

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS JOURNAL

SPECIAL SECTION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ALABAMA CIO



FROM OUR CHAIR

Alabama CIOs have stepped up for their organizations amid the massive shift to remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

S2



LEADERSHIP AWARD

Auburn alumna Michelle McKenna leads the technology operations for the National Football League.

S16



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

IT thought leader and C-suite trailblazer Becky Blalock offers straight talk on confidence, courage and career.

S18



The 2020 Alabama CIO of the Year® ORBIE® Awards program honors chief information officers who have demonstrated excellence in technology leadership. Winners in the Global, Large Enterprise, Enterprise, Large Corporate, Corporate and Public Sector categories will be announced Aug. 28 at the virtual Alabama CIO ORBIE Awards.

CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Alabama CIOs enable largest remote work experiment in history



At the beginning of 2020, no one could have imagined the enormous change we would all experience in the first year of this new decade.

By mid-March, chief information officers everywhere realized their systems and teams would be stretched beyond belief in the largest work-from-home experiment in the history of the world. Thanks to cloud-first systems, tools and services created by technology innovators we have held virtual meetings, had food and goods delivered to our doors, and remained connected to colleagues, friends and loved ones. We have adapted, survived and adjusted to our new abnormal.

CIOs are leading this overnight virtual transformation from office-based to remote work. Without their planning and implementation of the systems and services to support remote work, conducting business would be impossible under these circumstances. Thanks to Covid-19, there's greater appreciation for CIOs and the technological sophistication required to provide secure, available and scalable systems to enable digital business. Several AlabamaCIO members have even participated on state or national boards and task forces to address the pandemic.

AlabamaCIO is an executive peer leadership network focused on helping CIOs maximize their leadership effectiveness, create value, reduce risk and share success. Convening Alabama's leading CIOs in member-led, non-commercial programs, CIOs build meaningful professional relationships with colleagues facing similar challenges, solving problems and avoiding pitfalls.

From the beginning of this crisis, AlabamaCIO members have participated in regular local ZOOM collaborations and national ZOOM calls featuring CIOs from industry, higher education, health care and technology. In any gathering of CIOs, the answer is in the room. The challenge one CIO is facing has likely been solved by another CIO. What was their experience? What did they learn? What would they do differently? How could other CIOs benefit from sharing their experiences?

Peer-based leadership groups have incredible ROI when leaders share a common problem set. The vertical/industry and size/scale may be different, but similar approaches to effective leadership and problem solving are transferable. Every leader's perspective is valuable and contributes to the conversation - and everyone wins when leaders engage, share ideas, experiences and best practices.

For over 20 years, InspireCIO has been inspiring CIO success through the annual CIO of the Year ORBIE Awards - but this is just the tip of the iceberg. By joining AlabamaCIO, technology executives take their leadership to the next level through year-round, member-led programs and interaction. The power of CIOs working together - across public and private business, government, education, healthcare and nonprofit organizations - creates enormous value for everyone.

Together, we are transforming our organizations with technology and enriching our region and our world. On behalf of AlabamaCIO, congratulations to the nominees and finalists on their accomplishments and thank you to the sponsors, underwriters and staff who make the ORBIE Awards possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Curt Carver".

Curt Carver
Chair, AlabamaCIO
VP & CIO, UAB

CONGRATULATIONS 2020 ALABAMA CIO ORBIE® NOMINEES

BEN BARNES

McLeod Software

JOHN BARNHART

AMERICAN Cast Iron Pipe
Company

RON BLAHNIK

Hibbett Sports

LATESHA BLAIR

Burr Forman LLP

KEVIN BROOKS

Books-A-Million , Inc.

PHIL BURNS

Shelby County Alabama

RYLAND BYARS

Medical Properties Trust

TOM CLARK

Cadence Bank

RICK CORN

Huntsville Hospital

DAVID COX

Southern Company

MARK CYPHERT

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JOHN ENRIQUEZ

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JOHN FALLIS

Drummond Company, Inc.

RAND HARRIS

The University of Alabama /
Department of Athletics

JOE HARVEY

Southern Company
Technology Organization

BILLY HELMANDOLLAR

DCH Health System

MARK HENDRICK

Bradley Arant Boult Cummings

JOAN HICKS

UAB Medicine

KEVIN HICKS

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KEVIN RAY

O'Neal Industries

ROD REISNER

McWane, Inc. :
Synapse Wireless

CHRIS RHODES

Montgomery Transport

DOUG RIGNEY

Samford University

ADAM ROBINETT

Brasfield & Gorrie

SCOTT ROSS

HudsonAlpha Institute for Bio-
technology

MIKE ROWELL

Alfa Mutual Insurance

BOB SARNECKI

Children's of Alabama Hospital

GREG SOLOMAN

Bank Independent

DAVE SPOKAS

Cullman Regional Medical Cen-
ter

EDDY STEPHENS

Infirmity Health System

MICHAEL STOECKERT

ProAssurance Corporation

MASON TANAKA

State of Alabama - Alabama
Medicaid Agency

JAMEY TAYLOR

StateServ- Hospicelink

VERONICA TUCKER

Southern Research

BETH TURNER

Alabama Farmers Cooperative

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Carr, Riggs & Ingram

LAURA WARE

Jefferson County Board of
Education

DALE WATKINS

Five Star Credit Union

ANTHONY WILLIAMS

Surgical Care Affiliates

CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

GLOBAL FINALISTS

Over \$1 billion annual revenue and multi-national operations

RYLAND BYARS

DIRECTOR IT & SECURITY, MEDICAL PROPERTIES TRUST

Ryland Byars is the director of information technology and security for Medical Properties Trust Inc., a publicly traded health care real estate investment trust. Ryland formally joined MPT in 2014 after serving the company in a consulting role since early 2004.

SUCCESS STORY

"My greatest accomplishment at MPT has been the development of an IT team that understands the meaning and value of customer service and support, that everyone at MPT, including our clients, are our customers. We believe that providing customer service and support involves much more than providing solutions. True customer service involves a positive attitude, active listening, clarification of the issues or needs, providing alternatives, managing expectations and implementing a workable solution as quickly as possible. This service mentality ensures that we do our part to assist the MPT team in advancing the company goals on a timely basis."



JOHN FALLIS

VP & CIO, DRUMMOND COMPANY INC.

John Fallis joined Drummond Co. Inc. in 2001 as its first CIO. Fallis consolidated their global information systems teams into a single unit focused on supporting the company as it went through a period of rapid growth and expansion. His areas of responsibility included data, voice and video networks, COTS and customized application development and support, information security, project management and radio communications at their South American operations.

SUCCESS STORY

"My greatest success is, and always will be, the people in my organization. The impact my team is able to provide with our small numbers is amplified by the level of expertise and professionalism each and every member of my staff brings to the table. I find there is nothing we cannot do when we approach it as a team."



KEVIN RAY

DIRECTOR IT, O'NEAL INDUSTRIES

Kevin Ray is the director of information technology at O'Neal Industries. Ray is responsible for the technology needs of the parent company as well as coordinating with the affiliate companies to foster best practice sharing, collaboration and teamwork.

SUCCESS STORY

"Building a foundation of best practice sharing and collaboration among our diverse portfolio of affiliate companies has proven to be a great value to our company. The IT leadership at each of our companies is remarkable and its willingness to share and learn from one other is key to our overall success, both now and in the future."



ROLLIS REISNER

AVP AND DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION & IT PROGRAMS, MCWANE INC. : SYNAPSE WIRELESS

Rod Reisner is an accomplished leader with the business, financial and technology experience to build innovative teams and guide an organization to the next level of performance. He thrives on researching new ideas, collaborating and helping people solve problems through technology.

SUCCESS STORY

"At McWane, digital transformation is the catalyst for innovation. Leveraging the foundation we built from the ground up over the last 11 years, I am now working within McWane leveraging the products and programs developed by the talented IoT team at our division, Synapse Wireless. Having established the McWane Digital Innovation Organization in 2017, we are now deploying applications in the Industry Internet of Things that automate processes and promote energy conservation. As a leader in our Industry, we are developing solutions and new opportunities for revenue for our company."



Congratulations Mike

Thank you for always putting
our members first.

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CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

LARGE ENTERPRISE FINALISTS

Over \$1.5 billion annual revenue

JOHN BARNHART

DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES, AMERICAN CAST IRON PIPE COMPANY

John Barnhart is the director of information services at American Cast Iron Pipe Co. and is responsible for establishing information technology strategy and direction as well as integrating and executing it with five of American's subsidiary companies.

SUCCESS STORY

"The first significant project that impacted all AMERICAN users at all locations with IT under my purview was our migration to a cloud-based email and collaboration platform. We had aging on-premise email infrastructure and specific recovery-point and recovery-time objectives to meet for executive management in the event of a disaster. Upon implementation, 1,500 users had been migrated to the new solution that met our business objectives for a critical business platform. This project also proved to executive management that SaaS products could ultimately reduce risk and ensure business success, paving the way for future cloud deployments."



AMALA DUGGIRALA

ENTERPRISE CHIEF OPERATIONS & TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, REGIONS BANK

With "execution" as her brand, Amala Duggirala has led several large-scale and complex transformations at CenturyLink, BT and ACI Worldwide. Her leadership and results come from her balanced approach in transforming strategy into results at large corporations.

SUCCESS STORY

"My biggest accomplishment has been rallying the technology organization to support the transformation of the bank's technology philosophy to match changing client needs, in collaboration with operations and customer-facing businesses. As much as I'm pushing on the organization to challenge the status quo, I'm also just as determined in ensuring each associate has an opportunity to grow. I have a strong passion for developing associates and spend 30% of my time mentoring leaders and associates. Over the last several months, operations has also been moved into my organization. Leveraging technology to modernize and transform operations has been very rewarding."



JOE HARVEY

VP, ENTERPRISE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS, SOUTHERN COMPANY TECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATION

Joe Harvey is vice president of technology - enterprise technology solutions of Southern Co. Harvey leads the technology teams that develop, implement and maintain the enterprise-wide corporate business solutions, work and asset management solutions, GIS systems and database systems.

SUCCESS STORY

"A major recent accomplishment has been the creation and approval of the project that will completely transform the financial, HR, and procurement business processes and technologies across the company. The project will shift technology from a highly customized on-premise set of applications to a cloud-based platform that will drive major change in business processes that are anticipated to deliver operating efficiencies of up to 30% over current processes. In addition, it will deliver emerging technology in the areas of digital assistants, AI, and automation that will enable commodity work to shift to more value-added services for Southern Company."



JOAN HICKS

CIO, UAB HEALTH SYSTEM

Joan Hicks has over 40 years of health care leadership experience in the areas of IT and information management. In 2004, Joan became the CIO for UAB Health System. Under her leadership, University Hospital and Highlands Hospital have been recognized as "Most Wired" for 10 of the last 15 years.

SUCCESS STORY

"Implementation of the electronic health record for UAB Health System including 1,157 beds at UAB Hospital and Highlands, Women's and Infants Facility and 168 Health Services Foundation and UAB Hospital Clinics. Functionality includes all clinical documentation, electronic order entry, ePrescribing, five rights of medication administration, laboratory and radiology results, capturing of physiological monitoring, fetal monitoring, IV pump autoprogramming, incorporation of patient and clinical pictures, images from endoscopy devices, ECG tracing and interpretation, enterprise data warehouse, electronic prescribing of controlled substances with integration the State Prescription Drug Monitoring Program."



ANTHONY WILLIAMS

VP & CIO, SURGICAL CARE AFFILIATES

Anthony Williams joined SCA as VP and CIO in November 2018. He is responsible for providing strategic and organizational leadership, overseeing the capital and operational budgets and directing the day-to-day planning and execution of all IT-related functions.

SUCCESS STORY

"We launched a critically important and highly aggressive cyber security initiative in September 2019. The objective was to replace and reconfigure aging networking equipment with Next Generation equipment at more than 200+ facilities across the enterprise spanning approximately 38 states and India. This very complex project required a great deal of coordination and multiple teams of engineers working very long hours each week over a three-month period. This was the largest facility-level project in the history of SCA IT. In three months time, we successfully converted over 100 facilities with zero facility level outages and no impact to patient care."





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Burr & Forman LLP is proud to sponsor this year's ORBIES, helping recognize leaders in the Birmingham business community including Burr's own CIO **LaTasha Blair**.

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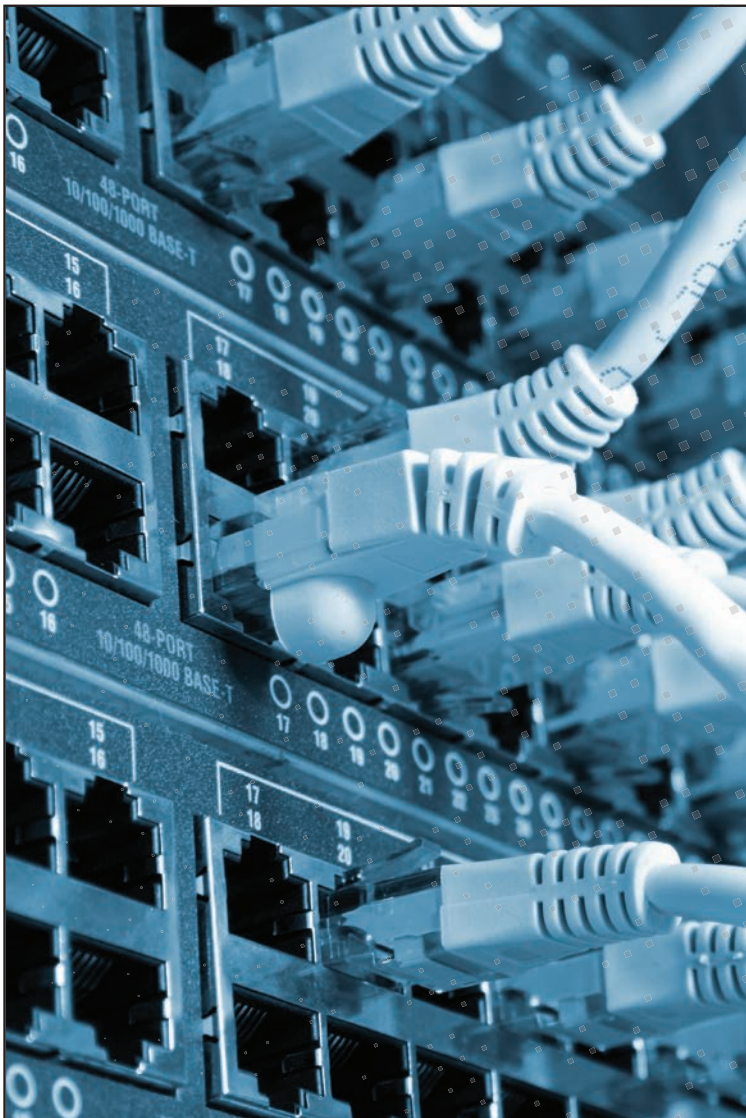
Ryland Byars
DIRECTOR OF IT & SECURITY

Congratulations
ON BEING A CIO OF THE YEAR FINALIST
IN THE ALABAMA ORBIE AWARDS



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CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

ENTERPRISE FINALISTS

Over \$500 million annual revenue

JOHN ENRIQUEZ

CIO, WIND CREEK HOSPITALITY

John Enriquez is a technology and business professional with over 32 years of hands-on experience with managing IT departments in the gaming and hospitality industry. He currently holds the position of CIO for Wind Creek Hospitality.

SUCCESS STORY

"My greatest accomplishment at Wind Creek Hospitality is developing one of the greatest teams of IT professionals in the gaming industry. We have been able to develop and mentor employees through proper training and certifications. We have created a culture of having a solid understanding of the company's needs fostering collaboration with all departments. At Wind Creek Hospitality, two of the last three year recipients of the coveted Best of The Best Employee of the Year Award have been IT employees. I am incredibly privileged and proud to lead the best team of IT professionals I have ever worked with."



BILLY HELMANDOLLAR

CIO, DCH HEALTH SYSTEM

Nominators say Billy Helmandollar is a talented, visionary and accomplished IT executive with demonstrated experience in planning, developing and implementing cutting-edge information solutions. He currently serves as CIO of DCH Health System.

SUCCESS STORY

"My greatest accomplishment during my tenure as CIO would have to be the realignment of the IT department to be a trusted and innovative business partner for the organization. By having an excellent team of top IT talent, we are able to provide effective and efficient technology solutions to our providers, clinicians, and staff. While I may provide strategic leadership and guidance, the IT team are the ones responsible for the true efforts and the results. I am pleased to be a part of a talented team and I am grateful to be part of a wonderful organization."



MIKE ROWELL

SVP & CIO, ALFA MUTUAL INSURANCE

Mike Rowell serves a senior vice president, strategic innovation and CIO for Alfa. He is responsible for Alfa's information technologies including property and casualty, life, cybersecurity, data warehousing and infrastructure responsibilities.

SUCCESS STORY

"Alfa began a system conversion in 2013. When I became CIO in 2015, the project was behind schedule and over budget. With the outstanding support of great people, we were able to get a troubled project back on track. We delivered the project in November of 2016. There were over 1 million hours committed to the project. This was a tremendous achievement for Alfa. This project has changed our strategic position. Alfa's team can now respond quickly to any technical challenge and react to industry movements. Our team now drives innovation and growth for our company."



BOB SARNECKI

SVP & CIO, CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA HOSPITAL

Bob Sarnecki is CIO of Children's of Alabama. He and his team manage all of the hospital's IT functions. Sarnecki has held technology roles in health care for several years, including general manager of professional services for ClearDATA Healthcare Cloud Computing.

SUCCESS STORY

"Technology is fun, and I have enjoyed the many IT successes we have seen in the information technology department at Children's of Alabama. But the greatest successes have been in delivering technology to patients and their families. Nothing beats being able to deliver Santa and Mrs Claus to a bed-ridden child using video conferencing to "the North Pole", or to use green screen technology to allow our kids to join their favorite Star Wars characters on the bridge of the Millennium Falcon. Being in a department that is part of a phenomenal era of change at Children's has been amazing."



MICHAEL STOECKERT

CTO, PROASSURANCE CORPORATION

Michael Stoeckert joined ProAssurance as group technology officer in 2013. In January 2014, he became CTO of ProAssurance, which is a multiline specialty insurance carrier and predominantly a health care liability insurance group committed to treating all fairly.

SUCCESS STORY

"ProAssurance has implemented a common email, financial, and HR systems, while consolidating datacenters/networks to support additional acquisitions. Implementing this consolidation included the creation of an overall business driven technology strategy to focus on areas to invest, consolidate or sunset. This led in year-over-year savings which we used to reinvest in solutions for the business and to achieve expense management goals. We implemented an enterprise architecture that supported the technology strategy will increasing transparency of data flows. We implemented an ahead of the industry security program and assessed our service providers to discover and manage cyber risk globally."





The Partner of Choice

Congratulations to Anthony Williams, SCA Chief Information Officer, for being named a 2020 ORBIE Award finalist!

As a physician partnership organization and leader in the ambulatory surgery center industry, SCA is a *partner of choice* for physicians, health plans, medical groups and health systems across the country. Driven by its mission to improve healthcare in America, SCA operates more than 230 surgical facilities in partnership with nearly 10,000 teammates and 8,000 physicians.



More information available on scasurgery.com.



Congratulations to Kevin Ray, O'Neal Industries' Director of Information Technology for being a nominee for the Alabama CIO of the Year ORBIE Awards.



UAB Medicine is proud of our Chief Information Officer Joan Hicks for being chosen by the *Birmingham Business Journal* as a finalist for the Alabama CIO of the Year.

CONGRATULATIONS TO JOAN AND ALL OF THE 2020 ORBIE® AWARDS NOMINEES FOR THEIR EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP!



InspireCIO is the preeminent executive peer leadership organization of chief information officers. Local chapters convene leading CIOs and foster meaningful relationships by hosting non-commercial, member-led programs - helping CIOs gain leadership advantage.



CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

LARGE CORPORATE FINALISTS

Over \$225 million annual revenue

KEVIN BROOKS

SVP IT & CIO, BOOKS-A-MILLION INC.

Kevin Brooks is senior vice president and CIO at Books-A-Million Inc. He oversees all aspects of IT, information security, data and analytics for the nation's second largest book retailer and its subsidiaries. He joined Books-A-Million in 2001, and previously led the company's applications development organization.

SUCCESS STORY

"It has been my pleasure to work with and now lead an incredible group of technologists that are devoted to helping Books-A-Million face the challenges of a 100-year-old retailer in a digital age. In the last couple of years, we've helped the company implement a new Workforce Management System (WMS), a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, a Buy Online Pickup in Store (BOPIS) program and a new Direct-to-Consumer Fulfillment program for our e-commerce partners. Through IT's continued partnerships with our vendors and the other Books-A-Million business units, we will continue to help Books-A-Million grow and evolve."



JEFF LILES

CIO, HARBERT MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

Liles joined Harbert Management Corp. in 2011. He is responsible for global technology initiatives at HMC, including network infrastructure, business continuity and disaster recovery, software support, mobility management and telecommunications.

SUCCESS STORY

"As CIO of Harbert Management Corporation, I am blessed to be a part of a great firm which is a reflection of its people, culture, and management. Commitment to excellence is a top priority for every single employee and is reflected in their work ethic, relationships, and proven results. I am thankful to have the opportunity to work with a firm where management strongly supports technology in all technology areas, including data/voice networks, cybersecurity and business continuity. Finally, to work with a great team that makes it extremely rewarding, both personally and professionally."



DAVID MYERS

CIO, DIVERSIFIED GAS & OIL

David Myers is an operational/IT executive with over 25 years of combined experience in operational consulting, retail and financial services and a strong track record of results. He has served as CIO of Diversified since 2018.

SUCCESS STORY

"As reported in the BBJ, DGO is the fastest revenue growth company in Birmingham, growing 304% over three years (2017-2019). Starting in August 2018, DGO developed an IT strategy that has created a flexible, scalable, and standardized platform. DGO has consolidated multiple acquisitions onto this platform, creating one operational company allowing DGO to continue growing through acquisitions. As the backbone of this platform, DGO has migrated all operational applications to MS Azure, making DGO 100% cloud-based. DGO has standardized all eight strategic software applications from the wellhead to the boardroom to create a 1DGO platform."



JAMEY TAYLOR

CTO, STATESERV-HOSPICELINK

Jamey Taylor serves as CTO of Hospicelink. Since Taylor joined the executive team, Hospicelink merged with StateServ to become a market leader in technology solutions for end-of-life care, doubling in size and providing services to over 120,000 patients daily.

SUCCESS STORY

"I joined StateServ-Hospicelink just a few months prior to the merger of the two largest, and fastest-growing medical equipment benefit management solutions. I've since built a world-class team that transformed IT from being a limiter on the business to being an enabler, a creator of value, and a catalyst for market differentiation and growth. Within our market, my team and my business partners have an unmatched ability to create a better experience and deliver better care for the over 125,000 patients we support every day."



STANLEY WALLS

DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES, CARR RIGGS & INGRAM LLC

He has been an integral member of CRI's corporate team since 2005 and has been responsible for information management and technology resources as the firm has grown into a top 20 CPA firm with eight portfolio companies.

SUCCESS STORY

"It was an unexpected pleasure to join the CRI Corporate team based in Enterprise back in 2005. I never expected that I would have the opportunity to participate in the continued growth of CRI across the state of Alabama and now through the Southern United States. I have watched CRI grow well beyond our initial boundaries and take root in states far beyond what I could have ever imagined. I am proud to work for an organization that was once a "firm to watch" and is now a top 20 firm in the country."



CONGRATULATIONS

to all nominees and winners!
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CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

CORPORATE FINALISTS

Up to \$225 million annual revenue

BEN BARNES

VP IT SERVICES, MCLEOD SOFTWARE

Ben Barnes is the VP of IT Services and chief information security officer for McLeod Software. His leadership guides the company's IT direction, IT initiatives and cyber solutions. He has provided technical services and lead IT strategies in the transportation industry for over 20 years.

SUCCESS STORY

"My role is to organize, train, and mentor a corporate IT team that provides infrastructure solutions to enable McLeod Software's growth. We've become the national leader in transportation management software in less than 10 years while shifting from delivering our system in on-premise customer-owned infrastructure to over 40% of installations now hosted by McLeod. This shift helped propel the company to 300% growth since 2010. Building a team that brings the right balance of technical expertise along with processes, policies, and cost controls to support this growth has expanded my knowledge, cultivated my leadership skills, and provided a rewarding career."



LATESHA BLAIR

CIO, BURR FORMAN LLP

LaTasha Blair is the firm's CIO. She is responsible for leadership and management of the firm's technology efforts and the information technology department. With over 21 years in technology, Blair has worked throughout the IT field in various environments.

SUCCESS STORY

"2019 proved to be a significant year of change for the firm, my team and my role as CIO. On the heels of acquiring a Carolinas-based firm, I was challenged with merging two IT departments, both of which had team members of enormous technical skill. My greatest accomplishment is leading this great group of professionals as we were challenged with combining various technologies, developing a strong IT support structure and strategically planning for a number of technical projects that would support the firm's operational and business goals."



MIKE NORTHRUP

SVP & CIO, AMERICA'S FIRST FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Mike Northrup began his career in 1979 as a computer programmer with South Central Bell, where he played an important role as the telecommunications industry evolved. These days, he is CIO for America's First, where he plays a critical role for a growing financial institution in the Magic City.

SUCCESS STORY

"In 2019, AmFirst replaced our digital platform with a more robust and user-friendly solution. This was a major conversion project that not only impacted many internal departments but also all of our Online and Mobile Banking users. With over 80,000 members being impacted, keen project management with excellent internal and external communications was imperative. Our project stayed on schedule and provided communications via every channel including online videos to help members with initial logins to the new system. The conversion went exceptionally well and our members are very happy with our new digital platform."



SCOTT ROSS

DIRECTOR IT, HUDSONALPHA INSTITUTE FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY

Scott Ross is an experienced IT leader for one of Alabama's most impactful research and innovation organizations. He's a proven leader, adviser and partner across many facets of technology and business.

SUCCESS STORY

"Being able to lead teams and deliver technologies to help solve the complex problems of genomic research, medicine, life science startups and education of our youth is the opportunity of a lifetime. At HudsonAlpha, I get to wake up in the morning leading our fantastic team wondering if today is the day. Is today the day where we make that once in a generation discovery to combat cancer, Alzheimer's or other chronic illnesses? Knowing that our people and the technology we deliver could help make this possible is a truly fulfilling accomplishment."



VERONICA TUCKER

SENIOR DIRECTOR IT, SOUTHERN RESEARCH

Tucker joined Southern Research with more than 20 years of experience managing large-scale IT operations, change management, technology deployments and enterprise solutions in a variety of industries with a heavy emphasis on information security governance.

SUCCESS STORY

"My most significant accomplishment in this role has been to effectively build, develop and grow our successful team. I am surrounded by such a high-performing group of professional individuals. Together, we centralized fractured IT services, rebuilt an outdated infrastructure and implemented effective technology solutions. The processes we created assist our teams of recognized scientists and engineers to continue their invaluable research and discoveries. This cohesive and dedicated team has been involved in implementing the required technical and cybersecurity services that fulfill the demands of our government customers; all under a very aggressive timeline."



Google Cloud is proud to support innovation in Alabama.



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IT's just who we are.



We Make
IT
Work
For You

CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

PUBLIC SECTOR FINALISTS

Government and education organizations

PHIL BURNS

COO & CIO, SHELBY COUNTY, ALABAMA

Phil Burns is an information technology/operations executive with more than 30 years experience managing large complex business operations. His broad skill-set includes senior management positions in four large organizations.

SUCCESS STORY

"Companies are only as good as their people. Succession planning is a great exercise but often never gets pass paper due to the various skills and experience required for the next level. Last year our IT director retired after 28 years. Ultimately it was filled by an entry-level employee as we had six competitive promotions that preceded each other. This domino effect took a decade of planning to ensure the proper mixture of experience and leadership was in place for the next level of responsibility. It's been an absolute joy to watch the staff shine in these new roles."



RAND HARRIS

ASSOCIATE ATHLETICS DIRECTOR, IT, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA / DEPARTMENT OF ATHLETICS

Rand Harris has spent more than a decade leading the UA Athletics Department's technology efforts, taking on an ever-expanding portfolio of responsibilities. In his current role, Harris has implemented solutions in applied technology ranging from daily business operations to in-venue fan experiences.

SUCCESS STORY

"One of my most important accomplishments was breaking away from traditional network architecture and implement a purpose-built network infrastructure to serve as the basis for all integrated technology in an organization that is both focused on a singular mission and drastically diverse in terms of constituents and daily needs. Our team built a flexible and powerful solution that services business operations for 17 sports programs, 26 organizational departments and 16 facilities. It is also flexible enough to host services for building automation, fast enough for in-venue audio, video, and post-production, and robust enough for live television broadcast transport and streaming."



SRIKANTH KARRA

CIO, JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION

Srikanth Karra is an accomplished senior-level operations and technology leader who has earned significant achievements within his field. Presently, Karra is working for Jefferson County Commission as CIO, where he is responsible for overseeing IT operations, IT strategy and processes.

SUCCESS STORY

"It is truly an honor and privilege to serve Jefferson County. I was hired to bring about a complete transformation to the under-performing IT organization. Gaining full support and trust from both the County Commission and the County Manager's office within the first few months helped me to implement new IT service delivery model and lay out an enterprise IT Strategic Plan. Developing a new IT management structure with an emphasis on building high performance team, I'm proud to say that the systems that our IT team helped implement have county-wide impact in efficiently delivering services to the citizens."



PATRICK MCLENDON

CTO, CITY OF BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Patrick McLendon serves as chief technology officer for the city of Birmingham. Prior to joining the city in 2018, Patrick enjoyed a 20-year IT career in manufacturing, telecommunications, and higher education, serving in IT management, project management, cybersecurity and consulting roles.

SUCCESS STORY

"The most rewarding thing about serving the city as CTO is the change in outlook and expectations from our employees, our partner departments, and the Administration. Our IT team has embraced our shared values of customer service, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Birmingham is in a period of great opportunity, but we have to address some long-standing challenges of deferred maintenance and process entropy. We've had some early wins with 311 updates and service desk improvements. It's given us the confidence to keep going. Our people see that change isn't just possible – its preferable."



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CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

LEADERSHIP AWARD - MICHELLE MCKENNA

DREAM ON

BEING A CIO HAS ENABLED MICHELLE MCKENNA TO WORK FOR BOTH THE NFL AND DISNEY



By Cary Estes

Michelle McKenna has had a knack for turning fantasy into reality. After all, she spent 13 years working for the Walt Disney World Company, an organization that has long promoted its Theme Parks as being “the place where dreams come true.”

Then in 2012, McKenna was online looking at the NFL website in order to do some research for her fantasy football team when she spotted a link for job openings with the league. She applied for the position of head of IT, and three months later was hired as the NFL’s first CIO.

This was indeed a dream job come true for McKenna. The native of Enterprise grew up in a football family (her brother was an offensive lineman for the Alabama Crimson Tide), and she attended Auburn University and worked in the school’s athletic department during the 1980s at the height of head coach Pat Dye’s successful tenure with the Tigers.

“I love football, and being able to be a part of bringing the game to the world means a lot,” McKenna says.

It definitely wasn’t the initial path McKenna took after graduating from Auburn in 1987 with a degree in accounting. She spent the first six years of her career working as an auditor and a controller, then joined the Disney Company in 1993 in the Finance and Strategic Planning Department. But as computer technology began to rapidly expand in the 1990s, McKenna found herself increasingly intrigued by the burgeoning role of IT.

“So many projects at that time were beginning to rely on technology, and I became very interested in all things related to data, analytics and how technology enabled the guest experience,” McKenna says. “I am a change junkie. I can’t stand things that stay the same. I love having something new and different going on, and IT is always that.”

In 1999, McKenna’s interest in technology resulted

in her being put in charge of a major new project called Destination Disney. The goals of this platform were to transform the company’s marketing and sales processes, implement customer relationship management, and replace mission critical sales and service systems at Disney parks and resorts worldwide.

“This was just around the time that the internet became so powerful,” McKenna says. “It was all technology. After that, I never went back to my day job (of accounting).”

McKenna helped launch several new initiatives for the Disney Company, including Disney Cruise Line, Disney’s Wide World of Sports, and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort (which allowed her to meet Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling).

McKenna later served as CIO for Constellation Energy, a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Baltimore. But her love for football never diminished. In fact, she often thought about an important piece of advice she had received from Coach Dye during her time at Auburn. “He told me I had a strong football IQ, and that I should follow my passion,” McKenna recalls.

The opportunity to do just that occurred in 2012, when Constellation Energy was sold to a company headquartered in Chicago. “As a Southern girl, I knew I could not handle the Chicago winters, so I started thinking about my next step,” McKenna says. “Then I think divine intervention happened.”

That is when, through her fantasy football research, McKenna noticed the job opening with the NFL. She submitted her resume online, then began working her LinkedIn contacts until she found somebody who knew the head of recruitment at the league. Following a three-month interview process, McKenna was hired as the NFL’s first CIO in September 2012.

“I always joke that my dad knew his kid would make it to the NFL, he just bet on the wrong one. It ended up being his Auburn girl rather than his Alabama boy,”

McKenna says, referring to her football-playing brother.

During her eight years with the NFL, McKenna has been involved in nearly every facet of the organization. She has been responsible for the league’s technology strategy across all activities, including the increased use of technology on the field. She also works with all 32 NFL teams to help them increase their technological footprints.

This past April, McKenna received a considerable amount of national attention as she helped coordinate the NFL draft, which was held remotely instead of in Las Vegas as scheduled because of the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. McKenna’s team was responsible for setting up the technology that allowed for a virtual draft of all 255 selections. It was basically a fantasy football league draft come to life.

Pulling off such a major undertaking is just one of the many ways that the role of a CIO has changed tremendously since McKenna first ventured into the field back in the 1990s.

“It’s always been such a critical role, but now it is so central,” McKenna says. “CIOs have to be true change agents, strong leaders, great project managers, and feel comfortable at the table driving the business. I see more of this today than ever.”

The key for CIOs these days, McKenna says, is to not become overwhelmed by all the rapid-fire changes in technology. Beyond the data, there is still a company filled with people, and jobs that have to be completed through old-fashioned hard work.

“There is so much data, so many new shiny things to try, that it’s easy to get distracted,” she says. “Don’t ever do tech for tech’s sake. Focus on the business, and let that drive your priorities.”

“(A CIO) should be a business partner, a strategic enabler, and a dot connector. Know your value, claim your spot, and be bold.”

It is a strategy that McKenna has successfully used in order to make dreams come true. 



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CIO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: BECKY BLALOCK

Trailblazer making an impact through IT

By Cary Estes

Becky Blalock spent 33 years with Southern Company, where she became senior vice president and CIO. She currently is the Managing Partner at Advisory Capital, a consulting firm providing strategic insight for companies involved in the energy, information technology, and medical industries. Blalock also is author of the bestselling book “DARE: Straight Talk on Confidence, Courage, and Career for Women in Charge.” She serves on several public boards, including Hannon Armstrong and Aspen Aerogels, and is an adviser in several private equity ventures.

Q: What led you down the career path of being a CIO? I’m somebody who you would call an accidental CIO. I was asked by our CEO to take a developmental assignment as a regional CIO. At the time, it was kind of frightening because I didn’t know that much about IT, and I told him that. What he told me was that this job is not so much about technology as it is about information. So he said for me to keep focused on whether the technology that people are talking about actually helps deliver business value, and to make sure we are deploying the things that will add the most value.

Q: What was your reaction to this new role? Every job I’d been in before that in my career, I got bored pretty easy. I’d go in, learn the job, and then move on to the next thing. I never got bored in IT. The reason for that is because it’s a constant challenge. I really loved it. So after I got into this developmental assignment as a lower-level CIO, I had the opportunity to go into many different things across Southern Company. I found it very rewarding. I don’t think there’s any place where you can make a bigger impact on the company than in IT.

Q: What advice would you give to people entering the CIO field? One of the things that gives us a lot of courage is our relationships with other people. So look closely at who you are associated with. If you want to be a better tennis player, what do you do? You play tennis with somebody who is better than you. And if you want to be a better CIO, the best thing you can do is identify the best people who do this business and hang out with them. Because this is a business that’s still very much in its infancy. It’s not like accounting, which has been around in some form for thousands of years. IT is still new and it’s changing rapidly, and the only way you can keep up is to talk to other CIOs. Also talk to the people who supply the tools that CIOs use in their business, because they’re inside every company. It’s an incredible investment in yourself when you build these types of relationships, but you have to put the effort into doing that.

Q: What is your book Dare about? I wrote about my experiences. I was the first woman to hold many of the positions that I held at Southern Company. Too many times I would go to a meeting, and there would be 100 people in the room and maybe three women if you were lucky. That’s changed a lot. So through this book I wanted to give back to women and really to anyone who is aspiring to reach their full potential. It’s all about encouraging people to step outside their comfort zone. Too many times we want to stay in that comfort zone, but that’s actually the most dangerous place you can be. Because if you stay there, you will never reach your full potential. It’s those experiences



outside our comfort zone that stretch and grow us. If you don’t stretch your comfort zone every day, it begins to shrink. Confidence is a learned skill, just like public speaking. And it’s built by ignoring that little voice in your head that says you can’t do something, and doing it anyway.

Q: Why can that be so difficult for people? Because we’re not programmed to take risks. That’s how our ancestors survived, by not taking too many risks. Change is scary. But there are things you can do to help you be more comfortable taking risks. The first thing is to be very clear about what you want to do. Then once you do it the first time and get through it, you’re ready for the next challenge. So you have to constantly be putting yourself out there and not hold yourself back. If you’re not meeting new people and asking questions, you’re missing an opportunity to learn something. If you don’t take on tough, challenging assignments, then you’re going to miss getting the experience you might need. We don’t do these things because we’re so afraid of failure. But failure is really just feedback that teaches you what doesn’t work, so you can be successful on the next try. It’s not the technology that’s difficult about this job. IT people are really smart. They can figure that out. The tough thing is the culture inside of companies that pushes back against change. People get very comfortable doing things the way they are used to

doing them. And IT is all about going in there and changing things when you know it’s in the company’s best interest.

Q: What is the future of the CIO profession? We’re in the middle of a crisis right now, and IT has risen to the challenge. The only thing that’s keeping many businesses up and running right now is the technology that is supplied to the organizations by the CIOs. So while this crisis has been very difficult, it’s also shined a light on how important IT is. Moving forward, IT will be even more central to how successful a company can be. If they are not transforming their business through applied technology, data analytics, business intelligence, robotics – basically everything that a CIO runs – that company is not going to be around for many more years. If you look at the Fortune 500 list that was created in 1955, only 10 percent of those companies are still around. And the pace of change for companies is accelerating. Most of the companies at the top of that list now are either technology companies or companies that do technology well. If you don’t do technology well, I don’t care what business you’re in, you’re not going to survive. So the CIO is much, much more central to the success of the company. It’s not some back-office function. The CIO has to be out front working with the business to figure out the best way to apply the technology. **▄**



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