



2021
Powered by
Women

THE 2021 CLASS OF POWERED BY WOMEN, SELECTED FROM READER NOMINATIONS, NAVIGATED THE WORST PANDEMIC IN MORE THAN 100 YEARS, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY, AND EMPLOYEE ANXIETY. TODAY, WITH COVID-19 ON THE WANE, THEY'RE HELPING TO LEAD THEIR RESPECTIVE CORPORATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS INTO A SAFER AND MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURE.

**PROFILES BY BILL DOW, TIM KEENAN, AND GARY WITZENBURG
PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY CROMBEZ
ICON ILLUSTRATIONS BY JUSTINE ALLENETTE ROSS**



**Senior Vice President and CEO North Market
Henry Ford Health System, Detroit
Employees: 30,000 | Revenue: \$6.5B**

For Denise Brooks-Williams and other hospital executives throughout the world, the most serious health crisis in 100 years created unprecedented challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic exposed disparities and the fragility of health care systems that required strong leadership to navigate through uncharted waters. With nearly 30 years of experience as a hospital administration leader, Brooks-Williams, senior vice president and CEO of Henry Ford Health System's North Market, proved up to the task.

"So many people were counting on us as leaders to make sure our clinical teams had personal protection equipment and policies that supported a safe environment. I'm so proud of how they did such a heroic job in caring for our community," says Brooks-Williams, who personally spent hundreds of hours meeting with staff, patients, and families

throughout the crisis.

Prior to her current position, the native Detroit — who graduated from Cass Tech High School and the University of Michigan, where she received her bachelor's degree and master's degree in health services administration — served as president and CEO of Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital. Before taking that position in 2013, she was president and CEO at Bronson Healthcare in Battle Creek, and she previously held leadership positions at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland.

Brooks-Williams says major developments that arose from the

pandemic included the significant increase in telehealth medicine and the exposure of the disparity in health care for minorities.

"Telehealth will remain with us, as demand for it has created more access, particularly for those who previously may not have been comfortable with it, while the disparity in health care for minorities that has always been there was highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic," says Brooks-Williams, who, during the height of the health crisis, was appointed to the Racial Disparities Task Force for COVID-19 by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

While noting there is more heightened awareness of the problem, she reports action is taking place. "Our task force has advanced the idea and implementation of unconscious bias training at hospitals," says Brooks-Williams, who continues to champion social justice initiatives in the hospital system.

"At Henry Ford, we've had a really strong diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda, but now we've added justice, in light of the unrest surrounding police brutality, because that's also a public health issue in terms of preventable death," she explains.

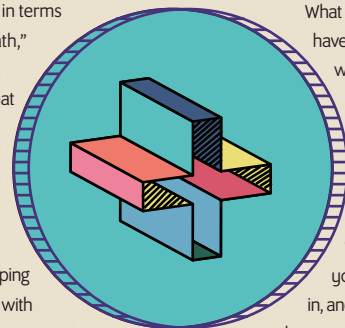
When asked what makes an effective health care leader, Brooks-Williams says the key to her accomplishments comes from developing strong relationships with her staff. "Throughout my career, I've worked closely in developing partnerships with physicians and the clinical care team members," says Brooks-Williams, who was named one of the Top 25 Minority Executives in Health Care by *Modern Healthcare* magazine. "Being a resource and a partner is critically important because I have to understand (others') needs and what environment they need in order for us

to deliver care safely to the community we're serving."

For years, Brooks-Williams has actively participated in community, charitable, and professional organizations, both locally and nationally. She is a board member at Authority Health, New Detroit, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, and Friends of African and African American Art through the Detroit Institute of Arts.

She previously served as the president of the National Association of Health Services Executives, one of the premier minority health professional organizations in the United States. The executive also found that being a mentor to others entering the health care administration field has been particularly rewarding.

"I'm blessed to be in the role I'm in as a Black woman, and I believe I have an obligation to mentor, support, and bring others into the profession," she says. "There are a lot of dynamic Black health care leaders, but some don't get there without significant bumps in the road. I've been fortunate that I've had great mentors throughout my career."



What advice does she have for young women entering the business world?

"You have to believe that you can do whatever role you choose to be in, and it's important to have mentors and

sponsors, and to stay engaged with them," she says. "Also, if you desire to be an executive and raise a family, don't be intimidated by what you think it might mean for career development, because you can make it work. The pandemic has reinforced, for all of us — including employers — that life is precious and very short, and we need to live our lives more fully and in a balanced way." ■

— Bill Dow

**Denise
Brooks-Williams**

Collette 'Coco' Champagne



COO | Hagerty, Traverse City
Employees: 1,600 globally | Revenue: NA

Like her customers, Collette “Coco” Champagne has a classic vehicle that she feels very strongly about: a 1935 3/4-ton Chevrolet pickup that was on her family’s fruit farm for generations. The vehicle helps drive her work as COO of Traverse City-based Hagerty, the world’s largest provider of specialty insurance for classic, vintage, and enthusiast vehicles.

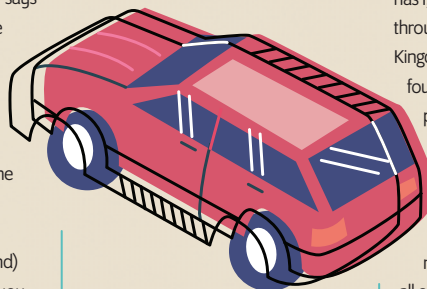
“I love people, so I get to learn all the stories about their cars, and that’s really my big attraction to (the business),” says Champagne, who has spent 22 years at Hagerty. “It’s rare that somebody doesn’t have a story about why they collect their cars. That’s what makes it so much fun.”

Champagne also extends her personal skills to the Hagerty team, where she is leading the company’s transition to a digital enterprise. In fact, before she became COO nearly three years ago, her title was senior vice president and chief people officer.

“It’s good to build good relationships with people, (and) learn about what motivates them,” she says. “The more you

learn about people, the easier it is to get together and solve problems. I’m very empathetic and have a strong understanding of people and what motivates them. That’s probably my superpower.

“(As COO) I spend a lot of time talking to people, and trying to



empower them to make good decisions and helping remove some obstacles they may have,” she explains. “I look at our teams and make sure they have the resources they need to execute their work. I work with the technology teams (to) make sure they have really good communication with our business teams on their prioritization, and how we can work together.”

In addition to leading digital growth, Champagne keeps an eye on the performance of the business, looking at things that drive profitability and revenue, and ensuring Hagerty is meeting its annual objectives and goals. She’s also overseeing an effort to make the company a better place to work, especially for other working mothers.

“As I look back on my career, I’ve always tried to make things better for people,” she says. “I’ve focused a lot on working moms and working families, (and making) it easier for them by extending paid time off after they have a child and implementing an extended gradual return-to-work policy. It’s important, from a business perspective, to allow working moms to come back to work gradually — if they choose to come back.”

Twenty-two years ago, when Champagne was first recruited to join Hagerty to develop its sales processes and practices for its inbound call center, the company had 70 employees. Now it has 1,600 workers and offices throughout the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Over the past four years, Hagerty has grown 22 percent year over year.

“I want to keep Hagerty growing and make a difference for the women leaders who are here,” Champagne says. “I really want to make a difference for all of our leaders, making sure they’re

inclusive and reaching their potential. One of the things we always talk about is looking at issues with a growth mindset. I love the idea of thinking about additional job creation with our growth.”

To perpetuate that rise, Hagerty has implemented other noninsurance programs. “We don’t look at ourselves just as an insurance company; we look at ourselves as an automotive brand with the higher purpose of saving driving and keeping car culture alive, which is exciting for Hagerty and exciting for the state of Michigan.”

Hagerty programs include a 620,000-member Hagerty Drivers Club, which has a YouTube channel that features programs like “The Barn Find Hunter” and “Redline Rebuilds.” There’s also a DriveShare program, where classic car owners can rent out their vehicles, as well as classic race car insurance programs.

The classic Chevy truck owner and gardener started her career as a loan officer at the National Bank of Detroit after graduating from Michigan State University with bachelor’s degrees in communications and agriculture. She also studied human resources at the University of Michigan.

Fortunately for Champagne, she hasn’t had to face any discrimination based on her gender during her career. “Being a woman isn’t an issue at Hagerty,” she says. “The owners are very inclusive and have been paving the way for women to have more responsibility.”

Responsibility is something Champagne learned growing up on a working farm, one requirement of which was learning how to drive a vehicle with a manual transmission — which leads back to the 1935 Chevy pickup. “It’s all original,” she says. “I had the body cleaned up and a new paint job. It’s adorable.” ■

— Tim Keenan

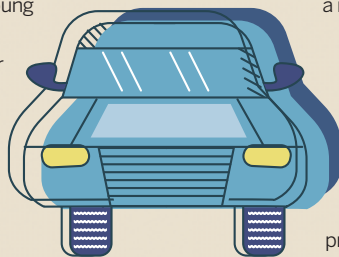


Lisa Drake

COO | Ford North America
Employees: 186,000 globally | Revenue: \$127.1B

Mechanical engineer Lisa Drake says the most challenging job in her career was chief engineer for Ford Motor Co.'s battery and hybrid electric vehicles. In that position, which she held from 2007 through 2010, she led development of the Ford Focus and Ford Transit Connect electric vehicles, and Ford Fusion, Lincoln MKZ, and Ford C-Max Energi hybrids. "That team was so excellent that I really had to stretch my technical competency, sharpen my skills, and get to know a lot of electrical engineering," she recalls. "It was during the recession, with a small team in an off-campus building, so you can imagine (how hard it was) to spend any money at that time."

For that effort, Drake earned the Automotive Hall of Fame's 2008 Young Leadership and Excellence award, in recognition of her "contributions and leadership in the growing field of electrification." She says the group she led back then has mostly stayed together. "A lot of those folks who worked on that technology all those years ago have now delivered the Mustang Mach-E and Ford F-150 Lightning," Drake says. "They kept researching battery cells and developing in-house motors, even when we didn't have vehicle programs. When we got really



serious about electrification a couple years ago — and even more serious now — they were ready. They love what they're doing, and that's why they're so good at it."

Drake's most physically demanding job was as Mustang Plant Vehicle team manager at the Dearborn Assembly and Dearborn Truck plants. "You have to be in by 6 a.m. for startup, the days are long, the speed is fast, you're on the floor all day, and when dealing with a problem, you can't schedule a meeting for the next day. You need to be right there, deciding what to do as those vehicles are rolling off the line," she says. "The production environment is very tough and taxing, and I give our teams a lot of credit for going there and doing those jobs day in and day out. They're real troupers."

Among her other notable

assignments have been assistant chief engineer, F-Series Super Duty; chief engineer, Lincoln MKC; program manager, Explorer and Expedition; and F-150 product and launch manager during the construction of Ford's Rouge Center Dearborn Truck plant.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, where she earned a mechanical engineering degree at Carnegie Mellon University, Drake moved to Michigan to take her first job as a Ford powertrain engineer. Initially aspiring to be a doctor, she started as a biology major but liked math and physics much better. "I had great physics professors, and one saw me as a problem-solver who would like engineering," she recalls, "so I switched to mechanical engineering in my sophomore year and absolutely loved it." From there, she earned an MBA from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Throughout her career, Drake says she's been fortunate to be successful as a woman in a male-dominated field. "I've been blessed with mentors, and because there weren't that many females around me early in my career, almost all of them were males. I don't like to gauge the challenge for women in this industry through my own singular personal experience, because for every female who succeeds, there are hundreds just as capable. We're making progress, but aren't exactly structured to allow that as easily as I'd like. And, of course, I pay it forward. I do more mentoring than I probably should, but I

can't resist doing it. I mentor every level, male and female, as much as I can."

One major mission of Drake's current position is improved profitability through cost and waste reduction. The two most important areas for accomplishing that, she explains, are improving product quality to reduce warranty costs and lowering material costs — and she says those goals can be complementary. For example, both material cost and warranty risk can be reduced by integrating some typically "set-and-forget" features into the infotainment system's touchscreen system instead of having them controlled by mechanical switches and wiring.

What would be her advice to women in business, and specifically in the auto business? "First, seek out mentors and advocates. Never worry that someone is going to say they don't have the time. You'll be surprised at how many of us will make the time to talk to individuals. Whatever they do in any company, everyone has to network, especially women in male-dominated spaces — and network at the right level. It's difficult when an employee whose work I don't know asks me for advice. I can give general advice, but people should find the right mentors who are close enough to their work to best be able to help. ... I have people I can go to when I need advice or guidance, and other people I can go to with tough engineering questions." ■

—Gary Witzenburg

M

arissa Hunter scored a major win with an ad that ran during the 2013 Super Bowl and

went a long way toward establishing the Ram Truck brand after it split from Dodge. “When the two brands split, I elected to work on Ram,” Hunter says. “We needed to build it from the ground up, and give it its own personality and value proposition. One of my proudest moments was the day we delivered that ‘Farmer’ Super Bowl commercial, (featuring) Paul Harvey’s ‘So God Made a Farmer’ speech — not just because it was a Super Bowl commercial, but because the message had such great impact on a lot of people, even beyond what we expected.”

It wasn’t long after that when she aceed what she laughingly calls the “longest job interview in my career.” After leading Ram brand advertising for nearly five years, she was offered a chance to move up to director of all brand advertising and communications. The transition took nearly three months.

“What I needed to demonstrate was my ability to be a leader among my peers. In reflection, I appreciate that the organization took that approach,” she says. “That long runway taught me a lot about leadership, and understanding how to get the best out of people and provide them the resources and support they need while appreciating that every person is different, everyone is motivated and inspired differently, and (everyone) has different needs for recognition, reward, and encouragement.”

During that time, she adds, “my co-workers saw me as someone very supportive and an active listener who wanted to find creative ways to solve business problems. I did ultimately get that position, and still have it — along with the one I was given two years ago of overseeing the marketing group at large. The camaraderie and the way that team was able to work together was something that I’m very proud of. It was challenging in the beginning, but the company was very patient and

allowed me to learn and grow.”

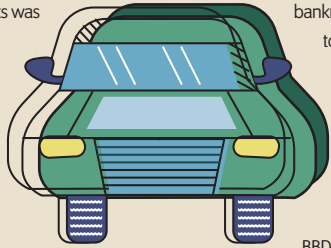
Born in Bay City, Hunter moved with her family at age 10 from Unionville, in the Michigan “thumb,” to Westland. The daughter of collegiate teachers and coaches, she earned her bachelor’s degree in communications from Michigan State University in 1997 and joined BBDO Advertising, where she progressed over 10 years to serving as Dodge brand and motorsports account

director. Following Chrysler’s bankruptcy, she moved to the new company that would evolve into Fiat Chrysler Automobiles in 2009.

“Those years at BBDO were when my love of automotive really developed,” she says. “I have a deep passion for what I do. I love my job, and I’m so privileged to be able to work with all the people at Stellantis and the marketing team that I’m privileged to lead. I consider myself fortunate to get up and go to work, whether virtually or in the office, (and) kick off the day with the team and see what we can do to innovate and think about ways to build our brands.”

Has her gender presented a challenge? “I don’t think I’ve experienced challenges that I didn’t (also) observe male counterparts experiencing,” she says. “I think I’ve been given equal levels of challenge, and have been equally recognized for the loyalty and performance I’ve given the company, and the way I’ve been able to lead my team.”

Hunter credits a “wonderful mentor” named Katie at BBDO for having had a profound impact on her life and career. “I have a tendency, sometimes, to not be very patient,” she admits. “But Katie was very wise, professional, and patient. We had some really good sessions, and she helped me understand the importance of taking your time, not wanting to get somewhere too fast. I really appreciated her wisdom, and still do now. It’s a long career — a marathon, not a sprint. You need to be ready for the next step before you take it, or even ask for it. I often think to myself, in dealing with a situation or working through



Vice President, Marketing | Stellantis North America
Employees: 300,000 globally | Revenue: \$163.6B

something with the team, ‘What would Katie do?’ It’s good internal guidance that has never failed me.”

Hunter extends the same open policy to her colleagues. “Everyone on my team and in other departments we work with knows that I’m very approachable and open to doing one-on-ones and mixed-level meetings to try to help people with their networking within the organization, and with external advertising and marketing groups. I think the concept of ‘pay it forward’ is very important in business, particularly for women, to help them understand the possibilities in their careers.”

What advice does Hunter offer to women in business? “Be confident in

your ability to have valuable contributions in your work. Remind yourself that you deserve a seat at the table. Active networking is extremely important, and don’t be afraid to fail. It happens to everyone, and you’ll learn some incredible lessons that will make you better moving forward.”

She also sees work/life balance as work/life integration. “We deal with partners on the West Coast, in Europe, and in Asia and Australia, so there are nights and early mornings when we’re in meetings. The days may not start and stop at the same time, and your family schedule may not be consistent all the time. It’s not necessarily how you spend specific hours in a day, but balancing your priorities and making sure to take time for yourself and your family, and it’s so important to have a strong support system and a flexible family unit. I’m extremely fortunate that my husband is able to take on a little more time with our 4-year-old son, leaving us both room to shift, depending on what the other needs.” ■

— Gary Witzenburg

Marissa Hunter

Olivia Jackson



Managing Director | Accenture, Detroit
Employees: 1,000 | Revenue: \$44.3B

Before graduating from William and Mary in 1998 with degrees in international relations and economics, Olivia Jackson had dreamed of becoming a diplomat or a lawyer.

The Virginia native's plans changed after attending a career fair where she met representatives from Andersen Consulting. She was subsequently hired by the firm that would later become Accenture, a leading Fortune Global 500 company that provides management consulting, technology, services, and outsourcing worldwide.

"My intention was to work at the company for two years and then maybe go to law school, but here I am 23 years later and I couldn't be happier with the work I do," says Jackson, who serves as a managing director at the Detroit office. "I'm a people person. I like to solve problems, I love

technology because it's always changing, and I love to learn."

Her climb up the corporate ladder at Accenture began with a stint as an analyst based in Washington, D.C., where she helped implement a large inventory system for field offices at a federal agency. She then became a consultant and was assigned to a government project that included the testing of various website designs. Following the 9/11 attack, Jackson was promoted to manager, with the assignment of deploying more accurate fingerprint-matching technology

for a federal security agency.

Twelve years ago, when Jackson was transferred to Detroit as a senior manager assigned to a local banking client, she began to raise a family of three boys with her husband — and faced the biggest challenges of her life.

"Our first son is a special needs child and our second son was diagnosed with cancer, so we had a lot of life thrown at us," says Jackson, who adds that she's grateful that she works for a progressive company that allowed her to work part time for eight years until her home situation was stabilized.

"I was inspired by a co-worker who previously had asked and was allowed to work part time, which was very unusual back then," Jackson says. "I learned to speak up and not be afraid to ask for what I needed. During that difficult time, Sheryl Sandberg's book, 'Lean In,' was helpful. I realized that I didn't have to opt out and quit my job. It doesn't have to be either I'm a partner or I stay home with the kids, because life is a journey and there are so many options in between."

Three years ago, Jackson returned to work full time and, within a year, was promoted to her current position as a managing director at Accenture's Detroit office. She's also the inclusion and diversity lead for her technology group, and it's a role that she relishes.

"When we lift others, we all get lifted, and I think it's important to have people who don't think like us and have different perspectives and life experiences," says Jackson, who this past year has been conducting unconscious bias training, and participated in inclusion and diversity recruiting events with university students as part of Accenture's recruitment initiatives.

Jackson also leads an effort to ensure that mentorships are implemented as part of Accenture's corporate culture. "I feel very strongly about the need to have a support system so people can help and advocate for you, because I've been the grateful recipient of those kinds of allies and advocates," she says. "We spend a lot of time on making sure we're inclusive in who we're mentoring and that it's not just people who are like us, but everyone."

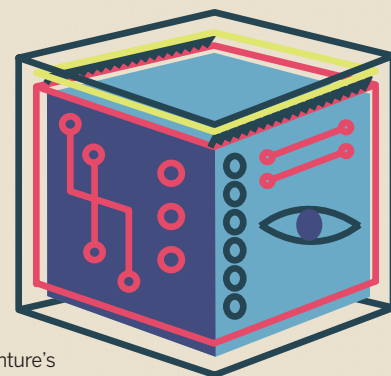
As a working mother and corporate executive, Jackson has clearly demonstrated that a female can climb the corporate ladder while holding both roles.

"I think generally, in this country, there's been a lot of progress in women being able to move up into top executive positions, but we still have a long way to go," acknowledges Jackson, who works for a company committed to ensuring there's greater gender equality in executive positions.

So, what's Jackson's advice to young women aspiring to become corporate leaders?

"As part of my higher purpose as a professional female, I encourage women to speak up, ask for support, be yourself, and make your own story. Find a place to work where you do what you love and can truly bring your best self to work every day. I'm so fortunate to have found a place like that for me at Accenture." ■

— Bill Dow



Carrie Jones-Barber knew at a young age that she wanted to follow in her father's, uncle's, and grandfather's footsteps at bakery supplier Dawn Foods in Jackson.

"There was one particular triggering event," Jones-Barber recalls. "I was 12 years old, and I answered the phone late at night and a baker needed ... my dad to help him with a problem. The next day, I decided I wanted to do what my dad did — solve people's problems."

From a donut mix with a 100-year-old secret blend of ingredients to gourmet chocolate, ready-to-serve cakes, and frozen muffins, Dawn Foods supplies a complete line of mixes, bases, icings, glazes, fillings, frozen dough, and fully baked products and equipment to food industry customers across the globe.

"I started working here part time when I was in high school," Jones-Barber says. "I started in the lab, washing pots and pans. Even earlier than that, I got to know the business by going to trade shows with my grandfather and dad. That's what propelled me to know that's what I wanted to do with my career."

After graduating from Western Michigan University with a bachelor's degree in business administration and then obtaining a master's degree in management from Northwestern University, she started her career in medical sales. Ultimately, however, she decided to return to the family

business. She joined the sales team in 1985, became chief information officer in 1997, and took over as president of Dawn Foods International, which is based in London, England, in 2002.

"When I came back to work sales for Dawn, there were no women in bakery sales," Jones-Barber says. "I would walk into the back of a bakery and they would look at me and go, 'What are you doing, and why are you here?' What I learned is that I had to really know my products."

Even today, she says, the baking industry is pretty much a man's world, and people often will start talking business to a man she's standing next to rather than her.

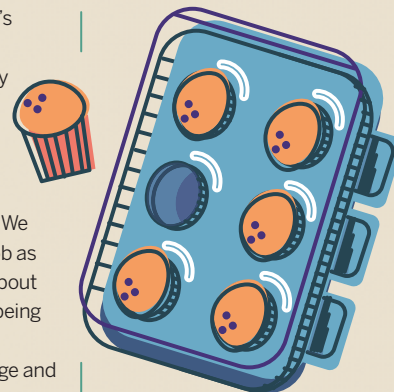
"It's changing pretty rapidly," Jones-Barber quickly adds, explaining that she's part of the Society of Bakery Women, which is trying to get more women into the culinary space via internships and other avenues.

At home in Jackson, meanwhile, she's striving

to continue the company's growth and work culture, which she says is the envy of the baking industry.

"Growth has always been really important to me, as well as innovation," she says. "We haven't done as good a job as we can in telling people about the areas in which we're being innovative."

To change that message and transform its organization, Dawn Foods is focusing on e-commerce and digital communications. "Our customers spend time on our website getting ideas for their own bakeries," she says.



According to Jones-Barber, the workplace culture at Dawn Foods is a differentiator between the company and its competitors.

"I want to continue to make Dawn the great place to work that it has always been — and that means I have to be able to attract the best people and give them the opportunities to develop, focusing on diversity and inclusion," she says. "We work in a bakery. We bring fun moments into people's lives. I really want to make sure we're laughing and enjoying and recognizing that we make great treats for people to enjoy every day, or (for) great celebrations."

"Without question, we believe we have a unique culture. It involves the circle of excellence that includes people, product, and customers. We get the best people. We keep the best people. We make sure they have great career opportunities and choices."

Dawn Foods was founded in 1920. Jones-Barber's grandfather, E. Marlin Jones, worked as a bookkeeper for the company and bought out the founders in 1955. Her father, Ron Jones, and uncle, Miles Jones, took over the company in the 1960s. Jones-Barber took the reins in 2006.

Jones-Barber says her father and uncle are still active in the company. "How lucky am I that I have the same mentors I've had since joining the company? That's a luxury a lot of people don't have, and I don't forget it." ■

— Tim Keenan



CEO | Dawn Foods, Jackson
Employees: 4,000 globally | Revenue: NA

Carrie Jones-Barber

Susan Koss has been in accounting long enough to have participated in the transition from paper forms to automated systems. Now, as partner and managing director of the O'Keefe consulting firm in Bloomfield Hills, she advises clients on how to adopt the latest fintech into their operations.

O'Keefe provides a range of advisory, consulting, or interim leadership roles to organizations in a diverse mix of industries. Due to the firm's wide spectrum of clients and businesses, Koss is never bored.

"Because I work in consulting, I work on an engagement-by-engagement basis," Koss explains. "It varies day to day. It's always different, with different clients. I do a lot of litigation support work as an economic or damages expert on cases. I work on all kinds of stuff. It could be a divorce case, a shareholder dispute, (or) two companies suing each other."

She also performs business valuations utilized in estate tax resolutions and merger and acquisition transactions, and participates in breach of contract, lost profits, and fraudulent conveyance matters.

Additionally, she prepares complex financial analyses utilized in business turnarounds and bank workout assignments for clients. Her restructuring expertise includes a variety of industries including distribution,

real estate, and manufacturing, and she's involved in the quantification of economic damages for large product recalls and warranty matters.

Koss, who spends time on administrative duties as well as marketing activities for the firm, grew up in the Utica-ShelbyTownship area and attended Oakland University in Rochester Hills.

While at OU, she interned in the international accounting and cost accounting departments at DaimlerChrysler Corp. (today Stellantis), where she first started learning about computers in accounting.

"That was actually great experience and very eye-opening," she says, "because it was such a big company and you're working in such a finite area. I thought that working for a smaller company would give me experience in all the different areas of accounting."

After graduating from OU in 1994, she became a staff accountant at Macro Computer Products. She earned her CPA and joined a public accounting firm before returning to Macro as accounting manager and then controller. When Macro was acquired by SER Solutions in 2000, she became its divisional controller.

All the while, Koss was amassing experience in various areas of accounting, to be able to advise clients. She joined O'Keefe in 2001. "At first I didn't think I should go to a consulting firm since I didn't have that kind



Partner and Managing Director
O'Keefe, Bloomfield Hills
Employees: 20 | Revenue: NA



of experience," she remembers thinking. "It turns out most consultants get their knowledge by working in companies."

She also has observed and participated in the digital transformation of accounting. "It's so different. A lot of stuff is handled by computers now, and we're leaning more and more to that."

Koss says she's fortunate that she hasn't had to deal with gender discrimination during her career.

"When I went through the interview process after college, I think there were a couple of instances where there were

some inappropriate questions asked, like was I engaged," she recalls. "I feel I've been treated fairly. I do the work and have been rewarded, but I know that's not always the case."

Koss is accredited by the National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts as a certified valuation analyst, and she holds Accredited in Business Valuation and the Certified in Financial Forensics credentials from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

She's involved in the Michigan Chapter of the International Women's Insolvency and Restructuring Confederation, and is a member of Oakland University's Accounting and Finance Advisory Board.

When not focusing on O'Keefe matters, Koss enjoys watching her daughters' volleyball games, biking, traveling, skiing, walking her two dogs, photography, bowling at the Detroit Athletic Club, and visiting the cottage she and her husband, who works for GM, own in Michigan's thumb.

"I'm excited to continue working with our clients and individuals at the firm to grow the firm," Koss says about her future. "As a partner in the firm, I have an interest in seeing it be as successful as possible. I'll continue growing professionally. I like to learn new things, and to stay on top of the things and issues that will impact my work with clients." ■

— Tim Keenan

Sus**S**an
Koss

Deborah Wahl



**Global Chief Marketing Officer
General Motors Co., Detroit
Employees: 155,000 globally | Revenue: \$122B**



As global chief marketing officer at General Motors Co. in Detroit, it's Deborah Wahl's job to convince drivers around the world to consider switching to electric vehicles so the automaker can make good on its promise to sell nothing but EVs by 2035.

"I spend a lot of time thinking about how we create a movement throughout the world for an all-electric future," says Wahl, who has been in her position since 2019. "The majority of people haven't had the opportunity to drive an electric car and know how much fun it is to drive. I'd put it up against any other driving experience. Part of my role now is to help people see that, understand that, and start to feel some of

that excitement. We've already seen consideration (of buying an EV) more than double in the last two years."

Wahl says she's all in on the transition to electric vehicles.

"We're (rapidly) building the software, architecture, and platforms that really will change the ownership and driving experience, which I think really hasn't happened since we changed over from horse and carriage. I think it'll be that dramatic and exciting," she says.

"The first phase of EVs were only people who were really green. Now we're moving into the next phase, of people learning about how fun they are to drive. The interiors are fun, the interactivity, the lighting."

Wahl's career started at GM, when she was selected for a position as a college intern. She then crossed the Atlantic Ocean, where she worked in Paris for another company after graduating from Wellesley College with a bachelor's in economics and receiving an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

Her true introduction to the auto industry came when she joined Ford Motor Co. as advertising manager for Ford do Brasil in 1995.

"When Ford picked a bunch of us up at the airport who were interviewing for positions and took us straight to the test track, that's when I knew the automotive industry was going to be way more interesting than any other marketing job," Wahl recalls.

From Ford do Brasil, Wahl took marketing jobs of increasing responsibility at Mazda, Ford's Lincoln Mercury Division, Toyota, Chrysler, and PulteGroup before changing gears and going to McDonald's.

"I'm a gal who loves a challenge, so I had the task of transforming an iconic American brand that had come into some really challenging times in its brand and reputation," Wahl says of her decision to head for the golden arches. "It was really similar to auto because it's a franchised business. It's a faster pace. That was an incredible experience, but hard and challenging every day."

While at McDonald's, Wahl was instrumental in removing a lot of the preservatives and artificial coloring from the food. She also helped launch the all-day breakfast, led the team that developed the company's U.S. digital strategy, and launched the first U.S. McDonald's app. She says she still treats

herself to a Quarter Pounder with cheese and a Shamrock Shake occasionally, but otherwise avoids fast food.

Wahl returned to the auto industry and GM in 2018, when she became global chief marketing officer for Cadillac. In 2019, she added the title of global chief marketing officer for the entire company.

"When I left McDonald's I had two ambitions," Wahl says. "I really wanted to come back to my roots in Michigan and be part of all the excitement happening here, and I also wanted to work for Mary Barra (GM chairman and CEO)."

Once almost exclusively a man's world, the automotive industry has become much more diverse. "Like business across the board, (the auto industry has) really changed," Wahl says. "What's really refreshing is that diversity drives creativity. It drives innovation. It drives solutions to all kinds of different needs that appeal to different audiences. Then there's more growth, more opportunity. I think it makes the whole environment better for everyone."



Having a job with a global focus is different from most positions at most companies.

"It can lead to a lot of early mornings or late nights, depending on if

we're working with China or Europe," Wahl says. "What's fascinating about this role, especially at this time, is the ability to help shape the transformation to a world of zero crashes, zero emissions, and zero congestion. Since we announced that four years ago, I see my role as making sure people know what change has happened, what the new avenues for growth are, and to help pave the way for the company to do that."

"I'm having the most fun I've ever had and facing new, big, meaty challenges every day." ■

— Tim Keenan