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**BUSINESS JOURNAL**

2026

# TENNESSEE **ORBIE**<sup>®</sup> AWARDS

The annual Tennessee ORBIE<sup>®</sup> Awards honors chief information officers and chief information security officers who have demonstrated excellence in technology leadership. Winners in the Large Enterprise, Enterprise, Large Corporate, Corporate, CISO Large Enterprise & CISO Enterprise categories will be announced May 1 at Omni Nashville Hotel.

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## FROM THE CHAIRS

Great leaders never  
lead alone  
**B3**



## LEADERSHIP AWARD RECIPIENT & KEYNOTE

Former FedEx CIO Rob Carter  
reflects on his innovation legacy  
**B4**

# CONGRATULATIONS 2026 TENNESSEE ORBIE NOMINEES

**SHELIA ANDERSON**  
Unum Group

**ANGEL AYALA**  
Deloitte Government & Public Services

**CONRAD BELL**  
C Spire

**IDO BIGER**  
Delek US Holding

**KEVIN BLANCHARD**  
Genesco

**PATRICE BORDORN**  
Community Health Systems (CHS)

**MICHELLE BORNINKHOF**  
AutoZone

**MICHAEL BOYD**  
Southwest Tennessee Community College

**ROGER BROTZ**  
Acadia Healthcare

**DAWN BRUMMETT**  
ORNL Federal Credit Union

**BRITTON BURTON**  
D4C Dental Brands

**ANTHONY BURWELL**  
State of Tennessee - Human Services

**JOE BUSUTTIL**  
JPW Industries

**HARVEY CABRERA**  
American Bath Group

**DENA CAMPBELL**  
Highspring

**RICK CARTAGENA**  
TeamHealth

**GENE CHASTAIN**  
Life Care Centers of America

**LARRY COMBS**  
Brown-Forman

**CHARLES COOPER**  
Meharry Medical College

**TOM CORRIDON**  
Bridgestone Americas

**ANDY CORTS**  
OneOncology

**TROY CRABTREE**  
Parking Management Company (PMC)

**KRISTIN DARBY**  
State of Tennessee

**LANA DAVENPORT**  
Sylvamo Corporation

**JEANNE DE VRIES SANDS**  
MedVet

**JEFF DELANEY**  
University of Memphis

**SCOTT DEVER**  
Recovery Solutions

**DAWN DREWRY**  
Monogram Foods

**ZACH EVANS**  
Xsolis

**JOSEPH FRACCHIA**  
MAA

**SURESH GAJULA**  
Amplify Cell Technologies

**ANIKA GARDENHIRE**  
Ardent Health

**VIJAY GOLLAPUDI**  
State of Tennessee - Department of Education

**RICKIE HALL**  
SMS Holdings

**PETER HASTINGS**  
CHS

**TEDDY HAZELWOOD**  
Smyrna Ready Mix Concrete

**ANDY HEINS**  
LifePoint Health

**BEN HICKS**  
National HealthCare Corporation

**GREG HYDRO**  
Pilot Flying J

**RYAN JACKSON**  
Smile Direct Club

**DAVID JACQUES**  
ALSAC/St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

**KEN JESSEN**  
Dialysis Clinic

**JOEY JOHNSON**  
Premise Health

**STEVEN JONES**  
First Horizon Bank

**LEE KAISER**  
Highspring

**ADAM KEOWN**  
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**KAREN KING**  
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**CRAIG KLOPATEK**  
Humana

**NAGI KUDITHINI**  
Nissan

**DR. SHERRY LAWDERMILT**  
Austin Peay State University

**BRIAN LOFLIN**  
Monogram Health

**ANDY LUPO**  
Pilot Company

**LESLEY MA**  
Nissan North Americas

**VENU MADDURI**  
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**AARON MARTIN**  
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**ARNIE MATSON**  
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**ANDREW MCINTYRE**  
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**HADEN MCWHORTER**  
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**ROBERT MCWILLIAMS**  
Alliance Bernstein

**CHRIS MEYSTRICK**  
Jewelry Television

**ED MILLER**  
Center for Medical Interoperability

**BUBBA MULLEN**  
Trexis Insurance

**BEN MURPHY**  
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**JAMIE NUTZ**  
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**SAL ORTEGA**  
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**RAMON PADILLA**  
The University of Tennessee System

**PT PADMANABHA**  
Helena Agri-Enterprises

**JIM PARCEL**  
Maury Regional Medical Center

**NEAL PATEL**  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center

**TOM PERRINE**  
TeamHealth

**CLAYTON PHILLIPS**  
West Tennessee Healthcare

**BRETT PHILLIPS**  
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**CHAD PORTER**  
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**DAVID PRATS**  
Smith & Wesson

**TOM RATZ**  
Dollar General

**JAY RICHARDSON**  
DaVita

**BETH SCHULTE**  
Louisiana Pacific

**HAROLD SHANNON**  
CoreCivic (fmr)

**CHRIS SHEA**  
Optum

**DR. EMILY SICIENSKY**  
Columbia State Community College

**HARVEY SMITH**  
Rhodes College

**MELANIE THOMAS**  
Nashville General Hospital

**DR. DAVID ULLOA**  
IMC Logistics

**LASHELL VAUGHN**  
MLGW (Memphis Light, Gas, & Water)

**GRANT VEAZEY**  
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**KAREN WALKER**  
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**SCOTT WARREN**  
Parallon

**CHAD WASSERMAN**  
HCA Healthcare

**ERIC WATTS**  
21st Mortgage

**JENNIFER WEAVER**  
BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee

**MATT WILLIAMS**  
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**KIM WISMER**  
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## Great leaders never lead alone

Even the strongest executives can feel isolated at times. When chief information officers (CIOs) and chief information security officers (CISOs) face challenges and learn with trusted peers, isolation transforms into clarity and confidence.

TennesseeCIO and TennesseeCISO bring together top CIOs and CISOs from Tennessee's leading organizations to build meaningful relationships, share what's working, and create real business value. While industries and organization sizes may differ, the challenges of leadership, and the power of connection, are universal.

The Inspire Leadership Network connects CIOs and CISOs with over 2,000 C-suite executives across more than 50 chapters,

spanning public, private, and nonprofit organizations across North America. Beyond CIOs and CISOs, Inspire now also serves as a community for chief marketing officers (CMOs).

For more than 25 years, the ORBIE Awards have honored C-suite executives for leadership, innovation, and excellence. I encourage you to attend the 2026 Tennessee ORBIE Awards to meet and support these outstanding technology leaders.

On behalf of TennesseeCIO and TennesseeCISO, congratulations to all nominees and finalists on these achievements. Special thanks to the awards partners, chapter underwriters, and staff whose support makes the TennesseeCIO ORBIE Awards possible.



Sincerely,

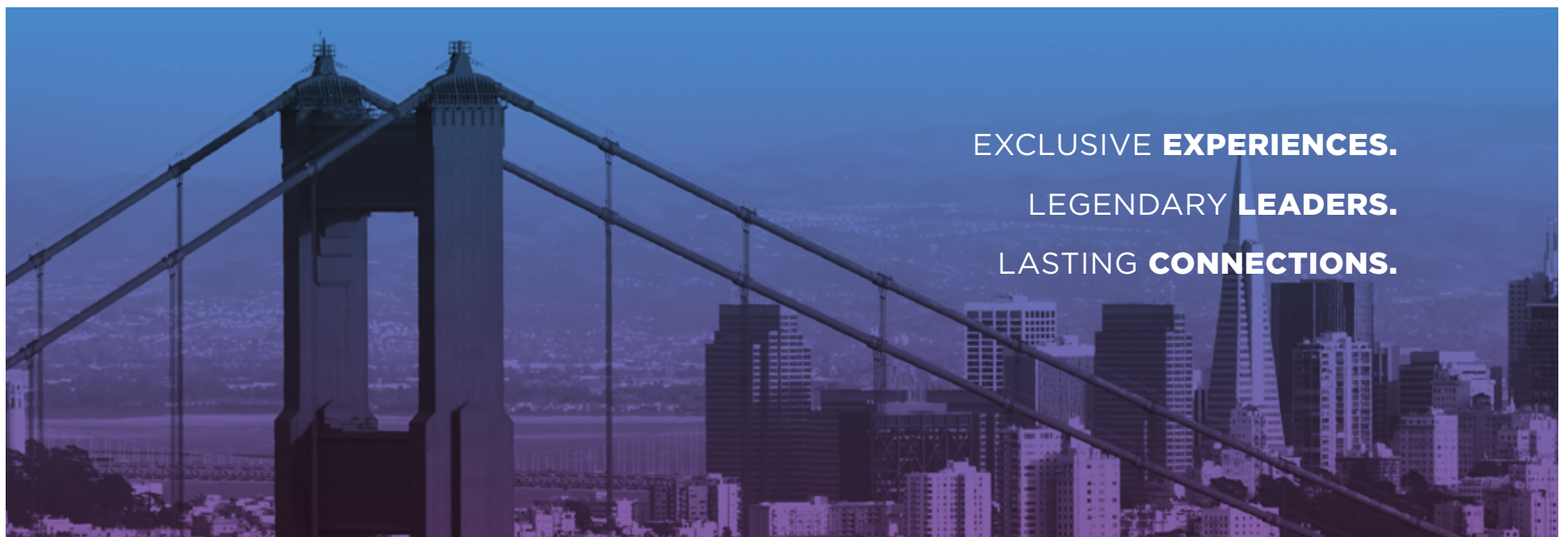
**Al Smith**

2026 Chair, TennesseeCIO  
SVP & CIO, LifePoint Health



**Nagi Kudithini**

2026 Chair, TennesseeCISO  
CISO and Technology Operations,  
Nissan Americas



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# Robert B. Carter

Chief Information Officer (Fmr.) | FedEx

## Former FedEx CIO on what happens when you empower customers and teams

By The Business Journals Content Studio

In 1998, Rob Carter became the first chief technology officer at FedEx.

He took on the role as the company was expanding rapidly. It had acquired several large transportation companies that added ground and surface capabilities to what was primarily an air-based organization.

“The CEO, Fred Smith, was an information architect at his core, so working as the CTO of the company was all about innovation and managing the technological footprint globally,” said Carter, who spent more than 25 years as the organization’s CTO and chief information officer, becoming CIO in 2000.

“That’s an unusual amount of time to spend in a CIO role in a single place, but frankly, we were having so much fun,” he said. “We were changing what was possible in the world and the company. And the technology role was always interesting because I always had a seat at the table.”

Although he is now retired from FedEx, Carter’s work continues to make an impact across sectors. In honor of his contributions to the field, he will be recognized as part of the 2026 Tennessee ORBIE Awards. On May 1, he will receive the organization’s Leadership Award at a live event at the Omni Nashville Hotel. The program honors CIOs who have demonstrated excellence in technology leadership.

### From Verizon to FedEx

Carter has spent his entire career in the technology field. In 1981, he earned a bachelor’s degree in computer and information sciences from the University of Florida. He then joined GTE Corporation, which would later become Verizon.

A dozen years into his time there, Carter left for a job at FedEx.

“In my (MBA) program, we studied FedEx,” he said. “They used technology strategically, making it part of the customer interaction and not just record-keeping and finance and payroll. It was strategic for the growth of the business.”

“Innovation and leadership go hand in hand when you empower people in the right ways.”

For Carter, it presented an opportunity he couldn’t resist.

“Back then, people didn’t carry computers in their pockets, and transportation systems tended to be black holes,” he said. “At FedEx, we were changing the concept of inventory — from product ‘at rest’ to product ‘in motion.’ We had a physical network moving things and a digital network that would show you where those things were. It was an early version of the digital twin, and it was fascinating work to me.”

### The first FedEx.com

Carter witnessed significant technological transformation over the course of his career. The early 1980s brought the advent of the personal computer, which FedEx experimented with in innovative ways.

“We would send you a software diskette that you would put into your PC, and it would pull up a tracking application,” Carter said. “Normally you called an 800 number and got the information you needed, but we were very early in the era of moving that technology out to the customer. We empowered them, and people liked it.”

From there, FedEx broadened its use of technology, from systems of operation and record-keeping to systems of engagement for customers and employees, Carter said. In 1994, for instance, Bill Joy, one of the founders of Sun Microsystems, asked the FedEx leadership team about its website. At the time, the internet was in its nascent stages, and FedEx didn’t have one.

“Bill said, ‘You need one, and you need one now,’” Carter said.

Carter tasked FedEx’s innovation team with standing up FederalExpress.com. Instead of setting up a basic brochure site with an about page, the team opted to create another tool for customers: a website that could track packages online.

“It was identified as the first transactional internet page, but it wasn’t a management idea. It was an idea that came from empowering our team to use their creative genius and build something interesting,” he said. “Innovation and leadership go hand in hand

when you empower people in the right ways.”

### Leading through empowerment

At FedEx, when someone on Carter’s team was asked to do something challenging, he would give them a custom plaque featuring his own spin on a quote from Winston Churchill: “There comes into the life of every man a task for which he and he alone is uniquely suited. What a shame if that moment finds him either unwilling or unprepared for that which would become his finest hour.”

Those plaques are a symbol of the type of leader Carter became over the course of his career — one who led through empowerment.

“It’s all about the teams you create and creating an environment that is ripe for success,” he said. “And that’s no accident. That’s intentional.”

### Making Fred Smith proud

A year into retirement, Carter isn’t very good at it. What began as a plan to slow down has turned into a very full plate — in part, once again, because of FedEx CEO Fred Smith.

While on vacation in Turkey at the start of his retirement, Carter took a phone call from a headhunter, who asked Carter if he would meet with the secretary of the U.S. Department of Defense.

At the time, the department was recruiting a handful of people to consult across the department. Carter was intrigued and, soon after, talked it over with Smith over lunch.

“Smith said, ‘I really think you should do this. I think you could add real value, and it would really make me proud,’” Carter said.

The day after their lunch, Smith passed away unexpectedly.

“After that, I said to myself, ‘If it will make you proud, sir, I’ll go do the work,’” Carter said.

In addition to several corporate boards and advisory roles, Carter now also serves as a senior advisor to the Pentagon on technology matters.

# Congratulations to the 2026 Tennessee CIO of the Year® Award winners and nominees.

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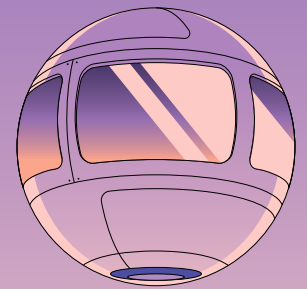
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## Shelia Anderson

EVP & Chief Information  
and Digital Officer,  
Unum Group



Shelia Anderson joined Unum Group in May 2025 as Executive Vice President Chief Information & Digital Officer. She previously led IT transformations as EVP & CIO at Aflac and Liberty Mutual, and as VP & CIO for USAA's Property & Casualty Insurance. A 2025 CIO100 Hall of Fame inductee, she has earned multiple ORBIE and CIO 100 Innovation Awards. Anderson holds a BS in Computer Science from Louisiana Tech University and an MS in Engineering Management from SMU.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Unum leverages AI to drive business value through enterprise scaling while transforming the customer experience and driving operational efficiencies: Client Retention Assist, a Celent Award winner, analyzes 500+ signals identifying at-risk Small Market Business clients and guide interventions improving persistency in the 100 lives segment. Short-term Disability Assist and Total-leave Assist automate ingestion of medical documents, accelerate approvals, and predict return-to-work timelines—cutting wait times by 5-6% and cost-to-serve while removing manual steps to better serve customers. Apollo Engine, a patented genAI framework, pioneers chain-of-thought, chain-of-verification, and sub-task prompt planning, delivering accurate outputs and mitigating risks like hallucinations and data leakage.



## Patrice Bordron

SVP & Chief Digital  
Information Officer,  
Community Health  
Systems (CHS)



Patrice Bordron is Senior Vice President and Chief Digital Information Officer at Community Health Systems, a healthcare enterprise. He leads enterprise technology strategy, governance, cybersecurity, and digital transformation to strengthen resilience, protect patient-care operations, and enable sustainable growth. A global C-suite executive with transformation expertise across healthcare, financial services, and banking. Patrice has worked on three continents, is fluent in three languages, and brings crisis-tested, multicultural leadership focused on innovation and high-performing teams.

**SUCCESS STORY:** The organization was redesigned to better align business and technology, break down silos, and address longstanding operational gaps. We stabilized the environment while continuing to drive transformation forward, including advancing a major ERP implementation, retiring aging infrastructure, and eliminating legacy applications. We introduced new technology standards to improve consistency and efficiency, significantly enhanced outage resolution and incident management, and generated meaningful cost savings and capital returns. Customer satisfaction continues to improve, employee engagement remains strong, and modernization is progressing across telecommunications, electronic health records, productivity tools, and AI.



## Kristin Darby

State CIO,  
State of Tennessee



Kristin Darby is a technology executive and board director with more than 25 years of experience leading digital transformation across the public sector, healthcare, finance, and cybersecurity. She serves as Chief Information Officer for the State of Tennessee and Co-Chairs the State's AI Council and Cybersecurity Advisory Council and serves on the Governor's Homeland Security Council. A CPA, CFE, and NACD Certified Director, she is a CIO Hall of Fame inductee and Global CIO100 honoree.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under Chief Information Officer Kristin Darby's leadership, Tennessee's Strategic Technology Solutions has accelerated state-wide digital transformation and strengthened the future of government technology. She launched the Focus Forward Initiative to advance leadership development, workforce innovation, and AI readiness across the enterprise, and established the State's first AI Innovation Lab to pilot secure, responsible AI solutions. As Co-Chair of Tennessee's AI Council, Darby helped deliver the state's first AI report to the Governor and General Assembly, outlining recommendations to position Tennessee as a national leader in responsible AI adoption.



## Andy Lupu

EVP & CTO,  
Pilot Company



Technology executive leading enterprise modernization, AI enablement, and digital transformation at scale. As EVP & CTO at Pilot, Andy's technology team accelerates growth and powers exceptional team member and customer experiences. Previously built and led advanced analytics and digital organizations, embedding AI across commercial operations. Married to his wife Melanie for 18 years and has two amazing boys who are 16 and 14. Andy also is a proud graduate of Indiana University - #NationalChamps.

**SUCCESS STORY:** As CTO, Andy led a multi-year enterprise modernization that repositioned technology from a support function to a strategic growth driver. He streamlined legacy systems, accelerated cloud adoption, strengthened cybersecurity, and embedded AI into fuel pricing, loyalty, and commercial decision-making. By shifting to a product-centric operating model and investing in engineering excellence, the organization improved speed to market, reliability, and cost efficiency while enabling measurable gross profit growth. The transformation enhanced team member and customer experiences, reduced risk, and created a scalable digital foundation to support long-term commercial expansion.



## Lesley Ma

CIO,  
Nissan Americas



Lesley Ma is a global technology executive and four-time CIO/CTO recognized for leading large-scale digital and organizational transformations across the automotive and technology sectors. With over 25 years of global and international experience, she champions cultural excellence, innovation, and leadership development. Her industry honors include the Michigan CIO ORBIE Award, HMG Strategy Top Global Technology Leaders Award, ASCEND Trailblazer Award, and Pace University Innovative Leadership Award. She is a thought-leader, speaker, and Board Director.

**SUCCESS STORY:** In a year defined by industry disruption and reinvention, we transformed Nissan Digital Americas into a modern, data-driven engine of growth—delivering more than \$500M in business impact through bold innovation and focused execution. By reorganizing around value-chain outcomes and elevating our data and AI capabilities, we empowered teams to move faster, think bigger, and lead with purpose. Externally, our work has received industry recognitions (eg. JD Power #1 Connected Vehicle App). I am most proud of how our people grew—emerging leaders, new talent pipelines, and a culture where every technologist feels ownership in shaping Nissan's digital future.



## Jay Richardson

CTO,  
DaVita

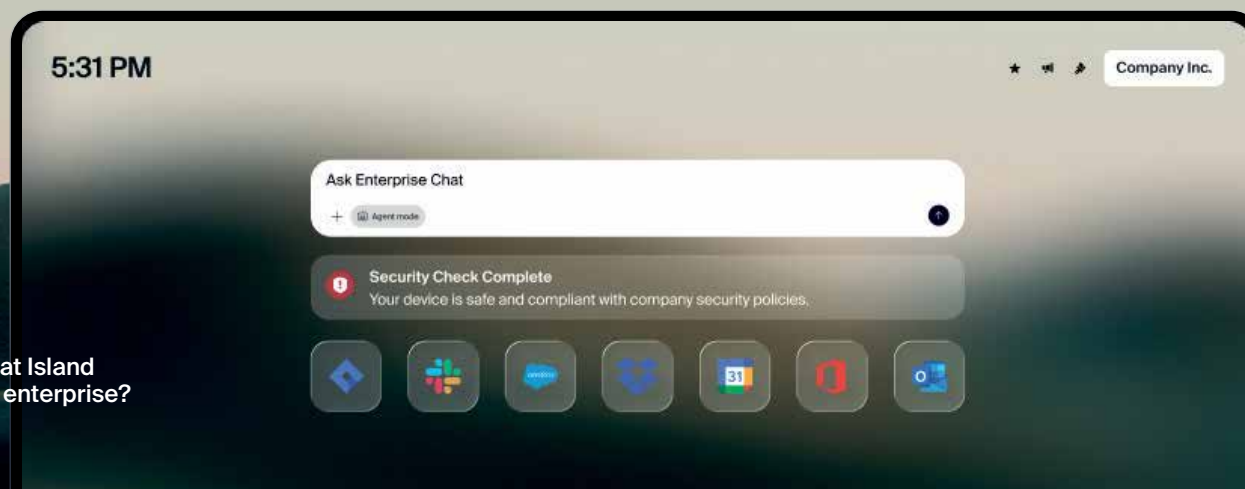


Experienced IT leader that drives innovation, trust and partnership. Skilled across a variety of industries tech, healthcare, Fortune 5 and startup with driving business value, talent retention and acquisition. Specialties include large scale program execution, advanced R&D with a specific passion around transforming technology to enable business growth.

**SUCCESS STORY:** I'm honored to lead extraordinary teams and work alongside talented partners and stakeholders; together, we have delivered and continue on an extraordinary multi-year digital transformation as an integral part of the DaVita strategy and mission. The entire IT team has leaned into this "new" role, and as a result, we have shifted our perception as valuable business enabler vs. a necessary cost center.

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ANNUAL REVENUE



## Anthony Burwell

CIO,  
State of Tennessee -  
Department of Human  
Services



Anthony Burwell is the Chief Information Officer for the Tennessee Department of Human Services, leading enterprise technology strategy, modernization, and operations across a large statewide organization. With more than 20 years of leadership experience spanning public service, he has led cloud adoption, digital service delivery, and enterprise platform transformation that improves how services reach Tennesseans. He is known for building high performing teams, strengthening IT and business alignment, and delivering outcomes through trusted partnerships.

**SUCCESS STORY:** I led a multi year modernization effort that replaced decades old systems with cloud based, scalable solutions that improved how TDHS delivers services statewide. We expanded the OneDHS Customer Portal into an omnichannel experience that connects digital and frontline channels into a more consistent customer journey. Along the way, I built a delivery model that blends internal talent with strategic partners, strengthened enterprise architecture through shared services and integration, and increased discipline around security, reliability, and execution. The result is a more resilient technology foundation and a better customer and staff experience.



## Anika Gardenhire

Chief Digital &  
Transformation Officer (fmr),  
Ardent Health



Anika Gardenhire is Chief Digital and Transformation Officer of Ardent Health, where she leads enterprise technology, data, cybersecurity, consumer engagement, and innovation. She oversees digital strategy for a multibillion-dollar healthcare organization, aligning technology investment to measurable clinical, operational, and financial outcomes. Recognized for building high-performing teams and advancing enterprise governance, Anika is known for transforming technology into a strategic growth engine that strengthens patient care and organizational resilience.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Over the past year, my team evolved from delivering strong digital execution to driving enterprise transformation. We strengthened governance and portfolio discipline, aligned technology investment to measurable financial and clinical outcomes, and advanced innovative programs that improved workforce sustainability and patient care. Through data modernization, cybersecurity resilience, and clinical AI initiatives, we delivered meaningful operational improvements while building leadership depth across the organization. The significance of this work extends beyond individual projects — we established scalable systems and accountability structures that position our healthcare enterprise for sustained growth, resilience, and innovation.



## Vijay Gollapudi

CIO,  
State of Tennessee  
Department of Education



Vijay Gollapudi is the Chief Information Officer for the Tennessee Department of Education, where he leads technology strategy, data systems, and digital innovation supporting K–12 education statewide. Vijay has over 20 years experience in Tennessee across public and private sectors, and has contributed to multi-state collaborations focused on education data systems and interoperability, helping shape how states leverage technology to better serve students and educators.

**SUCCESS STORY:** As CIO of the Tennessee Department of Education, I have led the modernization of our core data system using the Ed-Fi Data Standard, creating a common language across platforms and improving the flow of timely, reliable information for districts and schools. This work is helping us move from fragmented legacy reporting to a more interoperable, scalable, and educator-centered data environment. In partnership with standards-driven leaders like Ed-Fi Alliance and EdTech Collaboratory, we are building a stronger foundation for better decision-making, greater operational efficiency, and improved student outcomes statewide.



## Teddy Hazelwood

CIO,  
Smyrna Ready Mix  
Concrete, LLC



Teddy Hazelwood serves as Chief Information Officer at SRM Concrete, leading enterprise technology strategy across more than 580 locations in 24 states. A graduate of Middle Tennessee State University with a BS in Engineering Technology, he began his IT career in 1992 and has held progressive leadership roles for over three decades. Since joining SRM in 2017, he has built a resilient, scalable IT organization that enables rapid growth and operational excellence.

**SUCCESS STORY:** In high school, I was voted “Most Likely to Succeed,” a title that felt bigger than I was at the time. During my senior year, I became engaged to my wife, Joy, and that recognition became motivation. Over the next four years, I balanced college, marriage, full-time work, and the birth of our first child. I earned a BS in Engineering Technology from MTSU in 1992, and the company I worked for offered me an IT Supervisor role, launching a 30+ year career in technology leadership. Today, Joy and I are blessed with four children and fifteen grandchildren.



## David Jacques

SVP & CIO,  
ALSAC/St Jude Children's  
Research Hospital



David's current role at ALSAC/St. Jude Children's Research Hospital focuses on delivering digitally powered solutions to engage donors in becoming part of the St. Jude mission. David's previous leadership and strategic focus helped deliver innovative business solutions for a global \$22BN business. He's held international roles and was responsible for rolling out an ERP to over 40 countries outside of North America and Western Europe.

**SUCCESS STORY:** David Jacques is Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer for ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, with accountability for enterprise technology strategy and delivery. David and his team ensure that technology directly enables donor engagement, sustainable donation growth, brand experience, and operational scale to deliver the message of St. Jude's lifesaving mission.



## PT Padmanabha

CIO,  
Helena Agri Enterprises



PT Padmanabha is the Chief Information Officer at Helena Agri-Enterprises, LLC, where he leads enterprise technology strategy, digital modernization, and cybersecurity enablement. He partners with business leaders to drive operational excellence, scalable platforms, and data-driven decision-making. Known for aligning technology with business outcomes, PT has led multi-year IT roadmaps, modernized core platforms through cloud transformation, strengthened governance and security, and delivered enterprise analytics that position IT as a trusted, value-focused business partner.

**SUCCESS STORY:** PT Padmanabha, Chief Information Officer at Helena Agri-Enterprises, delivered measurable organizational impact by streamlining the company's technology landscape and strengthening execution discipline. He led platform consolidation and environment rationalization efforts that reduced operational complexity and improved system reliability, while establishing an enterprise technology roadmap aligned with business growth, cloud readiness, and enterprise business standardization. Through enhanced governance, disciplined change management, and strategically aligned modernization initiatives, PT improved organizational stability and scalability. He also advanced enterprise analytics and business intelligence capabilities, supporting data-driven decision-making and reinforcing IT's role as a trusted, value-focused business partner.

# Congratulations

to **PT Padmanabha** on being named as a finalist for the 2026 Tennessee ORBIE Awards.



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OVER \$800M  
ANNUAL REVENUE



**Dena Campbell**

CIO,  
Highspring



Dena Campbell, Highspring's Chief Information Officer, leads enterprise technology strategy and program portfolios to drive growth and scalability. With over 20 years of experience, she excels in large-system implementations and acquisition integrations. Outside of work, Dena enjoys traveling and finding inspiration through new adventures.

**SUCCESS STORY:** One of the most defining moments of my leadership was guiding Highspring through our enterprise brand transformation. I led the technology strategy and execution behind the transition, ensuring complex system migrations and domain changes occurred with minimal disruption to our people and clients. More importantly, I used that moment to reinforce a cultural shift grounded in 'Trust in Technology'—ensuring IT is not viewed as a support function, but as a strategic growth driver. By modernizing our platforms and strengthening data governance, we built greater transparency, scalability, and trust across the enterprise.



**Dawn Drewry**

CIO,  
Monogram Foods



Dawn Drewry is Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Monogram Foods, where she leads technology, cybersecurity, and data strategy to drive growth and operational excellence. A results-oriented leader, she brings deep experience across manufacturing, food, and high-tech industries, with prior roles at Tyson Foods, Honeywell, AMD, and Hewlett-Packard. Dawn holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Arizona and a Master's degree of Management from Penn State University.

**SUCCESS STORY:** When I joined Monogram Foods, IT had little connection to the business, resulting in siloed, costly, and unscalable processes. As the company prepared for rapid growth, our mission became clear: automate business processes while rebuilding trust. Partnering closely with Operations, we transformed one plant from paper-based yield tracking to a data-enabled production floor capable of near real-time response. This resulted in record-breaking yields and increased customer confidence. I'm proud of the IT team for bridging the gap between impossible and possible by listening to the challenges, showing a different way and working alongside the team with tools and perspiration.



**Haden McWhorter**

CIO,  
Premise Health



In his role as Chief Information Officer for Premise Health, Haden McWhorter leads the organization IT strategy and the technology required to support its vision, mission, and goals. Haden brings more than 30 years of experience in healthcare and technology, including data management and design, software development, and healthcare IT consulting. In 2019, he was recognized by the Greater Nashville Technology Council as their CIO of the Year.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Success to me is building strong, empowered teams that drive meaningful enterprise impact. Throughout my career I've prioritized fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability and innovation. By aligning teams around a shared vision, continuous learning, and creating an environment where people feel valued, we've been able to deliver lasting enterprise value. Whether through enhancing operational efficiency or driving strategic initiatives, the real measure of success for me isn't just in the outcomes, it's in the people, the culture we've built and the long term impact we continue to make together



**Harold Shannon**

VP, Technology & CIO (fmr),  
CoreCivic



Harold Shannon served as Vice President of Technology and Chief Information Officer, a role he assumed in April 2021 before recently stepping down. He joined CoreCivic in 2003 and progressed through multiple leadership positions, including managing and senior director roles. Harold worked as a team leader and developer at Accenture. He holds a bachelor's degree from MTSU and an MBA from Belmont University, where he also completed the Executive Leadership Program.

**SUCCESS STORY:** CoreCivic Technology supported increased facility capacity while advancing a digital transformation initiative. The organization deployed a modern cloud-based infrastructure, replacing legacy systems and improving efficiency, security, and scalability. Technology teams supported the reactivation of five facilities and one acquisition, deploying more than 5,000 new devices. CoreCivic migrated critical applications to a secure cloud environment, which included expanding Rubric, Nutanix, and Microsoft Entra. Upgraded more than 8500 computers to Windows 11. The company also insourced its Network and Security Operations Centers strengthening security posture and operational control. Lastly, Technology deployed a new officer mobile device to track activity and monitor compliance.



**Chris Shea**

CIO, John Muir Health,  
Optum



Chris Shea is the Chief Information Officer at John Muir Health, where he leads the organization's IT strategy and the technology required to support its vision, mission, and goals. Chris brings more than 20 years of experience in healthcare and technology, including data management and design, software development, and healthcare IT consulting. In 2019, he was recognized by the Greater Nashville Technology Council as their CIO of the Year.



**Kim Wismer**

CIO,  
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw  
Pittman LLP



Kim Wismer is an award-winning CIO, experienced strategist and innovative thinker. She leads the firm's information technology, project management, and security functions with a clear focus on aligning technology to the business. Kim partners closely with firm leadership to deliver practical, secure solutions that improve productivity, strengthen operations, and create a competitive advantage. Her approach centers on thoughtful planning, disciplined execution, and continuous improvement across the firm's technology landscape.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Our IT team strengthened the firm's foundation for growth by prioritizing security, accelerating AI enablement, and modernizing core infrastructure. We built an in-house threat intelligence capability, expanded Governance, Risk & Compliance, maintained ISO 27001 certification, and advanced CMMC preparation—protecting client trust and enabling government and international work. We strategically deployed enterprise and practice-specific AI tools that significantly reduced support timelines from months to hours, enhancing attorney efficiency without replacing expertise. At the same time, we standardized and modernized our global platform—improving reliability, scalability, and collaboration across offices—positioning the firm for sustained, secure, and profitable growth.



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# CORPORATE FINALISTS

UP TO \$800M  
ANNUAL REVENUE



**Charles  
Cooper**

CIO,  
Meharry Medical College



Charles F. Cooper Jr. is a transformative technology leader known for driving enterprise modernization across academic medicine, healthcare, and higher education. With more than 25 years of experience, he accelerates digital strategy, strengthens organizational resilience, and leads mission-driven change that elevates performance and user experience. Renowned for building empowered, high-performing teams, he partners with senior leaders to unlock innovation, streamline operations, and position institutions for long-term success in an increasingly data-driven world.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Meharry Medical College advanced its digital transformation by implementing Workday Finance, HCM, and Student, replacing legacy systems with a unified cloud platform that modernized processes, improved collaboration, and enabled real-time analytics and self-service capabilities. The institution also deployed K16 Scaffold DataX to retire costly legacy environments, centralize archival data, and automate ETL workflows. Together, these initiatives reduced technical debt, strengthened reporting and compliance, enhanced the user experience, and positioned Meharry for long-term operational efficiency and data-driven decision-making.



**Troy  
Crabtree**

CTO,  
PMC



Troy Crabtree is CTO of Parking Management Company (PMC), leading innovation in the parking industry through technology, automation, and enablement. A 25+ year IT executive and multi-time Nashville technology award finalist, Troy brings a relentless entrepreneurial spirit—founding companies, scaling high-growth platforms, and transforming operations. He blends bold vision with disciplined execution, building modern parking ecosystems that drive revenue, enhance the customer experience, and create measurable business impact.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under my leadership, PMC Pay has become a scalable digital commerce platform supporting millions of users. Revenue-driving features include online reservations, prepaid parking, season and game-day sales, tap-to-pay, and LPR-enabled frictionless entry. Dynamic pricing optimizes revenue per space, while memberships and stored payment credentials increase repeat usage and marketing reach. Ticketing and venue integrations capture demand upstream, and stadium landing pages convert event traffic into direct sales. Real-time reporting and reconciliation automation reduce leakage and improve margins. SaaS-based technology fees further diversify recurring revenue beyond traditional management contracts.



**Walter  
Mullen**

CIO,  
Trexis Insurance



Bubba Mullen is the CIO for Trexis Insurance. Starting as a Systems Engineer with EDS, he has worked to help apply technology to solving business issues in many industries. While at IBM he implemented Document Image and Workflow solutions. In his current role, he leads a team that is focused on bringing solutions together to build a product that streamlines and improves the agent and customer experience for a growing insurance carrier.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Part of leading an IT organization is continually looking for ways to leverage technology and solutions to enhance our business. One of those projects here at Trexis was the implementation of a solution that enhanced our Claims Payment process. The tool we selected was integrated within our claims payment process to allow the people involved in an accident to select how they want to get paid. While previously we mailed a claims payment to the person, now we allow the individual to select the payment method. By allowing options where people can get funds immediately, user satisfaction has soared.



**Chad  
Porter**

Chief Information &  
Technology Officer,  
AMSURG



Chad Porter is the interim CIO of AMSURG, overseeing technology strategy and innovation. With 25+ years in IT, he's led complex projects at AMSURG and previously held leadership roles at LifePoint Health and HCA. Chad earned a BS in Health Care Administration from Western Kentucky University and has been instrumental in advancing AMSURG's technical operations since joining in 2019.

**SUCCESS STORY:** My leadership enabled AMSURG to successfully be established as a privately owned, independent company by overseeing and participating in comprehensive due diligence and managing the IT process. This achievement will ensure operational continuity and position the organization for long-term growth.



**Dr. Sherry  
Lawdermilt**

AVP & CIO,  
Austin Peay State  
University



Sherry Lawdermilt is a technology executive with over 27 years of experience across government and higher education. She currently serves as Chief Information Officer at Austin Peay State University, where she leads enterprise technology strategy, infrastructure modernization, and cybersecurity initiatives. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Sherry is known for her collaborative, service-oriented leadership. She holds an AAS in Computer Programming, a BS and MBA in Management Information Systems, and a PhD in Higher Education Leadership.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under my leadership, the team delivered transformative projects that strengthened security, collaboration, and infrastructure. We merged the student and employee Microsoft tenants, an eight-year goal, improving account security and seamless collaboration. The team designed and implemented technology for the new 114,600-sq-ft Health Professions Building, including robust networking, advanced simulation labs, and classroom technology. We completed two major ERP initiatives: a rebuild and upgrade of the Student Information System and a \$20M Oracle Fusion implementation, replacing legacy on-premise Finance and HR solutions. Collectively, these efforts strengthened security, improved efficiency, and positioned the university for sustainable growth.



**Harvey  
Smith**

CIO,  
Rhodes College



Harvey is an IT professional with more than two decades of experience across multiple institutions. He holds engineering and business degrees and maintains multiple certifications. As Chief Information Officer of Rhodes College, he leads Information Services, which includes Information Technology and the Barrett Library. IS supports the college's digital infrastructure, enterprise systems, cybersecurity, academic technology, and library services. He has guided major software and infrastructure initiatives and is responsible for AI efforts.

**SUCCESS STORY:** As Chief Information Officer at Rhodes College, I have led major modernization efforts, including our transition to Workday Student, which improved the student experience, reduced technical debt, and strengthened operations. I strengthened cybersecurity through improved authentication, community training, and AI based threat detection. We launched an academic computing network, modernized classroom technology, and expanded accessibility tools. We also began a campus wide network modernization project that is deploying next generation equipment to improve reliability and performance. As chair of the AI Working Group, we established an AI policy and began preparing the campus to be AI ready.



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OVER \$1.5 BILLION  
ANNUAL REVENUE



**Roger Brotz**  
VP & CISO,  
Acadia Healthcare



Roger Brotz is VP and Chief Information Security Officer at Acadia Healthcare, with more than 40 years of experience in IT and cybersecurity, including over 30 years in healthcare. He is recognized for building and maturing enterprise cybersecurity programs, developing high-performing teams, and aligning security strategy with business and patient care priorities. Roger is an award-winning security leader, frequent speaker, and founder of the Nashville CISO Collective, actively contributing to the broader cybersecurity community.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under my leadership, Acadia Healthcare transformed its cybersecurity function into a mature, enterprise-aligned program that supports patient care, operational resilience, and long-term business strategy. The team established modern security capabilities, strengthened organizational preparedness, and aligned cybersecurity to recognized industry frameworks and a multi-year maturity roadmap. Equally important, cybersecurity evolved from a behind-the-scenes technical function into a trusted business partner. Today, security is viewed as an enabler of resilience and accountability across the organization—protecting patient trust while supporting the mission of delivering high-quality care.



**Joey Johnson**  
CISO,  
Premise Health



Johnson serves as the 15yr CISO for Premise Health. Outside of this he serves as a CISO advisor for multiple cyber technology investment entities. He served externally as an early stage founding advisor for the Health-ISAC, founding champion of the Nashville CISOExecNet chapter, and editorial board for the Journal of Law and Cyberwarfare. He continues to contribute his time to focus on coaching emerging cyber leaders, and advising early stage cyber companies.

**SUCCESS STORY:** I studied anthropology and archeology. Far cry from cyber! I also spent college working in restaurants, where I learned soft skills I still leverage today to disarm situations, read the emotion of the room, etc. I picked up a cyber career when a friend taught me about the Black Hat arts, and I was intrigued at the challenge. I finished school and focused on IT Security. I worked at Premise Health, where I moved into C-Suite, and led with a group of executives that have mostly been 50/50 male to female ratio. Those things helped me learn to lead valuing diversity of perspectives, capability, and respect for others.



**Adam Keown**  
CISO,  
Eastman



Adam Keown is the Chief Information Security Officer at Eastman, with over 20 years of experience in IT and cybersecurity. He is recognized for building and maturing enterprise cybersecurity programs, developing high-performing teams, and aligning security strategy with business and patient care priorities. Adam is an award-winning security leader, frequent speaker, and founder of the Nashville CISO Collective, actively contributing to the broader cybersecurity community.



**Nagireddy Kudithini**  
CISO,  
Nissan



Nagireddy Kudithini is a seasoned technology, cybersecurity, and digital transformation executive with over two decades of experience leading large-scale enterprise change. As CISO for Nissan Americas, he oversees cybersecurity, cyber resiliency, and AI-driven risk management, embedding security as a business enabler. He also leads Global Digital HR transformation, leveraging AI and automation to modernize employee experiences. Previously, he served as CTO and Head of Digital Transformation, delivering innovation at scale.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under my leadership, we transformed cybersecurity from a reactive function into a strategic, business-enabling capability. We elevated cyber maturity, embedded resiliency by design across critical operations, and leveraged AI to proactively manage enterprise risk and improve employee productivity. By deploying an AI assistant, employees now get answers faster, accelerating decision-making at scale. I also took on additional responsibility leading global Digital HR transformation, modernizing people experiences through automation and AI. These efforts strengthened trust, resilience, and innovation—demonstrating how strong leadership and empowered teams drive measurable business outcomes.



**Ben Murphy**  
Global CISO,  
Unum Group



Ben Murphy is the Chief Information Security Officer at Unum Group with extensive experience guiding cybersecurity strategy across global enterprises. His background includes leadership roles in threat management, security operations, and technology risk in large enterprises and startups. He is active in industry collaboration and advisory work and brings a strong academic and professional certification foundation to his role. Outside work, he enjoys spending time with his family, gaming, disc golf, cooking, and community involvement.

**SUCCESS STORY:** I transformed the cybersecurity program from a reactive, compliance-focused function into a strategic, intelligence-driven organization aligned with enterprise risk. I elevated the security leadership structure, built a dedicated threat intelligence capability, and created a Countermeasures function to close gaps between detection and response. I also established a cross-functional Cyber Risk Board to strengthen accountability and shifted our planning process to a quarterly, data-driven cycle. Through steady investment in people, processes, and technology, I built a more mature, resilient security program that enables the business to operate securely and confidently.



**Matt Williams**  
Enterprise CISO &  
Technology Officer,  
University of Tennessee



Matt is an accomplished technology executive with 18+ years of experience driving innovation, leading high-performing teams, and delivering measurable results. As the AVC & CISTO at The University of Tennessee, he oversees IT infrastructure and information security, and has led major initiatives including establishing shared security services, modernizing IAM, and establishing a IT GRC program. Previously, he held leadership roles at The University of Akron, Kent State, and Bucknell and is a U.S. Army veteran.

**SUCCESS STORY:** My team delivered a systemwide cybersecurity transformation for the University of Tennessee by establishing a standardized security baseline supported through shared services, ensuring every campus receives consistent protection. We rolled out AI-driven phishing defenses, a shared 24/7 Security Operations Center, standardized Endpoint Detection and Response, centralized Identity and Access Management, device management, and an IT Governance, Risk, and Compliance framework that embeds security into procurement. In the past 14 months, we have stopped tens of thousands of network attacks each month and blocked thousands of phishing emails with minimal oversight. Campuses now benefit from stronger, coordinated defenses and optimized resources.

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# CISO ENTERPRISE FINALISTS

UP TO \$1.5 BILLION  
ANNUAL REVENUE



**Conrad Bell**

SVP & CISO,  
C Spire



Conrad Bell is Senior Vice President and Chief Information Security Officer at C Spire, where he leads enterprise cybersecurity strategy and aligns security with business objectives. With 30 years of experience spanning military service as a U.S. Marine, federal advisory roles, and executive leadership, he brings deep expertise in cyber risk and resilience. Conrad holds degrees in computer science and information assurance, maintains CISSP and CISM certifications, and serves on multiple education and technology boards.

**SUCCESS STORY:** As C Spire's Senior Vice President and first Chief Information Security Officer, I built the enterprise cybersecurity program from the ground up beginning in 2016, establishing strategy, governance, and security operations aligned to enterprise goals. I formed a high-performing security team and SOC, implemented advanced detection and response capabilities, and significantly reduced risk and response times. These efforts strengthened cyber resilience, protected customer data, preserved service continuity, and reinforced customer trust—enabling C Spire to operate, innovate, and grow with confidence in an increasingly contested cyber environment.



**Britton Burton**

CISO,  
D4C Dental Brands



Experienced strategic leader and program builder in InfoSec across Fortune 100, small business and medium/growing enterprises. Skilled at communicating security and risk issues in terms that non-technical people understand and can relate to. Exceptional team builder and people leader. Understand how to balance the needs of the business against the security controls required to mitigate the risk presented by real-world threats that the business faces every day.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Over the past year, we transformed an early-stage InfoSec function needing structure, leadership, and a clear roadmap into a program girded by governance and risk reduction. We established risk governance with a KPI cadence and aligned priorities to frameworks, giving leaders visibility into progress. We closed “first-step-to-breach” gaps by hardening identity (MFA/SSO and access controls), rebooting vulnerability management, expanding endpoint visibility, and standardizing encryption and device baselines. We elevated incident readiness through an updated response plan, tabletop exercises, managed SOC, and exec leadership engagement. We operationalized issues management so assessments drive trackable remediation and raised third-party security expectations.



**Ben Hicks**

CISO,  
National HealthCare Corporation



With 28 years of experience in technology, Ben has dedicated 18 years of his career to National Healthcare Corporation. Throughout his tenure, he has continued to learn and grow while leading a talented team focused on integrating security and infrastructure into everyday business operations. Ben attributes his success to collaboration and a commitment to supporting others, striving to help National Healthcare Corporation stand out as a senior care leader in customer, partner, and investor satisfaction.

**SUCCESS STORY:** For 18 years, I've been privileged to help build a dedicated team at National HealthCare Corporation, committed to solving business challenges securely and efficiently. Together, we launched a comprehensive, evolving security program that safeguards our customers, adapting to new threats every day. Our team lives the company vision—“Caring in a Better Way, Day by Day”—by supporting partners who care for patients with compassion and excellence. This ongoing commitment has made a positive impact, reflecting our dedication to innovation and outstanding service. It's a ongoing journey I'm proud to share in.



**Lee Kaiser**

CISO,  
Highspring



Lee Kaiser is a Chief Information Security Officer at Highspring and an executive technology leader with more than 20 years of experience across cybersecurity, infrastructure, and enterprise IT. He is known for building unified security organizations, aligning risk with business strategy, and leading large-scale transformation initiatives. Lee brings a pragmatic, outcomes-driven approach to security leadership, with a strong focus on operational resilience, governance, and trust-based collaboration across executive and technical teams.

**SUCCESS STORY:** As CISO, I built a unified security organization by integrating Information Security, IT Architecture & Design, IT Operations, and GRC into a single, accountable function. In our first year, the team achieved SOC 2 Type II, ISO/IEC 27001, and ISO/IEC 27701 certifications, an uncommon milestone for a newly formed organization. I transformed fragmented teams into a cohesive program with aligned governance, standardized policies, automated compliance, and stronger vulnerability and incident management. Beyond certifications, I led a cultural shift from reactive security to proactive risk management—embedding security into the technology lifecycle and strengthening resilience, trust, and scalability across the enterprise.



**David Prats**

Director, Cybersecurity  
& IT Infrastructure (fmr),  
Smith and Wesson



David Prats is a cybersecurity leader known for his proficiency in enterprise security and threat management utilizing his 30 years of experience in informational technology across retail, manufacturing, oil and gas, and telecommunications. As the head of cybersecurity at Smith & Wesson, David has been instrumental in protecting the company's intellectual property and reputation amidst the constantly changing landscape of cyber threats.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Smith & Wesson faces constant cyber threats from various adversaries targeting our intellectual property and reputation. During a peak in ransomware attacks and our headquarters' relocation, my Cybersecurity team set a new standard in enterprise security. We swiftly upgraded our security posture by deploying a cutting-edge SIEM system for centralized threat detection, introducing MDR for 24/7 monitoring, replacing outdated EDR tools with next-gen solutions, and enhancing infrastructure with advanced firewalls. Despite the challenges and increased attacks, my team reduced vulnerabilities and responded quickly to incidents, protecting our intellectual property and ensuring business continuity.



**Dr. David Ulloa**

CISO,  
IMC Logistics



Dr. David Ulloa is the Chief Information Security Officer for IMC Logistics, where he built a modern, business-aligned cybersecurity program that enables growth and operational resilience. A technologist and strategist, he is known for developing high-performing teams and modernizing security capabilities that strengthen enterprise risk management. A servant leader at heart, Dr. Ulloa credits his Lord and Savior for guiding his work, inspiring his commitment to mentorship, community service, and empowering others to thrive.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Under my leadership, IMC Logistics built a modern, business-aligned cybersecurity program from the ground up. Our team transformed security into a strategic enabler — strengthening operational resilience, supporting rapid growth, and ensuring secure integration of newly acquired companies. We modernized identity, access, and threat-management capabilities, giving the organization real-time visibility and protection across locations nationwide. Through innovation, collaboration, and a culture of trust, we elevated security from a safeguard to a catalyst for IMC's continued expansion and industry leadership.

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*Conrad Bell, C Spire Chief Information Security Officer*

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