"I'm inspired by a number of women—many of whom have inspired me in ways they'll never know. I am thankful for the legacy they've built for me, and the young women who may be inspired to make a difference because of their work."*



### **SUE GLAWE Vice President of Community Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona**

SUE GLAWE HAS TAKEN COMMUNITY service to new levels as vice president of community relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona. In her professional world, Glawe focuses on community and nonprofit outreach and establishing partnerships in order to promote community service.

As a board member of Florence Crittenton, a program that aims to help at-risk girls, the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center, the Arizona Educational Foundation and as the chairwoman of the US Airways Education Foundation, Glawe has made a hobby out of community involvement during her personal time and encourages others to become involved. "Find your passion," Glawe says. "You can't do well unless you like the organization or mission; find and identify your interests."

Along with her long résumé of local service efforts and a superb reputation among notable community members and co-workers, Glawe's modesty adds to her charm. "I don't take any personal credit for these things; it's much more about Blue Cross Blue Shield and their willingness to be front and center in the community," says Glawe, insisting that the company she has worked with for 23 years is more worthy of recognition.

In her spare time, Glawe enjoys being with her children, grandchildren and two rescue dogs, Gracie and Coco. She is also fond of painting, when time permits—though she shows no sign of slowing down. With a natural love of community service, Glawe continues her ongoing involvement in more and more nonprofit organizations throughout the Valley. —A.P.