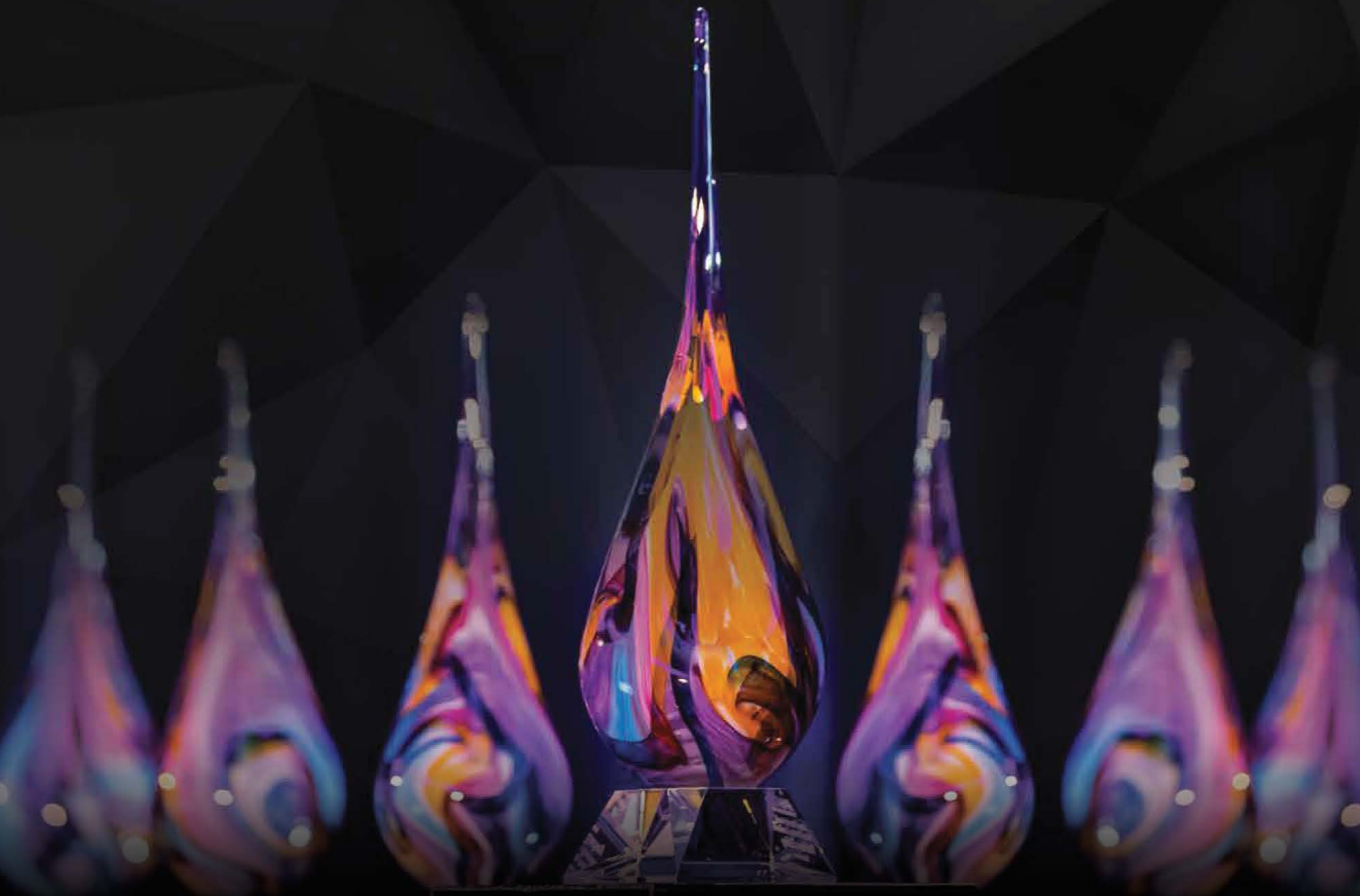


CHICAGO & MIDWEST REGION  
MAY 30 | 2024

# ADMIN AWARDS<sup>®</sup>

THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION'S  
HIGHEST HONOR



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# A LETTER FROM THE ADMIN AWARDS



On May 8th, the Admin Awards lost our hero.

Colleen Barrett, the Executive Assistant who rose to President & COO of Southwest Airlines during her five-decade career at Southwest, and the namesake of the Admin Awards' most prestigious award, was laid to rest at the age of 79.

Thirteen years ago, I approached Colleen with the belief that public recognition of Administrative Professionals was long overdue and that I was creating the Admin Awards to ensure its time had come. As the daughter of a retired Executive Secretary, I knew firsthand how beloved and valued Admin Professionals were. I pitched the idea for the Admin Awards to Colleen, taking weeks to craft what I hoped was the perfect email, asking if we could name our program's most prestigious award after her. Her response came within an hour: "Yes! Count me in! And I love that you're also recognizing receptionists as well - because they too are so important!" She thought the Admin Awards was an excellent idea and couldn't believe that it hadn't been done anywhere in the world before. We indeed would be the first public recognition program for Administrative Professionals, ever. I was thrilled and terrified in equal measures. Colleen Barrett's name was now attached to our endeavor. We could not screw this up.

In 2012, we held the first Admin Awards in Dallas, Texas. I remember when I went to reserve the ballroom, thinking 'if nobody shows up, we'll just spread the tables out enough to make the room look less empty'. I was a single mother at the time, with no nest egg and no plan B. I could not afford to lose. And I would not disappoint Colleen Barrett.

But on that cold November day back in 2012, we welcomed hundreds of area Administrative Professionals and Executives, filling the ballroom to capacity within a week. Originally, I had no vision of becoming a national recognition program, much less the Administrative Profession's highest honor. But that afternoon, as we left a ballroom packed with Admins and Executives cheering one another on, I realized what we created was truly special. And we made grown men cry. That is when I really knew we were onto something. What I knew from watching my mother's dedicated service to the profession was that there never was a shortage of appreciation of Administrative Professionals. What was lacking, however, was a meaningful way to show it.

Over the next 12 years, as we expanded the Admin Awards from coast to coast, Colleen meticulously deliberated over every decision regarding the Winners and Finalists of the award that bears her name. She would scribble notes in the margins of printed nominations, indicating what resonated, what didn't, and her rationale for each decision. Colleen was clear and uncompromising about the behaviors, skills, and ideals that nominees in her award category needed to embody—attributes she believed were essential to her impact at

Southwest. She also warned me that there could be a time when she may declare no winners and to be prepared because one day she may have more than one. Colleen's compass was true north and she made sure she followed it.

Colleen also became my friend. I'll never forget the day, early in our relationship, when I received an invitation to a dinner party at her home. I looked at my husband wide-eyed after opening the email invite, panicking. 'This has got to be a mistake'. But when we arrived and met the diverse group of down-to-earth guests with nothing to prove, but all equally tickled to be there, I understood. Colleen was for everyday people doing extraordinary things. We everyday people were also told on the invitation that we needed to be out of the house by 8:30.

I will forever be grateful to Colleen for her example of Golden Rule leadership and for the time she spent with me which at times felt like a mini MBA on how to be a human being in business.

I'm also thankful to her for showing Administrative Professionals everywhere what's possible. And to know their potential and ability to impact. But I'm most thankful for her friendship and for the honor and privilege of continuing her legacy through the Admin Awards.

My hope for Administrative Professionals everywhere is that they are guided by Colleen's incredible example of servant leadership. I believe that was truly what transcended her roles and defined her legacy.

My hope for executives is that you are inspired to regard your Administrative Professionals the way Herb Kelleher regarded Colleen Barrett.

Herb was Colleen's biggest fan, championing her every step of the way, from Executive Assistant to President & COO at Southwest. As far back as the 70s, long before it was a thing to consider your Admin your strategic partner, Herb not only gave Colleen a seat at the table, he gave her a voice. He created an environment where she felt safe to spread her wings and try new things. But I think the greatest gift he gave her was his confidence in her ability to go beyond where she thought she could. As Colleen shared with me shortly before her passing, "If Herb told me I could do something, I just believed it."

He gave her a chance.

Just like the chance Colleen gave me 13 years ago. I'm not sure where we'd be today without it.

Rest in Peace, Colleen. You will forever be our Queen of Hearts. ❤️

**Sunny Nunan**  
Founder & CEO  
Admin Awards



**Colleen Barrett**  
September 14, 1944 - May 8, 2024  
Queen of our Hearts



# CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2024 WINNERS!



**“NEXT TO EXCELLENCE  
IS THE APPRECIATION OF IT.”**  
– William Thackeray



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**Melissa Little**  
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Adatalem Global Education

**Danielle Mack**  
Adatalem Global Education

**Ryan Hayman**  
Taelor

## COLLEEN BARRETT AWARD FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE

# WINNER



### CHRIS CASHATT ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR, USCELLULAR

Chris is an Administrative Coordinator at US Cellular, serving the East Region Area VP and General Manager, and has been at the company for 29 years. Chris embodies UScellular's values, ensuring actions align with the company's culture, focusing on people, customers, and shareholders. She supports the DE&I mission, actively participating in Associate Resource Groups, enhancing the company's diversity and inclusion presence. Her commitment to UScellular's cause is evident in her support for the East Region, representing leadership with professionalism, and enabling the company's mission and strategy. She plays a crucial role in the Apex Recognition program, enhancing engagement and awareness through her design and coordination efforts. Chris's passion for customer service is demonstrated through her support for internal teams and associates. As a VALOR ARG board member, Chris advocates for veteran associates, contributing to the group's business planning and community outreach.

### FINALISTS



Ann Dahlke  
UMR



Carol Durant  
AbbVie



Lawanda Flennoy  
Obama Foundation



Teresa Munoz  
BlueCross BlueShield  
Association

## COLLEEN BARRETT: SERVANT LEADER AND SUPERSTAR



When The Admin Awards was launched in 2012, we sat down with Colleen Barrett to ask her for her thoughts and experiences on the administrative profession. Her answers from that September interview, edited for brevity; are below:

### What did you like most about being a secretary?

I like to serve so you have to start there. I loved to solve problems. And I loved to give exemplary or positive customer service delivery on behalf of whomever I was working for. Life is all about relationships... you have an opportunity in the administrative group to form more relationships than probably any other position – even much higher up on that so-called ladder because you are very often that first point of contact with the outside world or the customer... life is just one big grassroots campaign as far as I'm concerned.

### What did you like the least?

I didn't like anything that was routine. I loved to master projects, but, for example, filing was only interesting to me because I loved to be able to find anything that anyone was looking for... I've never liked rote work. (But) there's some that goes in every job no matter what position you're in.

### What was the most challenging aspect of serving Herb Kelleher?

Being a nanny for 45 years for a man who has always thought he was 17 regardless of any year that was added to his

personal calendar! He was a great servant leader. He loved life and you almost couldn't be around him and not catch that love of life and love of people.

### And the best aspect?

It was truly feeling his egalitarian spirit and appreciating the fact that he valued my judgment and thinking as a team member.

### Did you ever think you would rise from Secretary to President and COO of Southwest Airlines?

Quite honestly it wasn't something I wanted, and I never wanted to be COO—and I made that very clear to the Board—that isn't my strength. My strength is customer service and people and everything that touches people, and, honestly, being President and COO wasn't my favorite position at Southwest...my favorite position was Executive Vice President-Customers. Customer to us means employees, passengers, and shareholders, so I could really touch everything. I could touch every department. And as President... I had to do a lot more external things... I did them... I can't say I hated them... (but) I like to get down and dirty and really roll up my sleeves.

### What advice do you have for Admins?

Love. Everybody. Just love. It's a word that corporate America doesn't use very much... always remember where you came from – so that you know how far you've come...I don't think most of us start out thinking we're going to be the President of the United States or the CEO of a company... and I think... be humble and appreciate what you get. To me psychic satisfaction is 10 times more important than pay or title.

**Be authentic. Be real. Remember who you are.**

## LOYALTY AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### JOANNE KUSHNER LEAD RECEPTIONIST AND OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR, LOCKTON COMPANIES

Joanne is the Lead Receptionist and Office Administrator at Lockton Companies. She has been with the company for 28 years and was the very first support professional hired at the Lockton Chicago! Over the years as Lockton grew to over 300 staff, Joanne was approached and offered multiple positions within the company. Joanne always came back with "I love being at the front desk, and that's where I want to stay." To this day, Joanne remains the FACE of Lockton and represents everything that is the culture of the company. Joanne is known throughout the office, and all of Lockton carrier partners and clients as the go to person. When she is on vacation the office does not run as smoothly, but when her bosses are away, Joanne makes it seem like they never left! She has been told by her boss she is not allowed to retire and that Lockton would be lost without her.



**Maria Avila**  
ABC7 Chicago



**Nancy Cooper**  
P&G



**Jennifer Crago**  
Strata Decision  
Technology



**Janice Gray**  
Crowe LLP



**LaShawn Murray**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association



**James Velez**  
Ann & Robert H.  
Lurie Children's  
Hospital of  
Chicago

## ABOVE THE CALL AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### RENEE CLARK EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, CRATE & BARREL

Renee Clark is Executive Administrative Assistant for Customer Experience, reporting to the Vice President of Service and has worked at Crate and Barrel for 23 years. While she directly reports to the Vice President, Renee more broadly supports a team of 50, including Directors, Managers and Supervisors. Renee oversees customer communication and engagement as well and puts the customer FIRST in everything she does. Renee is the epitome of a Servant Leader- Always ready to help, anticipating needs, stepping up to guide and lead. While Renee's role is "assistant," she really acts as a team leader and project manager. Crate and Barrel's favorite thing about Renee is her ability to anticipate needs and pivot. She has never complained about a shift or a change in plan. In fact, much of the time she identifies a need to shift based on what she anticipates coming up. Renee could've coined the phrase- work smarter not harder. Thank goodness because she fills her time with a super-hero amount of work.



**Bridget Boss**  
Ann & Robert H.  
Lurie Children's  
Hospital of  
Chicago



**Linda Colello**  
Adtalem Global  
Education



**Ryan Genson**  
Ann & Robert H.  
Lurie Children's  
Hospital of  
Chicago



**Laurin Hawthorn**  
W. W. Grainger



**Margaret Phillips**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association

## Congratulations to the 2024 Admin Award Nominees from Grainger!!!!

**Above the Call Award Nominee:**  
Amber Muendel  
Laurin Hawthorn  
Monica Rubeck

**The Spirit Award Nominees:**  
Angie Donovan  
Angela Pote  
Diana Jankoviak

**The Team Achiever Award Nominee**  
(Group Award):  
Jenny Bilsky  
Cassy Cutright  
Kirstin Serdar  
Lisa Patterson  
Stacy Newman

**The Achiever Award Nominees:**  
Laurin Hawthorn  
Sara Nash

**The Leadership Award Nominees:**  
Carla Moncrief  
Katie Smolak  
Monica Rubeck

## ACHIEVER AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### JANET CHARTRAW EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE CIO, BLUECROSS BLUESHIELD ASSOCIATION

Janet Chartraw, Executive Assistant to the CIO, is a key member of BCBSA, and is widely recognized for her exceptional coordination skills and her role in facilitating strategic delivery and productivity. Janet is instrumental in organizing meetings and events for a significant portion of BCBSA employees and 33 independent BCBS Plan CIOs. Her ability to foster high-quality relationships and collaborate effectively makes her a linchpin in daily operations. Janet's disciplined work and forward-thinking planning ensure seamless experiences for those she interacts with, managing competing programs, vacation schedules, catering needs, and more. Janet's leadership extends to her voluntary role in BCBSA's Administrative Professionals Forum, coordinating charitable giving and member engagement. She also leads in organizing culture journey trainings, town hall events, and CIO community-of-practice events, impacting the broader work ecosystem. Janet's impact is profound, affecting over 160 million Americans who rely on BCBS health care services, making her an invaluable asset to BCBSA.



**Linda Bohanon**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association



**Jenifer Lewis**  
UScellular



**Kathy Mason**  
AIA Corporation



**Ann McKeveitt  
Segal**



**Debra Pienta**  
Southwest  
Airlines



**Michelle Terkoski**  
Stonebridge Capital  
Advisors, LLC

## LEADERSHIP AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### MARY RYAN EXECUTIVE BUSINESS PARTNER TO THE CEO, STITCH

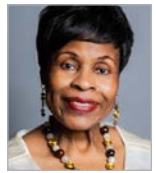
Mary Ryan is the Executive Business partner to the CEO at Stitch. Mary is a beacon of leadership and the driving force behind the company's cohesion. Her multifaceted role includes supporting leaders, onboarding new team members, spearheading cultural initiatives, and managing company-wide events. Her partnership with the CEO has been instrumental in navigating the dynamic changes at Stitch, demonstrating adaptability and commitment to excellence. Her initiatives, such as the Serge Award for team recognition and the Stitched with Care program for charitable giving, highlight her dedication to community and team spirit. Her generosity in sharing knowledge and leading by example with tech certifications inspires the Stitch team to strive for continuous improvement. Mary's servant leadership qualities, her proactive nature, and her ability to foster a collaborative environment make her a deserving winner of the Leadership Award.



**Linda Baumann**  
CCC Intelligent  
Solutions



**Melissa Bennett**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association



**Eraena Hart**  
Roderick  
and Solange  
MacArthur Justice  
Center



**Dawna Novack**  
Securian Financial



**Lisa Petrusha**  
Southwest Airlines



**Katie Smolak**  
W. W. Grainger

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**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL  
THE 2024 CHICAGO ADMIN  
AWARDS NOMINEES!**

**Thank you for your endless commitment to excellence.**

**rh** Robert Half®

# LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

At Robert Half, we know talent. And we know these extraordinary individuals are examples of incredible talent in action. Congratulations to all the Chicago Admin Awards Nominees!

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### **SAMEERAH MILLER** EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT - NURSING EXCELLENCE, ANN & ROBERT H. LURIE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF CHICAGO

Sameerah is the Executive Assistant - Nursing Excellence at Ann & Robert H Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. She supports three senior directors on the nursing senior leadership team as well as a director and the Nursing Board. Sameerah plays an integral role in providing precious healthcare for the Children of Chicago. Sameerah's ability to organize and communicate across the multiple layers of hospital staff and administration was critical to the division's success in dealing with the January 2024 cyber-attack, which resulted in a complete computer network shutdown that lasted over 6 weeks and was a situation that was far more difficult to manage than the Covid-19 crisis. All patients received exactly the medical care they needed and deserved and patients were 100% safe. Sameerah played a crucial role in coordinating the mass numbers of activities involved in planning this critical medical care. Her proactive thoughtfulness has always greatly facilitated the division's performance of various activities involved in meeting the needs of critically ill children. Her partnership and foresight cannot be understated in terms of impact.



**Niki Cousino**  
TransUnion



**Michelle Scherneck**  
UScellular

## ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### **MYRA RIVERA** ASSISTANT SECRETARY TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, CHICAGO BOARD OF EDUCATION

Myra Rivera serves as the Assistant Secretary to the Board of Education for the City of Chicago. Her role within the Chicago Public Schools system, which is one of the largest in the nation, involves managing the logistics of bi-monthly Board meetings, committee sessions, and public hearings. She coordinates with internal departments and external vendors to ensure ADA compliance, safety, and the provision of services like sign language interpretation and Spanish translation. She also oversees the Honorary Student Board Member selection process. Myra's exceptional organizational skills enable her to manage complex logistics and administrative duties efficiently. Her professionalism, reliability, and eagerness for continuous learning are evident as she keeps abreast of industry trends, contributing to the Board Office's effectiveness. Myra's positive demeanor and team-oriented approach foster a supportive and collaborative work environment. Her unwavering dedication, organizational expertise, professionalism, and proactive attitude are key to her performance, reflecting her significant contributions to the Board Office and the community.



**Nancy Montenegro**  
Heartland Family Service



**Margaret Siame**  
Gift of Hope



**Chanel Wilson-Stewart**  
Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc.



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At Lurie Children's, we know that caring for your child takes more than medicine. It requires compassion and understanding kids do best when they get to be kids.

 Ann & Robert H. Lurie  
Children's Hospital of Chicago®

## SPIRIT AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNER



### ELIJAH WARFIELD OFFICE COORDINATOR, STRATA DECISION TECHNOLOGY

Elijah, the Office Coordinator at Strata, embodies the Spirit Award through his infectious enthusiasm and unwavering support for his team. Elijah's welcoming presence is the first encounter for team members and visitors at Strata's Chicago headquarters, and he also manages the St. Louis office remotely. His optimistic spirit is contagious and has significantly contributed to a positive and supportive company culture. Elijah is the go-to for a boost of energy. He leads company initiatives, like Strata's annual "Day of Thanks" and "Lucky Shamrock," fostering a culture of gratitude and camaraderie. Elijah's eagerness to assist across departments also showcase his versatility and commitment to efficiency. Elijah gets stuff done, gets it done well, and gets it done with a smile. He is a true culture champion at our organization. His dedication to his work and optimistic attitude are inspiring.



**Evelyn Castro-Lake**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association



**Dennis Fuentes**  
Ann & Robert H.  
Lurie Children's  
Hospital of Chicago



**Angela Pote**  
W. W. Grainger



**Jessie Terry**  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie  
Children's Hospital of  
Chicago



**Babbi Williams**  
BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Association

## TEAM ACHIEVER AWARD

## FINALISTS

### WINNERS



### GRAINGER'S ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS PARTNER BENCHING TEAM JENNIFER BILSKY, CASANDRA CUTRIGHT, STACY NEWMAN, LISA PATTERSON, KIRSTIN SERDAR

Grainger's Administrative Business Partner Benching Team of Jennifer, Kirstin, Stacy, Lisa and CaSandra is responsible for a proactive initiative addressing recruitment gaps by preparing candidates for excellence from day one. The pilot program, set for a comprehensive launch later this year, ensures a pool of 'ready-now' candidates through structured development for administrative roles. It includes mentorship, coursework, and mock interviews, filling a previous void in structured mentorship. The ultimate benefit of this program is the establishment of a transparent and attainable career trajectory for

individuals aiming to transition into administrative roles within the business. The program's success is not only a milestone for the administrative division but also a beacon of inspiration for the entire company, showcasing the potential for innovation and growth. As we look forward to the continued evolution of this program, we celebrate the hard work, ingenuity, and collaborative spirit that have made it possible. This initiative is more than just a career development pathway – it is a reflection of Grainger's values and a blueprint for future endeavors.



**The Business Administration  
Group, UScellular**  
Kathy Dichristofano, Jennifer Latzke,  
Jennifer Lewis, Megan Moore, Lori  
Snyder, Judy Szura



**Administrative Professionals  
Leadership Team, Cincinnati Children's  
Hospital Medical Center**  
Ashley Ayers, Heather Binning,  
Melissa Ensign, Melissa Gray, Jennifer  
Luebbering, Xeng Karns

## GOOD AS GOLD

### BEST OUTFIT PRIZE DRAWING



**BRIDGETT BOSS,  
ANN & ROBERT H. LURIE CHILDREN'S  
HOSPITAL OF CHICAGO**

## GOOD AS GOLD

### TEAM SPIRIT PRIZE



**CHICAGO BOARD  
OF EDUCATION**



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