



Molly Berendt
Dr. Susan Koch
Margaret "Boony" Luparell
Rasha Said
Dr. Tracey Smith
M.T. Vann (posthumously)

Security Bank and *Springfield Business Journal* are proud to bring you the 14th annual Women of Influence. This program honors local women for their contributions to the Springfield area community. Selected by their peers through submitted nominations, all have made important contributions to the community at large.

You are invited to join us in celebrating their achievements at a reception on Tuesday, May 9, at the Inn at 835. The reception will be held at 5 p.m. with an awards ceremony to follow at 6 p.m. Please let us know if you plan to attend by calling 217-726-6600 or emailing info@springfieldbusinessjournal.com.

Molly Berendt

PHOTO / TERRY FARMER

BY COURTNEY ENLOW HALL

Molly Berendt was 23 years old when she started the program that would change both her life and the lives of Springfield's homeless children. Beginning as a ministry at Douglas Avenue Methodist Church, the Compass program – now Compass for Kids – sought to support homeless children at Dubois Middle School. Within a year, this volunteer project became her career. Five years later, it has expanded into an entire nonprofit organization.

Compass was an after-school program held at churches in several neighborhoods when it became part of Family Service Center in 2011. The after-school program provides transportation to the students, as well as an evening meal, mentorship and classes. Compass works with around 200 kids who are in low-income, at-risk situations, including homelessness, foster care and substandard housing.

The program has since expanded to include a summer camp, Camp Compass. The camp provides more than fun summer days; its purpose is to ensure children maintain the education provided during the school year.

"Low-income kids – especially homeless kids – lose a lot of ground over the summer

months that they're not in school," Berendt says. "This program helps provide necessary tools and enrichment so they don't fall behind."

In addition to education, the summer camp program provides much-needed consistency for children whose home situations are less stable. The program is set up like a typical school day, with breakfast and lunch in between reading, math and life skills classes, as well as field trips and swimming.

In 2016, Compass for Kids went out on its own. The parting of ways was the best decision for both groups: Family Service Center's focus is fostering and adoption, whereas Compass is wholly dedicated to homeless and at-risk youth, requiring a great deal of community engagement and fundraising. As an independent and distinct entity, Compass now has its own board of directors.

"You can only imagine the paperwork and filing that went into this, and there's no way I could do it myself," Berendt says. "Our board worked tirelessly to make sure we had our ducks in a row to make this happen. I'm just so grateful for our board of directors and volunteers and all the local organizations we partner with. This has become a community-wide effort."

Those efforts have opened the door for expanded programs. Camp Compass, formerly a four- to five-week program, is now six weeks long, thanks to funding from the United Way.

"Six weeks is the most effective amount of time for a program like this," Berendt says.

Compass is seeking additional funding to add 40 children to the usual 80 summer spots available. The after-school program has expanded to five elementary schools: Blackhawk, DuBois, Harvard Park, Graham and McClelland. With the exception of Graham, which is a year-round school, all of the 125 after-school program participants are invited to Camp Compass.

Along with the summer camp's usual theme weeks – focusing on art, health and STEM education – Camp Compass has added new ones such as Abraham Lincoln week and a cultural appreciation week. This is thanks, in part, to the interests and needs of the kids themselves.

"They were interested in the election and racism this past year, so we brought in people to discuss those issues," Berendt says. "They love camp. They talk about it all school year. They love sharing with other kids, and they thrive in the program."

Further expansion is in the pipeline for

Compass. Thanks to a grant from the Young Philanthropists, next year, Compass will begin piloting a home visit program at Blackhawk Elementary to better engage parents of Compass children with their teachers and school administration.

"Those are the families who are harder to reach and connect with school," Berendt says.

Compass will work with the parents and teachers, including providing transportation to parent-teacher conferences and events, to help make parents feel they can walk into the school and not be intimidated.

While Berendt is the executive director and developed the program, she is quick to share any accolades.

"I'm not the one who should be getting recognized; it's Compass and the hundreds of people who make it happen. If you look back to 2011, probably thousands," she said. "I'm constantly grateful to this community; that's why my husband and I decided to buy a house and stay here."

Berendt points out that Compass is only able to exist because there is a need for it.

"But there's also such a response," she said, "and it's such a genuine, heartfelt response." ♦



Dr. Susan J. Koch

PHOTO / TERRY FARMER

BY ROBERTA CODEMO

Dr. Susan J. Koch always looked up to her mother, who worked full-time while raising five children in a rural South Dakota town.

"She was a very courageous and dedicated person," Koch said. "She had high expectations for us. I didn't want to disappoint her."

Whenever she left the house, Koch's mother always told her, "I expect you to conduct yourself like a lady."

"I had a reputation to live up to," Koch recalls.

In 2011, Koch was named chancellor of the University of Illinois Springfield, where her leadership has led to the institution's steady growth and strengthening.

Koch and her brothers and sisters never questioned that they were supposed to do something with their lives. Her parents were well-educated professionals and came from large metropolitan areas. From an early age, they were exposed to opportunities outside their peer group. She recalls spending summers in Chicago and Denver, her parents' hometowns.

"It was clear to us the world was a big place," Koch said. "We were encouraged to explore."

A product of the Catholic school system in the 1950s, she credits the Presentation Sisters with instilling a love of learning in her. Every Saturday would find her at the local Carnegie Library.

"I learned to read at an early age," she said.

While she had a wonderful childhood, she also recalls the constraints that were placed on women in that era.

"It was a very gendered society," she said.

As a result, she feels she missed out on some opportunities reserved at that time only for boys. For example, after she married, her spouse asked her if she wanted to go pheasant hunting, a popular recreation in the Dakotas. She had never been hunting because it was something girls didn't do. She went and found she enjoyed it.

She graduated from Dakota State University in South Dakota with honors with a bachelor's degree in education and started her career as a high school teacher. She later

earned her master's and doctoral degrees in community health and education from the University of Northern Iowa.

Koch took on her current role at a time when both the Chicago and Urbana-Champaign campuses for University of Illinois were led by women.

"It was an amazing experience being chancellors together," she said.

Under Koch's leadership, enrollment at UIS has grown, diversity on campus has increased and the university is building its first student union. Koch, who retains a tenured faculty position in the College of Education and Human Services, has also led an effort to beautify the UIS campus, including the Shakespeare Garden, complete with a sculpture of the Bard himself.

Koch and her family have put down roots here, and it's important to her to be part of the community in which she lives. Among the organizations she belongs to are the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce's Q5 Strategic Leadership Council, United Way of Central Illinois and Memorial Health System's board of directors.

In addition, Koch writes a regular column

in the *State Journal-Register*. She is also very active on campus, saying, "I enjoy being part of a diverse intellectual community."

Nobody succeeds alone. A dedicated member of the Evelyn Brandt Thomas fan club, Koch credits the women she has met throughout her career with providing support, advice and mentoring along the way. Likewise, Koch's family is also very important to her.

"I have a wonderful spouse and partner in life," Koch said, adding that she has raised her children to be empathetic and kind, to aim high and to bring others along with them.

When Koch was asked to serve as chancellor at UIS six years ago, it was a natural career trajectory from dean to associate provost to provost. From an early age, she knew she was headed towards a leadership position.

"I was raised with the idea that everybody had an obligation to be all they could be," she said. ♦

Margaret “Boony” Luparell

PHOTO / TERRY FARMER

BY ROBERTA CODEMO

The odds were stacked against Margaret “Boony” Luparell of Dawson from day one. Born on the south side of Chicago, her family moved to Springfield when she was about four years old. She grew up on Springfield’s north side, the youngest of five children.

“I come from very humble beginnings,” she said. “It was tough.”

Luparell’s older siblings raised her, and she was expected to contribute financially to the household from a young age. She graduated from Lanphier High School but never attended college. Luparell says she has always felt she had to prove herself.

“I think this responsibility at such a young age instilled a very strong work ethic,” she said.

Luparell has used that work ethic to build two businesses, and she gives back by volunteering in several roles. Her contributions enrich the community by molding young people and supporting the

arts in Springfield.

Luparell was working for the State of Illinois when Connie Matrisch with the Credit Bureau of Springfield hired her in Luparell’s first managerial role – one for which she says she’s forever grateful. She left after four years to help her husband run CapiTel Communications.

“I had never balanced a checkbook,” Luparell, said, recalling the first time she opened Quickbooks and saw they were in the red. She says she cried for a month. “I thought, ‘I just quit a good paying job.’”

She credits three close friends with teaching her more than any business course could. She could bounce ideas off them, and they shared tidbits of wisdom with her.

“They were an oasis,” she said.

Within five years, CapiTel went from one store to 15, before they sold the business in 2008.

Luparell says it’s important for her to give back to the community because others helped her. A strong supporter of the Springfield Youth Hockey Association,

she hosts Springfield Junior Blues players in her home. She is also a mentor for high school students in the Sangamon CEO program and serves as social chairperson for the Springfield Old Capitol Art Fair.

When Luparell looks back on her childhood, she sees a lot of kids who are growing up now the way she did, who just need to know someone cares. She mentors at-risk children at Washington Middle School through a feeder program for the Sangamon CEO program.

“I’ve been where you are,” she said, explaining how she approaches students. “I’ve lived where you live. I want you to know there’s more out there.”

Luparell says children need support from the community, and she thinks often about the world she wants her sons to live in.

“They have to have hope,” she said. “My children are my whole life. My life went from black-and-white to color when I had them.”

Before having children, Luparell says, her life revolved around work. Now, she

doesn’t want to miss a second with them. In 2011, she bought another business, A Storage Box, because it allows her to spend more time with her kids.

“It fits me,” she said.

Luparell says it’s important for her children to know where they come from. She’s raising them not to be judgmental.

“Everyone has the right to live within their own skin,” she said, adding that she’s a firm believer in equality. “It’s important to step in when someone is not being treated fairly.”

For now, Luparell is focused on helping her sons navigate their way into adulthood. She wants to instill a clear understanding of right and wrong in them, along with compassion, empathy and love – and some sick hockey skills.

Luparell says that if someone had told her as a young woman that she would someday be a successful business woman and help improve her community, she wouldn’t have believed them.

“If I can do this, anyone can,” she said. “Don’t give up on your dreams.” ♦



PHOTO / TERRY FARMER

Dr. Tracey Smith

BY COURTNEY ENLOW HALL

As the director of population health and community outreach for the SIU Center for Family Medicine, Dr. Tracey Smith has devoted her professional life to providing access and equity to people in vulnerable situations.

"When I look at something, I always look at it in terms of a system," she said. "Whether it's nurses being satisfied in their jobs, or crime-rate reduction, to better the system itself opens doors to change."

Smith is at the forefront of a partnership between SIU and a handful of other groups in Springfield which is creating measurable, long-term change in communities – from better health to lower crime rates.

Smith's focus on systemic problems dates back to the beginning of her career as a nurse. As a case manager in the public health department in her hometown of Gillespie, Smith saw gaps that desperately needed to be filled.

"We have got to do something about the things we don't want to accept," she says.

Thanks to what she credits as great mentoring, Smith went back to school to get

her master's degree and doctor of nursing practice degree, which now provide her the tools to change the system herself.

Smith's focus on systemic issues came in adulthood, but her interest in social needs is lifelong. For that, she thanks her parents. Growing up on a farm, her family would often take in people who needed a job or a place to live, including young children.

"We didn't have a lot of material possessions, but we had a lot of wealth in terms of love," Smith said.

And like her parents, she chose to never shut doors on anyone or anything.

"I always just said 'sure.' I never said 'no,' and that opened up a lot of opportunities," she said.

One such opportunity was SIU School of Medicine. When she started at SIU 20 years ago, there was no role like hers – one with a focus on providing access to health care for populations which are vulnerable to systemic problems such as racism and poverty.

"That comes from having great mentors," Smith said. "They knew they needed to have something in this direction, but I was able to determine the path. I was always

able to connect with those who were helping those who were socially vulnerable. I could always investigate and take a different approach to educate, based on a person's individual needs."

Addressing those needs has developed into a series of endeavors implemented by SIU School of Medicine and spearheaded by Smith. The Enos Park Access to Care Collaborative, a program dedicated to increasing access to health care in the Enos Park neighborhood, began in the fall of 2015 as a three-year pilot program. Already, it has had far-reaching implications such as improvements in health care coverage and a decrease in emergency department visits. Beyond health care measures, the project has also spurred a decrease in parolee recidivism and neighborhood crime, as well as a 50-percent increase in employment.

As Smith would say, they changed the system, and the results are overwhelmingly positive - for both the community and for Smith.

"The excitement of young students who want change, the excitement of seeing my daughter who stands up for people being

bullied, the excitement of our patients – those little things keep me moving forward," she says. "How do we create systems based on what people bring to the table rather than conform and change who they are?"

As a mother of two daughters, ages 10 and 16, Smith sees a lot of herself in her girls. Her older daughter is gravitating toward Smith's drive to affect systemic issues.

"She's always questioning and wondering what the next steps are, how we can change things," Smith said.

Her younger daughter, who has autism, shares her love of people.

"You can walk into a crowded room and people just gravitate toward her," Smith said. "If there's anything you want your kids to have, it's the ability to love people."

Although Smith lives in Carlinville, she's grateful to the Springfield community and feels deeply connected to it.

"Springfield has been trusting and open with me. I don't just work here – I love Springfield," she said. "The support of this community has been so important and has allowed me to do what I do." ♦

Rasha Said

PHOTO / TERRY FARMER

BY COURTNEY ENLOW HALL

Necessity is the mother of invention, and Rasha Said is a mother whose invention was born out of necessity.

When her young son started to lose his vision, Said began to realize how important it was for him to remain independent. On a family trip to Disney World, she found herself attempting to inform him of what was nearby, but there were understandable gaps while she focused on other children or missed things because they were from her own perspective, rather than his.

"I felt bad that it was up to me to tell him what he was near," she says. "Wouldn't it be cool if there was something that could tell you what was around, some app he could use himself?

And he told me, 'Mom, that's too good to be true.'"

After extensive research, it turned out he wasn't wrong. At the time, there was no such device or system that allowed people with visual impairments to explore the world on their own and gather easily digestible information about their surroundings.

Within a few years, there would be, because Said created it herself.

Using Apple's iBeacon technology, which features devices used in the retail market to alert shoppers of promotions and coupons, Said determined that the signals could be used for more than just sale notifications. She could use them for much, much more.

That's how she came up with Aware. Through her company, Sensible Innova-

tions, Said developed Aware in collaboration with the team at LRS Web Solutions. With a visual impairment-friendly display – think bright colors and large fonts – as well as Braille and audio-only functionality, Aware delivers accessible information about a person's surroundings, which Said points out is not the case with even the most well-intentioned Braille signs. Aware can also be used successfully by people with dyslexia and anyone else who has difficulties navigating an unfamiliar environment.

The app was first piloted at Glenwood High School, where her son now attends school, then installed without charge in the Mary Bryant Home. The system was also installed at Chicago Lighthouse, an organization for blind, visually impaired, disabled and veteran communities. Said

has appeared at and given demonstrations to national conferences and symposiums, appeared on Good Day Chicago and been interviewed by the American Foundation for the Blind's magazine.

"There are signs everywhere – multiple ways for me to get information, plenty of options," Said says. "But not for my son or anyone with a visual impairment. Their choices for getting information are limited. Aware gives them another option for living with independence."

What's next for Said and Sensible Innovations? She wants the entire world to talk.

"I want walls to talk, signs to talk," she says, so that everyone is able to get the same information – with or without their eyes. ♦



PHOTO / JOHN KERSTEIN

Mary Therese “M.T.” Vann 1961-2016

BY PATRICK YEAGLE

She grew up the only girl with five brothers. Maybe that was where Mary Therese Vann first learned to hold her own.

Known as M.T. to many, Mary Therese Vann of Springfield died Dec. 31, 2016, leaving a respected legacy of making her own way in the worlds of business and social justice.

M.T. Vann was partly known in Springfield for starting a real estate firm, Prairie Property Solutions. However, she was also a strong advocate for LGBT rights and animal rights, a generous philanthropist and a helping hand in times of need.

The Most Rev. Kevin Vann, who serves as bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange in California, is one of M.T. Vann's five brothers. Vann remembers his sister as larger than life and with a heart full of gratitude.

“She would do anything for anybody,” he said. “She would help all kinds of people on the margins of society.”

Vann notes that Mary Therese was committed to Springfield and took seriously the responsibility that comes with being part of a well-known family. When something needed to be done, he said, Mary Therese was “not just words; she was words and action.”

“She was socially engaged and went out of her way to do things for other folks,” he said. “That kind of presence will be greatly missed.”

Jonna Cooley, executive director of the Phoenix Center in Springfield, met Vann around 2006. Cooley says she and Vann instantly became friends, in part because of their shared passion for LGBT issues. Vann soon joined the Phoenix Center's board of directors and eventually served as board president for eight years and as an honorary board member afterward.

Cooley says Vann never hid who she was, but rather embraced it. In doing so, Vann created space for others to be themselves.

“She said things other people wanted to say but couldn't,” Cooley said. “She definitely opened doors for the LGBT community in Springfield.”

Cooley praises Vann's ability to stay cool, even during conflict.

“No matter if you were in a frenzy, she was always pretty even,” Cooley said. “She would listen even if she was ticked off, and most of the time, you would walk away with an understanding. She could bridge gaps like no one else.”

John Kerstein was Vann's business partner at Prairie Property Solutions, the residential real estate firm they created together in 2012. Kerstein says one of Vann's best qualities was her ability to lead people “without them feeling like they were being led.” He admired Vann's

tenacity, drive and perseverance, but like many who knew her, he emphasizes her eagerness to help others.

“M.T. touched countless lives,” he said, comparing to her St. Francis. “There was always somebody she was helping. That was her life's mission.”

Springfield real estate agent Sam Perks met Vann when she invited him to join Prairie Property Solutions in 2015. Perks said he was instantly drawn to Vann's charisma and trustworthiness.

“Whether it was a personal issue or a business issue, it didn't matter — day or night — she was one person I always knew I could count on,” he said. “It's sobering to realize the void that now exists. It's easy to take for granted the people who are most capable in your life. Not having her here makes it even more apparent that she was one of the most capable people I ever met.” ♦

Congratulations to the 2017 Women of Influence

From the Officers, Employees and Board of Directors of Security Bank

Molly Berendt - Dr. Susan Koch - Margaret "Boony" Luparell
Rasha Said - Dr. Tracey Smith - M.T. Vann (posthumously)



Front Row (L-R):

Kathy Law, AVP Loan Operations
Elly Mackus, President and CEO
Kristy Gue, Branch Manager Chatham Road
Teri Fleckenstein, VP Information Systems

Back Row (L-R):

Karen Hansen, VP, SB Financial
Casey Boggs, FVP Finance
Morgan Beck, VP Enterprise Risk
Mary Ann Dunn, VP Project Management
Bridget Moore, FVP Lending
Missy Willoughby, Financial Advisor

Security Bank is the founder and continuing sponsor of the Women of Influence program, which allows us to recognize area women for their outstanding contributions to our community. As a local bank with a woman President/CEO, and many women officers and directors, we are especially proud to recognize these women for their leadership, both in their professional and personal lives. Congratulations to this year's Women of Influence recipients.

"We are proud to invest in progressive leadership, both for Security Bank and for the Springfield community."

- Elly Mackus



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