

37th Annual Women of Achievement

Valerie L. Anderson

Associate Alumnae of Douglass College, Executive Director

The Associate Alumnae of Douglass College was formed by the first graduating class of the New Jersey College for Women in 1922. The AADC launched its \$35 million Capital Campaign and shortly after, Valerie was named Executive Director. Under her leadership, they exceeded the goal by \$7 million. The focus was to construct a new building for the College's Global Village. Despite design changes and complications, the original project was achieved and the building opened in 2016, only one year later.

She has consistently set goals and achieved them, by establishing a Strategic Planning Committee for the short and long-term success of the organization, taking an intensive look at the By-Laws, engaging with key donors and volunteers to commit their time and talents for the benefit of the 37,000 Douglass alumnae, and establishing a close working relationship with members of the Rutgers community.

While the AADC was adjusting to the new relationship with Douglass and Rutgers, Valerie was raising money, managing a reduced staff, engaging alumnae and volunteers, and managing the budget. She oversaw infrastructure changes, securing services for the AADC that was previously provided by Rutgers such as the phone system, databases, email and other communications critical to the organization.

Valerie's achievements were creating the Victoria Dambroski Schmidt '42 Workplace & Professional Development Symposium, the Mabel's Alumnae Mentoring Program, inviting world-class speakers including a Pulitzer Prize winner to the campus, overhauling the AADC's Awards Program and the creation of a Pride Network for the LBGTQ alumnae community.

Valerie's leadership is an ongoing positive influence on New Jersey women and wherever Douglass alumnae reside. Her brilliance, inspiration and diligence makes Valerie Anderson an exceptional leader and a genuine Woman of Achievement. Tina Gordon nominated Valerie.

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Jennifer Beck

New Jersey State Senator

After graduating from Boston College with a degree in Physics and Mathematics, Jennifer obtained her Masters in Government Administration from the University of Pennsylvania. This prepared her for a career in government on the Borough Council in Redbank, an Assemblywoman for one term and a Senator since 2007 representing Monmouth County, New Jersey.

She was one of the prime sponsors of the Historic Pensions and Benefits Reform legislation where she worked hard to ensure that New Jersey's pension system did not fall into bankruptcy while shielding the pensions of New Jersey State employees. Another bill she sponsored was the creation of the Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority promoting lasting economic redevelopment for those affected by the closing of the fort and ensured a smooth transition of the property. Another legislative focus area was the protection of individuals with developmental disabilities, where she sponsored Tara's Law and the Stephen Komminos Law.

Senator Beck has worked tirelessly for sexual assault survivors and established the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program. Most recently, she helped establish the Monmouth County Family Justice Center, which provides services assisting domestic violence and sexual assault survivors.

She aided in the help from Superstorm Sandy by sponsoring a bill to create foreclosure for Sandy victims that would establish temporary protections against foreclosure for families who continue to suffer from economic distress as a result of the storm.

In celebration of Woman's History Month, she introduced, and approved, a resolution honoring the life and work of the late Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick, a 1982 Woman of Achievement. Senator Beck has made an amazing impact on the residents of the State of New Jersey which makes her an obvious choice for this award. This award was nominated by the Woman's Club of Colts Neck.

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Gina Hernandez

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey, Senior Vice President of Programs

For over 13 years, Gina has worked as Vice President of Programs for Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey, making it the premiere child abuse prevention organization in our state. She supervises the many programs the organization offers through her extensive experience with program development, implementation, and evaluation.

She provides technical assistance, quality assurance and training for the home visitation services, family outreach programs and teen parenting programs for over 40,000 families across New Jersey.

A Healthy Families America Certified family support worker/trainer and a national peer reviewer, Gina is currently working with various program research and evaluation with several universities.

Gina graduated with a B.A. in Communications, an M.A. in Counseling and is also a Certified Infant Massage Instructor. She currently teaches the Great Beginnings Start Interaction and Motivational Interviewing for home visitors throughout the state. Her future plans are to bring more evidence-based child abuse prevention programs to this state through Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey.

Her vision is a world where every child has a safe and happy childhood free of abuse and neglect. Her mission is to help parents nurture and develop their children by training staffs of organizations to help parents sustain healthy children is also practiced in her own home. Gina has adopted three children, who were subjected to child abuse, making Gina Hernandez a true Woman of Achievement. She was nominated by Susan Chambers, Special State Project Chairman.

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Michele N. Siekerka

New Jersey Business & Industry Association, President and CEO

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association is this state's largest member organization comprised of 20,000 companies. As President and CEO, Michele has defined strategy and implemented goals to ensure the business climate is competitive, by providing resources and programs that support business sustainability, and working with administrations and legislature on policy issues to advance a positive business climate.

A litigation attorney with a specialization in employment and business law and partner of Needell, Siekerka, and Castellani, Michele is Senior Legal counsel with AAA Mid-Atlantic Inc. Insurance Company and addresses all legal matters in the areas of employee relations, benefits, contract and regulatory compliance.

As an asset to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection as Deputy Commissioner, she led efforts toward comprehensive environmental management, and in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, was responsible for coordinating funding, outreach, and resources for the rebuilding of impacted environmental infrastructure.

Michele serves on the Board of Directors for many organizations and associations such as Investors Bancorp, Inc., Roman Bank Community Foundation, Mercer County Community College, Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness, Trenton Public Education Foundation, the Greater Mercer County Chamber of Commerce and many more.

However, the one association where her leadership skills are used to empower young women is the Girl Scouts of Central and Southern New Jersey. She was awarded a Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts and she took that honor seriously by volunteering her time for many years as a role model for them. She has been honored with many awards throughout the years, unfortunately, too many to name here.

Furthering the goals of the Girls Scouts, a visionary, leader, mentor and champion of small business in this state, Michele N. Siekerka is a true Woman of Achievement. She was nominated by Jean Battaglia.

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Robyn Urman

Pet ResQ, Inc., Founder

They say there is a special place in Heaven for animal lovers and an even more special spot for those who rescue sick, abandoned, abused, and handicapped dogs. Robyn is that special person. For almost 18 years, she has helped over 3,000 dogs, who may never have a second chance, by getting them back into good health and finding them loving homes. Although she accepts monetary donations through fundraisers, the burden of the funding comes from her directly.

She not only helps dogs in her area of the state but when she hears of a natural disaster, she packs up her car with supplies and heads there to help animals abandoned by their owners. She arranges to have them transported back to New Jersey so that she can take care of them. During the most recent Hurricane Harvey disaster, and due to the high water flooding, she saved dogs and cats that may have drowned and arranged for another 200 brought to New Jersey to foster homes. She has a network of animal lovers across the country informing her on the troubled areas. She has also rescued animals from 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. She coordinates drop-off areas for food and water donations for the people affected in those areas, as well. Internationally, she has rescued neglected dogs from Egypt, Puerto Rico and other areas overseas.

Her dream is to open a shelter for the abandoned dogs, but right now her home is where she takes in dogs with severe medical issues. One year the vet bill was over \$160,000, most of which was paid by Robyn.

A champion of dogs in need, and an inspiration to us all, Robyn Urban is an exceptional Woman of Achievement, and she was nominated by the Cresskill Woman's Club.