



» **TOP DOGS** Clockwise, from left: Robby Dhillon, Dwight Brown, Rob Lydic, Courtney Tarara, Ryan Hoyle, Andrea Trapani, Lee Skandalaris, Leslie Matukaitis, Phillip Rzepka, April Donaldson, Joshua Humphrey, and Niki Serras.

IN THEIR 30 THIRTIES

**THE 2014 CLASS OF 30 IN THEIR THIRTIES
MANAGES GLOBAL BUSINESSES, OVERSEES MAJOR EVENTS,
OPERATES UPSCALE RESTAURANTS, AND FORGES AHEAD
WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES.**

Profiles by **R.J. KING, JOHN S. SCHULTZ, TOM BEAMAN, LEAH BENOIT,
AND DAN CALABRESE** ★ *Photographs by* **DAVID LEWINSKI**



№1 ROLAND N. ALIX // 34

Partner, Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Bloomfield Hills

EMPLOYEES: 150 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Michigan Tech University

Bloomfield Hills-based civil engineering firm Hubbell, Roth & Clark turns 100 this year. And while Roland Alix is only 34 years old, he's been part of the firm for half of his life, starting when he was 17 and worked on survey and inspection crews. He couldn't have foreseen, at the time, that he would eventually become an HRC partner and join the firm's board of directors. "I was given great opportunities by the people I worked under to become a project manager," Alix says. "I was given those opportunities early in my career, working on a large, multifaceted engineering project. There was electrical engineering, structural engineering — and I helped manage all these different kinds of groups as I was coming up through the ranks." At the same time, his work ethic spoke for itself. The partners at HRC were noticing his commitment to the profession through active participation in the American Society of Civil Engineers. Over the past three years, he has served as president of the Committee on Younger Members. In that role, he helped organize the association's annual charity golf outing and a career night with local universities. He believes those efforts played an important role in his advancement within HRC. "Doing that outside of work showed my commitment to the profession and a drive that extended beyond work hours," Alix says. — *Dan Calabrese*



№2 STEVEN BARDOCZ // 36

President and CEO, Savance, Commerce Township

EMPLOYEES: 20 **REVENUE:** \$1.2 million **EDUCATION:** Kettering University

The seed for Savance was planted in Steve Bardocz's head while he was working at a wholesale electrical distributor as a co-op student at General Motors Institute (now Kettering University). The company had a paper-based system for taking orders, quoting prices, and checking inventory. When a quality audit exposed mistakes, Bardocz seized the moment. "All of this seemed ludicrous," he says. "The engineer in me recognized opportunities to improve that process to make the job more efficient." Bardocz started Savance in 1998, a year before he graduated, with the idea that technology could be used to save businesses time and money. The company today has 3,000 customers, some of which have over 8,000 individual users. "Our very first product was a Windows-based ordering and quoting system for the company where I was a co-op," he says. "It gave instant feedback on price and availability, and freed up data entry people for more value-added tasks." Using the same technological architecture, Bardocz later created EIOBoard, which can track the whereabouts of employees or conduct a roll call in an emergency; Datamiser, a plant floor data collection system that records production variables to pinpoint problem areas; and Savance Health which monitors patient visits, physician schedules, and medical assets. "I am driven by solving problems and helping people," Bardocz says. "Work, to me, is not work." — *Tom Beaman*



№3 AARON F. BELEN // 31

President and CEO, AFB Investments/AFB Hospitality Group, Berkley

EMPLOYEES: 100 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** University of Hartford

Fishing on Pine Lake on a late Sunday afternoon in early July, Aaron F. Belen got a call that Hollywood stars Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner had just sat down for dinner at Bistro 82, his new restaurant in downtown Royal Oak. Affleck, in town for the filming of *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, was celebrating the couple's ninth wedding anniversary. "Our staff is well-trained, so I didn't feel as if I had to drop everything and get to the restaurant," says Belen, president and CEO of AFB Investments and AFB Hospitality Group, both in Berkley. From his roots investing in commercial real estate — he got his start at 18 years old — Belen now owns and manages more than 50,000 square feet of space, including Bistro 82 and Sabrage, a nightclub on the second floor of the restaurant, as well as an Einstein Bros. Bagels outlet in Berkley, a food distribution center in Detroit, and private offices. "I am very passionate about hospitality, and I think we absolutely moved the needle for fine dining in downtown Royal Oak," he says. "We're drawing entertainers, business executives, professional athletes, and people who appreciate fine dining and an upscale nightclub scene." Belen says he wants to open additional restaurants and commercial offerings, but isn't interested in being "a big chain." Rather, "It all starts with finding talented people and encouraging them to stay in Michigan," he says. — *R.J. King*

No 4 KATHLEEN BORSCHKE // 34

Senior Account Director, Fulkerson Group, Birmingham

EMPLOYEES: 7 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** University of Michigan

After seven years of selling sponsorships for several National Hockey League teams across the country, Troy native Kathleen Borschke was ready to come home. With no direct job leads, she researched companies that organized sponsorships for major events in metro Detroit and found Birmingham-based Fulkerson Group. Taking a shot in the dark, she sent founder Tavi Fulkerson her resume and pitch, despite knowing there were no open positions. The gamble paid off; Fulkerson took a chance on Borschke and now, nearly four years later, Borschke is a senior account director working with such clients as the North American International Auto Show, the Detroit Jazz Festival, and the Chevrolet Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix. Borschke's key focus, and self-described "baby," is the Grand Prix, where she works with 55 different sponsorship partners. Though others may view the increase in attendance (the 2014 event saw the largest attendance since it returned to Detroit in 2007) and sponsorships as a mark of success, she sees it differently. "When you look at the events we work on, some of the sense of achievement you feel is what is going on with Detroit, as well," Borschke says. "Seeing what (the Grand Prix) has done for both Belle Isle — we cleaned up the park, made it more inviting for residents year-round — and our sponsors, many of which, like Chevrolet, are Detroit-based, has been great." —*Leah Benoit*

**No 5** DWIGHT BROWN // 35

Director of Features and Technology Planning, General Motors Co., Detroit

EMPLOYEES: 212,000 **REVENUE:** \$155.4 billion**EDUCATION:** University of Iowa

Although he started working for General Motors Co. full time in 2004, Dwight Brown's history with the automaker stretches back to his days as an undergraduate at Iowa State University. While studying mechanical engineering, the Iowa native interned with GM and received a job offer from the company — but he turned them down. While Brown accepted a different offer, boredom set in and he left to pursue an MBA from the University of Iowa. Again, he took an internship with the automotive giant. "I always really loved automobiles — cars, trucks — but I was always scared of the automobile industry, due to the cyclical nature of it and not being from Michigan," Brown says. Once he accepted the position, where he and a team seek out new automotive technologies and features, he knew the industry was for him. "I call them 'surprise and delight' features," says Brown, who notes that small details help guide purchase decisions for consumers on tight budgets. Brown attributes his success to his genuine enjoyment of the industry, and encourages young people to find a career in line with their passions. "It can be hard to find your footing in such a big company, but with time you can really find your footing. I definitely see myself sticking with this industry down the road — I've fallen in love with it, and what I do." —*Leah Benoit*

**No 6** ROBBY DHILLON // 33

Founder and President, Rockstar Digital Inc., Sterling Heights

EMPLOYEES: 12 **REVENUE:** \$3 million **EDUCATION:** Kettering University

An entrepreneur at a young age, Robby Dhillon was a deejay during high school and college, and he and his friends performed at various venues in downtown Detroit. He entered the professional world as a co-op student at Kettering University in Flint. "I worked at various jobs at General Motors, first as a co-op student for three years and then four years as a full-time employee," he says. "I majored in computer engineering and electrical engineering, with minors in computer science and acoustics." After leaving GM in 2006, Dhillon went to work for his uncle, a wealth adviser with a private investment firm. "My uncle died soon after, in a car accident, and I had lost my father at a young age, so I was devastated," Dhillon says. "At the funeral, I met one of my uncle's friends, and long story short, I developed a custom point of sale system (display) for Lady Jane's Haircuts for Men. That was my big break." Launching Rockstar Digital, Dhillon combined his software and hardware skills to create displays for an array of clients, as well as LED boards for use inside GM and Chrysler plants. "When the workers look at those boards, they can tell how many cars were produced (that day) and any number of other metrics," he says. "We also help facilitate local concerts, we create events for small- and mid-sized companies, we have our automotive work, and we have special projects." —*R.J. King*





№7 JOHN DIMOVSKI // 37

Co-founder and Managing Partner, Harmon Partners, Birmingham

EMPLOYEES: 2 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Michigan State University

More than a decade ago, John Dimovski got his first taste of how accounting and auditing can impact personal lives. Following graduation, he joined PwC as an auditor, where he stayed for six years before joining Ernst & Young. He enjoyed the work, but he noticed he had little impact on the outside world. Over time, he transitioned into forensic accounting, business valuations, and litigation support. "I was working as an auditor in 1999 when there was a large explosion at the Ford Rouge Plant (in Dearborn), and a partner of mine had the Ford account and asked if I could help out for six to eight weeks, but it turned out to be six or eight months," he recalls. "It was a very eye-opening experience, and we were able to recoup a large portion of the property damage and business interruption from the insurance companies." Over time, Dimovski looked for an opportunity to transition to a boutique environment where he could work one on one with owners of small- and medium-sized firms. Two years ago, he partnered with Meagan Hardcastle, and the pair opened Harmon Partners. Today, the company works with businesses "that have annual revenue of between \$1 million and \$200 million, but the sweet spot is \$50 million to \$60 million," he says. "Our four core service offerings are business valuation, management consulting, succession planning, and corporate finance. I couldn't be happier." — *R.J. King*



№8 APRIL DONALDSON // 38

Executive Vice President, Strategic Staffing Solutions, Detroit

EMPLOYEES: 2,300 **REVENUE:** \$238 million **EDUCATION:** NA

April Donaldson cites Cindy Pasky, founder, president, and CEO of Detroit-based Strategic Staffing Solutions, as the mentor who has both trained her and positioned her for leadership. "For 12 years, I've been under her wing," Donaldson says. "She's not only helped mentor me in different areas of how to run the business and how to put our customers first — because if it's the right answer for them, then it's also the right answer for our business — but she's also allowed me to be the mentor, and I'm valuing that." Donaldson joined the company in a marketing position, and advanced into an executive role as she mastered more aspects of the global IT and business services provider. "My goal is to double the company's size within the next three years, and my priority is to execute the strategy to do that, (where) I touch just about everything in our company," Donaldson says. "I have direct responsibility for a fourth of our regional operations and a third of our customer relationships." Every day, Donaldson says she makes a point of meeting personally with customers and team members. "It's my job to support them," she says. "I work for them, not the other way around." In addition, Donaldson serves on the advisory board at Staffing Industry Analysts, an organization that serves as global advisers to the staffing industry. — *Dan Calabrese*



№9 WALTER K. EVANS // 33

COO, The Barthwell Group, Detroit

EMPLOYEES: 15 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Stanford University

Walter K. Evans recalls his first brush with business, when his grandfather would ask him to count the change from that day's drugstore receipts. "I would roll up the quarters so we could deposit them in the bank," says Evans, whose grandfather, the late Sidney Barthwell, built up a chain of 13 drugstores and three ice cream stores, mostly in Detroit. During high school, Evans helped a small newspaper digitize its supplier base and tap technology to better manage the operations. In 2001, during his junior year at Stanford University, he took a part-time position at an investment firm in the Bay area where, over the course of five years he rose to the position of lead analyst for venture capital and private equity fund to fund products. "That was a very interesting time. I think most people had heard of Google, but companies like Facebook and Netflix were still in their infancy, so to watch them grow to what they are today was pretty amazing," Evans says. In 2006, he returned to Detroit and, with his mother, Akosua Barthwell, the pair launched The Barthwell Group, a strategic management-consulting firm that today works with Lockheed Martin, Wayne State University, and McKesson. "We work on management issues, strategic planning, brand enhancement, and workforce development," Evans says. The company's three client groups are higher education and not-for-profit organizations, corporations, and the military. — *R.J. King*



» WINNER'S CIRCLE

From left: Aaron F. Belen, Dr. Carlos A. Ramirez, Walter K. Evans, John Dimovski, Brad Lott, and Niall Hay



№10 BRIAN FOSTER // 38

Co-owner, Stars and Stripes Activity Center, Clarkston

EMPLOYEES: 25 **REVENUE:** \$2 million **EDUCATION:** NA

By offering activities as diverse as preschool, summer camp programs, and piano lessons, Brian Foster hopes the Stars and Stripes Activity Center will cause young people to experience a digital disconnect. “The biggest thing is to get kids unplugged from iPads and cell phones, and get them involved with activities that stimulate their brains and keep them moving,” says Foster, a former Oakland County Sheriff’s deputy who opened the facility with his wife and a business partner in 2002 to teach gymnastics. Foster says by offering programs that kids love, hiring qualified staff, and providing an appealing environment for parents, the Stars and Stripes brand competes well in the recreation space. Unable to secure an initial bank loan of \$90,000, Foster borrowed money from his family and paid it back within a year. Stars and Stripes operates within 26,000 square feet of space — up from 5,000 square feet — and today has several thousand students in its year-round programs, which include competitive cheerleading and karate. “We have students who start with us as toddlers and might be in and out of programs all the way through high school,” Foster says. As for expansion, he will forgo the franchise route in his plans to expand to 100 locations. Instead, he plans to seek out strategic partners. “Our system is a win for the kids, for parents, and for entrepreneurs,” he says. — *Tom Beaman*



№11 NIALL HAY // 36

Brand Director, Penske Automotive Group, Bloomfield Township

EMPLOYEES: 19,900 **REVENUE:** \$14.7 billion **EDUCATION:** Ohio State University

At first, Niall Hay thought he would be a banker — but his parents, both physicians, envisioned their son as a lawyer. After earning an economics degree, Hay landed an interview with Detroit Diesel in Livonia, and went to work for Roger Penske in sales and marketing. Soon after, Detroit Diesel was sold and Hay left and joined Penske Automotive Group, which today operates more than 325 dealerships in the United States, western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. “Since I started, the company has grown four or five times (in size),” Hay says. “Today, I’m a brand manager for Fiat and Chrysler, and soon Alfa Romeo. Every day is a little different.” Hay worked on e-commerce initiatives before being promoted to brand manager in March. “The best way to describe what I do is acting as a representative between the manufacturer and our dealership group. We work on promotions, performance, personnel, and financing, all the while keeping excellent customer service at the forefront,” he says. “People want to do business with people they like, so we do everything we can to satisfy our customers.” Outside of work, Hay is a partner at Cornerstone Schools in Detroit, where he helps mentor students and prepare them for college. He’s also working with others to re-form a chapter of the First Tee in Detroit, a nonprofit organization that teaches the game of golf to students and provides an array of life skills programs. — *R.J. King*



№12 RYAN HOYLE // 38

Vice President Business Development and Talent Acquisition, GalaxE.Solutions, Detroit

EMPLOYEES: 2,000 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Rutgers University

Ryan Hoyle arrived in Detroit from New Jersey in 2010 to address one of GalaxE.Solutions’ greatest challenges: cultivating the company’s market competitiveness while realizing a vision of Detroit as an international hub for IT. As vice president of business development and talent acquisition, Hoyle oversees a team of 60 recruiters and dozens of support staffers from the company’s software development center in downtown Detroit. “Unemployment is so low in IT, there aren’t enough resources to take on all the job openings,” he says. The company has partnerships with organizations like Quicken Loans, Marketing Associates, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and others to train the next generation of IT workers through a program called Experience IT. “It’s a good example of how we are turning it up as it relates to training ... and how it relates to how we’re able to have an impact on people’s lives. Most of these students are new to IT, and they’re coming out of this program with careers.” He says students must understand the industry has evolved. “Technology doesn’t work in a bubble; it’s not the old-school IT team working in a basement creating reports or spreadsheets. It is used to solve complex business problems, so it’s not good enough to know technology; you have to understand the business, as well.” — *John S. Schultz*

No 13 JOSHUA HUMPHREY // 37

COO, Peas & Carrots Hospitality, Birmingham

EMPLOYEES: 290 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Johnson & Wales University

Growing up on a farm outside of Lansing, Josh Humphrey attended Central Michigan University for two years before moving to Providence, R.I. to complete a culinary degree program at Johnson & Wales University. Following graduation, Humphrey went on a multicity tour, serving as a chef and operating manager for restaurants and hotels in South Carolina, Denver, Dallas, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, and Las Vegas. At the last stop, he met Zach Sklar, a partner with Jim Bellinson in Peas & Carrots Hospitality in Birmingham, which owns and operates Social Kitchen and Bar in downtown Birmingham and MEX in Bloomfield Township. "Zach found me in Las Vegas and we had breakfast at the Wynn, and soon after (in July 2013) I came back to Michigan," says Humphrey, COO of Peas & Carrots. "At first, I was the executive chef and general manager, and then I hired an executive chef and general manager, and we opened MEX." The company recently added its third restaurant, Beau's, at the former Beau Jack's at Maple and Telegraph in Bloomfield Township. The 165-seat eatery features a large brass bar, a chef's table, and a menu highlighted by steaks, chops, seafood, and 20 rotating side dishes. "What I've learned in my career is that trust and integrity is everything," Humphrey says. "The way I was brought up, I didn't understand not working. I was brought up to do the right thing, no matter what." — *R.J. King*

**No 14** JESSICA KNAPIK // 35

Data Analyst, Walsh College, Troy

ENROLLMENT: 4,038 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Walsh College

As a data analyst at Walsh College in Troy, Jessica Knapik finds joy not in numbers, but in the number of jobs she can juggle at one time. Since starting her career more than a dozen years ago, Knapik's role at the school has continued to evolve and progress. And she likes it that way. "(The college administration has) seen my potential, understands my interests, and I've been able to incorporate what I like to do into something useful for the college," she says. As a self-described liaison between the college's departments, Knapik monitors student enrollment data, manages social media pages, and coordinates special events for the school, among other duties. "I have a variety of things that I can work on, from brainstorming ideas with the marketing team to coming up with ideas for school events or solving problems for students, and I enjoy it all," she says. Knapik is also active outside of her job. In 2008, she helped create an outreach project to collect school supplies for the Blackwell Institute, an elementary school in Detroit. The program has since expanded under her guidance, and now includes tutoring sessions provided by nearly 250 volunteers skilled in reading, writing, and math. She also sits on two fundraising committees for Gilda's Club, and serves on the mentoring program for the Michigan Council of Women in Technology. — *John S. Schultz*

**No 15** JEFF LANTZ // 31

Founder and Owner, Maybury Child Care, Northville Township

EMPLOYEES: 35 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** NA

Jeff Lantz set out in his early 20s to become a force on ice as a professional hockey player. And while that venture took him to outposts like Bismarck, N.D. and Sioux City, Iowa, Lantz would ultimately find his calling enhancing the lives of children. With his hockey career finished at the age of 22, Lantz decided in 2005 to follow his mother's lead and become the owner of his own day care center — the first based in Northville Township. "I talked to my wife and I said, 'I want to open a day care center,' and she said, 'What do you know about day care?'" Lantz recalls. "I said, 'I know what I want for my kid.'" What Lantz wanted was a combination of learning and nurturing — something he didn't find with his competitors. "There wasn't a lot of learning going on," Lantz says. "Every one of my lead teachers has their associate's degree in child development. It feels like it's kind of a good mix between academics and nurturing." Maybury went through tough times in the beginning, as the 2008 global financial crisis saw day care among the first cuts made from many household budgets. Lantz and his team soldiered through the downturn and in 2010, they opened another location — a larger center in Canton Township. He plans to add a third location in the next few years. "It's rewarding to know that every day you can impact a child's life for the better," Lantz says. — *Dan Calabrese*





» CUTTING THE MUSTARD From left: Jason Teshuba, Jessica Knapik, Vatche Tazian, Jeff Lothian, Kathleen Borschke, and Jeff Lantz.

No 16 JEFF LOTHIAN // 37

Executive Vice President, Impact Management Services, Southfield

EMPLOYEES: 18 **REVENUE:** \$17 million **EDUCATION:** Central Michigan University

Growing up in Bay City, Jeff Lothian gained valuable experience sourcing, screening, orientating, and training key personnel in the manufacturing sector by working every job imaginable at his family's business. The company manufactured and installed large boilers and turbines for use inside power plants, and Lothian did everything from working on the factory floor to driving large delivery trucks. "I was working with pipefitters and boilermakers, sort of those old-school trades that provide tremendous value for the companies they work for," says Lothian. Starting in 2005, he joined entrepreneur Pete Davis, and the pair quickly expanded what was a firm specializing in professional engineering staffing solutions to include light industrial job placements, since renamed Impact Management Services. "Our biggest segment is serving what we call commercial staffing, so finding those key personnel that are needed for any company to grow their business," he says. "As everyone knows, there's a war on talent right now, pay rates have climbed, and there's more perks, so things are very competitive." Lothian says a key factor in the company's success is identifying skilled workers, such as welders, who are looking to stay for the long term. "Finding reliable, quality people is what sets us apart," he says. The firm, he says, is on pace to record \$30 million in sales this year, and through acquisitions, will be at \$100 million in 2017. — *R.J. King*

**No 17** BRAD LOTT // 37

Senior Vice President, Corporate Sales, Palace of Auburn Hills

EMPLOYEES: 250 **ATTENDANCE:** 2 million **EDUCATION:** Augustana College

During college, Brad Lott took to the mound for his baseball team, but he realized his arm wasn't going to carry him to the major leagues. Still, with an eye on becoming the president of a professional sports team, he took an entry-level position with the Quad Cities River Bandits, a minor league baseball team in Iowa. He spent three years there, learning every facet of the business. Next, he joined the Tampa Bay Lightning, then owned by the late William Davidson, former owner of the Detroit Pistons. "I started out with Tampa Bay in 2001 and held about seven different jobs over 12 years," says Lott, senior vice president of corporate sales at the Palace of Auburn Hills. "I kept learning and, for about 18 months, I was director of building operations, which was a nice change because it gave me a 360-degree view of the games, concerts, and the (2012) Republican National Convention." In late 2012, he was recruited to the Palace empire, which includes DTE Energy Music Theatre. While the Pistons are in a rebuilding mode, he nonetheless highlights millions of dollars of improvements at the Palace recently undertaken by team owner Tom Gores. "It's great to be part of a turnaround, which is one of the things that attracted me to Detroit," Lott says. "One of the coolest things I experienced was the eight-sold out Kid Rock concerts (at DTE) last summer. It was the first time I really felt the Detroit pride." — *R.J. King*

**No 18** ROB LYDIC // 39

President, IP Security Reps, Brighton

EMPLOYEES: 13 **REVENUE:** \$45 million **EDUCATION:** Texas State University

Launching a startup in Brighton in 2010, Rob Lydic has steered his company into rapid-growth mode, recording \$45 million in revenue last year. The firm, IP Security Reps, provides an array of surveillance and security systems for large corporations, federal and local law enforcement agencies, and schools. "I came into the marketplace at a time when the technology was emerging to meet the growing demand for safety and security," says Lydic, president of IP Security Reps. Over the last two years, the company has installed numerous software and hardware upgrades in downtown Detroit, including some 2,000 cameras, and helped to equip a central command center. "We work in 17 states throughout the Midwest and in the mid-Atlantic region," says Lydic, who attributes part of his success to his teenage years, when he launched a lawn-cutting business. "I learned about the cost of goods and services, how to manage the business, and how to treat customers and employees in a very professional manner." The entrepreneur launched his second business right after college, a data communication sales firm that he sold in December 2009. "The biggest factor I see in building up a company is to have a top-notch sales staff," he says. "If the staff is well-trained, provides excellent customer service, and looks for new opportunities for growth, everything else will take care of itself." — *R.J. King*





№19 LESLI MATUKAITIS // 38

Senior Vice President, Dearborn Federal Credit Union Financial, Dearborn
EMPLOYEES: 500+ **ASSETS:** \$3.7 billion **EDUCATION:** Wayne State University

If not for a turn of events while Lesli Matukaitis was going to college, she most likely would be working for the family tire retread business rather than heading up the commercial loan department for the largest credit union in Michigan. “I thought I would work there during and after college, and eventually work my way up to owning the business,” she says. However, the family sold the enterprise during her junior year, so Matukaitis set her sights on a career in finance. After graduation, Matukaitis landed at Comerica Bank and worked in the commercial lending department for 16 years. In April, she was recruited by Dearborn Federal Credit Union Financial to build and manage its first-ever commercial lending department. “It’s exhilarating to build an entirely new line of business for DFCU Financial and have the ability to, with the help of many employees, create this department from the ground up,” she says. At Comerica, Matukaitis’ detailed, driven-results earned her the Chairman’s Circle for Leadership. Outside of work, Matukaitis is involved with the National Association of Women Business Owners, an organization that provides ongoing education, support, and mentoring to girls and women wanting to start or grow a successful business. She also sits on the board of Starfish Family Services, a nonprofit that serves thousands of vulnerable children and families annually in metro Detroit. — *John S. Schultz*



№20 DR. CARLOS A. RAMIREZ // 36

Director, LakeShore Center for Head and Neck, Maxillofacial and Reconstructive Surgery, St. John Providence Health System, Warren
EMPLOYEES: 3,000 **REVENUE:** \$400 million
EDUCATION: Wayne State University School of Medicine

While completing his residency at St. John Providence Health System in Warren, Dr. Carlos A. Ramirez observed an increasing amount of head and neck cancer patients receiving treatment elsewhere due to a lack of services available within the St. John system. The native of Peru was inspired to make a change. He sought a fellowship in microvascular reconstruction under the direction of world-renowned head, neck, and microvascular surgeon Dr. Rui Fernandes at the University of Florida. Under his guidance, the Wayne State Medical School graduate worked to develop and gain approval from St. John’s for the Center for Head and Neck, Maxillofacial and Reconstructive Surgery. Since its opening in July 2013, Ramirez and his staff have helped more than 250 patients with head and neck cancer, congenital malformations, and facial trauma. He’s also working to develop a Microvascular Surgery Fellowship training program within the next two years, where students would receive the same guidance he did. Ramirez attributes his success to being able to find a need in his field and fill it. “Learn to visualize outcomes and all their different permutations, and proceed with the one that will give you the best result,” he says. — *Leah Benoit*



№21 PHILLIP RZEPKA // 38

Group Director of Digital, Carat, Detroit
EMPLOYEES: 80 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Wayne State University

When Phil Rzepka decided to leave an innovation-focused role at Starcom to become group director of digital at the Detroit-based startup Carat, he understood the inherent risk. But he also saw an opportunity to add excitement to the next phase of his career. “When I was making the decision, it was more personal,” Rzepka says. “It was to stay with the General Motors account, with a chance for a broader leadership position. It was the chance to build something from the ground up and work the 90-hour weeks required to do something like that.” Rzepka was part of the second wave of people hired at Carat, now one of Detroit’s fastest-growing agencies. “We’ve got tons of young people, a high-energy work environment, and a chance to really help GM succeed,” he says. Combining a strong automotive and tech background that he applies to digital applications, Rzepka oversees a group of about 80 employees. “We’re making sure GM is on the cutting edge of the digital marketing environment, working with companies like Google and Facebook and making sure GM’s marketing department is world-class in that environment,” he says. Rzepka also recently became the 108th president of the Adcraft Club of Detroit, where his priorities include contemporizing the club and driving stronger connections with the creative forces within the region. — *Dan Calabrese*



» GETTING GRILLED
From left: Courtney
Tarara, Lesli Matukaitis,
Ryan Hoyle, Phillip
Rzepka, Dwight Brown,
and Rob Lydic.



№ 22 RYAN SCHRAM // 34

COO, IZEA, Milford

EMPLOYEES: 50 **FUNDING:** \$36M **EDUCATION:** Michigan State University

The mainstream media have always made their money mixing sizzle with spice. Still, the business side of the industry has changed dramatically, which means the revenue model isn't like it was 20 years ago, or even five years ago. Enter Ryan Schram, the Milford-based COO of Winter Park, Fla.-based IZEA. The company deals in sponsored social marketing, which might involve a public figure with several million Facebook fans or Twitter followers posting or tweeting about a client and getting paid for doing so. Schram began to recognize the power of the idea thanks to Ted Murphy, a friend in Florida who founded IZEA and became his boss. "Basically, I remember the day in 2006 when Ted told me, 'I believe that social is to the point now where every single one of us can be as powerful as a publisher, especially when you understand how that works at scale, and there needs to be a marketplace that exists to bring these influencers together with these brands, and I'm gonna do it.'" Five years after Murphy launched the company, he persuaded Schram to leave his job with Pleasant Ridge-based ePrize (since renamed Hello World Inc.) and join IZEA, initially as marketing director. "A couple months into the role, we quickly realized that not only did I bring marketing expertise, we really needed operational excellence, as well," Schram recalls. A year later, he was promoted to COO. "It's been a great ride," he says. — *Dan Calabrese*



№ 23 TED SERBINSKI // 32

Partner, Detroit Venture Partners, Detroit

EMPLOYEES: 275 **PORTFOLIO:** 24 investments **EDUCATION:** Cornell University

Growing up in a military family, Ted Serbinski never lived in one city for more than three years. "It prepared me to accept and embrace change," he says. Following graduation in 2004, he moved to Washington, D.C. and joined a 20-person government contractor. Soon after, he started working with Drupal, a free open source software platform. In 2006, Serbinski and two partners started Lullabot, an advanced Drupal consulting firm. When one of his partners and his wife started ParentClick, a website geared to families, Serbinski joined the group as co-founder and chief technology officer. In 2008, the company was sold to Lifetime Television, and Serbinski moved to San Francisco to continue with his technology role. "When A&E bought Lifetime in 2010, I started meeting angel investors and then I met my (future) wife, who was from metro Detroit," he says. "I started looking at opportunities in Detroit, and came across Detroit Venture Partners, so I sent a cold email to Josh (Linkner, CEO and managing partner of Detroit Venture Partners) explaining why they should hire me. Josh called the next day and we came to Detroit." Serbinski says three pivotal events have helped establish Detroit as a technology hotbed — the opening of the Madison Building in late 2011, the Google for Entrepreneurs partnership in 2013, and the Rise of the Rest Competition in June. "That put Detroit on the tech map," he says. — *R.J. King*



№ 24 NIKI SERRAS // 31

Partner, Scavolini by Cucina Moda, Birmingham

EMPLOYEES: 8 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** University of Michigan

For Niki Serras, opening a home remodeling business in 2010 — when downtown Birmingham had a 70 percent commercial occupancy rate and the housing market at large was still recovering from the 2008 global financial crisis — was one part naïveté and one part brass tacks. "People said we were stupid, they said we were dumb, and that it would never work," says Serras, whose partners include her sister, Alisha, and Brian Gamache, Alisha's husband. "But we dug in our heels and made it work. We may have been naïve, but it was a blessing in disguise." After Alisha fell in love with a Ferrari red kitchen, she convinced her husband and her sister to bring the kitchen to Michigan. "It became our calling card," Niki says. "Once we had it installed in our store window, people couldn't help but see it." After partnering with Scavolini by Cucina Moda in Italy, the sisters took to event marketing. "We went to every charity fundraiser and party we could, and just started to talk to people about kitchens and bathrooms," Niki says. As the business became successful, the group opened a location in January on the first floor of the Merchandise Mart in downtown Chicago. With the Chicago store surpassing first-year revenue projections, and the Birmingham store having tripled its sales in four years, the partners are looking to grow in such markets as Minneapolis, Atlanta, Boston, and Denver. — *R.J. King*

No 25 NEIL SHERMAN // 38President/Managing Partner, Best Homes Title Agency/
Schneiderman and Sherman, Farmington Hills**EMPLOYEES:** 75/50 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Michigan State University

Neil Sherman met law partner Peter M. Schneiderman in 2002, and became managing attorney at Schneiderman & Sherman in 2008. When the pair created Best Homes Title Agency that same year, to service the real estate and mortgage banking needs of its legal clients, Sherman was named president. "Our hope was if we could reinvest in the title company the revenue we were generating off of our firm, we would be able to develop a thriving title company as we came out of the recession," he says. Best Homes Title has grown from four employees in one location and averaging 200 transactions per month in 2008 to 75 employees in 12 Michigan locations today, averaging a monthly volume of 1,000 transactions. "This industry begins and ends with customer service," Sherman says. "Our investment in technology and (our) ability to meet federal and state compliance standards get passed on to our customers." Sherman points to paperless document preparation and emergency data recovery capabilities as competitive advantages. The company's One Stop Real Estate division records deeds electronically with the county register of deeds. "If the right opportunity presented itself we would consider expanding, but today our future expansion plans all involve locations in our state," he says. — *Tom Beaman*

**No 26** LEE SKANDALARIS // 32

President, Quantum Digital Group, Warren

EMPLOYEES: 130 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Duke University

As an M&A specialist early in his career, Lee Skandalaris saw too many companies suffer because they were heavily invested in a single technology or market. He was encouraged by the scope and relatively low capital requirements of the digital printing business, however, and that led to the formation of Quantum Digital Group in 2008. "Printing allows us to be diversified," he says. "We can pursue a lot of different markets and not necessarily be beholden to any particular piece of business." The firm produces graphics for the B2B market, ranging from building wraps to trade show exhibits to point-of-purchase displays. Retail offerings include graphics for boats, ATVs, firearms, and vehicles. In 2009, Quantum acquired Holland-based Ceiling Scenes, which produces murals for medical centers and assisted living centers. The acquisitions of competitors Meteor Photo and Tectonics Industries followed in 2011 and 2013, respectively. "We're in a unique position in the visual communications market," Skandalaris says. "We have design, engineering, nationwide installation, a full-metal fabrication facility, and warehousing. We have our own internal marketing staff and a pretty deep sales team across the country that has relationships with almost every major sporting goods retailer. When you add all those things together, there aren't many people in the marketplace who can provide the same end-to-end solutions." — *Tom Beaman*

**No 27** COURTNEY TARARA // 37

Co-owner, Heart of Howell/Frontal Lobe, Howell

EMPLOYEES: 2 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Northwood University

A combination of civic pride and an entrepreneurial family inspired Courtney Tarara to turn three neglected buildings in downtown Howell into a community focal point branded "Heart of Howell." Tarara and her father, Joe Parker, purchased the three-story, circa-1880 structures for \$600,000 in 2012. They have since invested \$2.2 million in new windows and foundation walls, mechanical equipment, an elevator, and an outdoor courtyard. "We purchased the buildings with the idea of creating a destination location in Howell — to have really cool, one-stop shopping," Tarara says. So far the entire third floor is leased, Fog's Pub has claimed two-thirds of the basement, and a custom home furnishings store will occupy part of the ground floor. "My dad is a serial entrepreneur, so I've got that in my blood," Tarara says. To maintain historical authenticity, the pair consulted the Howell Area Historical Society and worked with the Detroit-based architectural firm Kraemer Design Group, which specializes in vintage restorations. With her husband and other family members, Tarara also owns Frontal Lobe, a membership-based co-working space in downtown Howell. "There's not enough emphasis put on how important downtown communities are," Tarara says. "It gives not only a sense of community, but also a sense of ownership. People need to recognize that and become much more involved." — *Tom Beaman*



SHOT ON LOCATION

The American Coney Island coney dog has been a favorite with Detroiters and visitors for nearly a century. The popular destination restaurant, with its festive red, white, and blue decor, operates from a triangular space at the corner of Michigan Avenue and West Lafayette Boulevard in downtown Detroit. The restaurant is owned and operated by Grace Keros, granddaughter of Constantine Keros, who started the business in 1917. She says one reason for the great popularity of the American Coney Island is the Keros family's secret recipe for the chili sauce, developed decades ago. To satisfy transplanted Detroiters and new coney fans, the American opened a location in the D Las Vegas Hotel & Casino in October 2012.



» **DOG DAYS** From left: Jeff Lantz, Brad Lott, Jeff Lothian, Vatche Tazian, Niall Hay, Jason Teshuba, Dr. Carlos A. Ramirez, Ted Serbinski, Kathleen Borschke, Ryan Schram, Steven Bardocz, Walter K. Evans, Aaron F. Belen, John Dimovski, Jessica Knapik, Brian Foster, and Roland N. Alix.

No 28 VATCHE TAZIAN // 39

Founder and President, Envirolite, Birmingham

EMPLOYEES: 17 **REVENUE:** \$5.5 million **EDUCATION:** University of Michigan

Vatche Tazian has had his share of automotive supplier work, from overseeing the procurement, manufacturing, and installation of rubber seals in such vehicles as the Dodge Viper, Plymouth Prowler, Chevrolet Corvette, and Chrysler PT Cruiser to opening production plants in Mexico and the United States. It turned out to be a good training ground for Envirolite, a specialty foam business he launched in 2008 that serves a variety of industries, including marine, industrial, recreational, appliance, flooring, and packaging. "One of the growth markets we entered at a good time was the indoor trampoline park business," Tazian says. The company's so-called foam pit cubes are also used inside gymnastics facilities and gyms as well as to cushion participants during BMX, FMX, and skateboard competitions. "We're also in the retail side, with camping mats, and we started offering household cleaning sponges that we export to Canada, Mexico, Europe, Hong Kong, and Asia." Operating a 30,000-square-foot production facility in Coldwater, south of Battle Creek, he plans to double the size of the plant next year. "From my automotive career, I was fortunate to work in and visit different countries like France and Mexico, which helped when I started Envirolite," he says. "We're looking to sign a few deals with some larger retailers, which will lead to more growth for us and the hiring of eight to 10 more workers." — *R.J. King*

**No 29** JASON TESHUBA // 38

CEO, Mango Languages, Farmington Hills

EMPLOYEES: 60 **REVENUE:** \$9 million **EDUCATION:** Michigan State University

Before Jason and Michael Teshuba launched a Web development firm in 2002, they had a strong background in business. Their father owned a heating and cooling company, and Jason recalls helping out wherever he could. "Two years after we started the Web development company, we began distributing language education products," says Teshuba, CEO of Mango Languages. "We sold the business in 2007 and started Mango Languages. We already had a great background in language education, and then new technologies like the iPhone, the iPad, and Flash were coming into the marketplace." With a background in computer science and computer engineering, the Teshubas tried to interest investors in the company's product offerings, but the pitches fell on deaf ears. So they invested in the digital business and began offering a variety of subscription-based language classes and programs to individuals, libraries, schools, government, and corporations. Offering 12 languages at first, the portfolio now has more than 65 listings, including Greek, Hebrew, Portuguese, Japanese, Dutch, and French. Last year, the pair launched Mango Premiere, a language-learning service using foreign films. "Our main market is serving public libraries, which purchase a year-long subscription," he says. "Anyone with a valid card to a particular library can access the service and you don't need to be there, since we offer everything online." — *R.J. King*

**No 30** ANDREA TRAPANI // 32

Partner, Identity, Bingham Farms

EMPLOYEES: 22 **REVENUE:** NA **EDUCATION:** Western Michigan University

Following several internships — including a six-month stay with *The Detroit News* — on her way to earning a journalism degree, Andrea Trapani received a call for a job interview from Identity, an integrated public relations firm in Bingham Farms. Starting out as an account assistant in 2004, she gained experience in each of the firm's three practice areas: media relations and marketing, social media, and creative. At the start, Identity worked on a variety of real estate accounts around the country, mostly in the commercial arena, before adding such industries as architecture, technology, financial services, and retail brands. In 2012, Trapani was named a partner. "I share leadership and management responsibilities with Mark Winter, who is our managing partner, and we work today with more than 50 clients both nationally and globally on their strategic direction and assisting them in expanding and opening new markets," she says. "I also launched our consumer practice group, which today has nearly a dozen clients." The group includes Livonia-based Team Schostak Family of Restaurants, which owns and operates 64 Applebee's and three Del Tacos in Michigan. Identity is helping Schostak roll out a series of renovations, in addition to better connecting with the communities they serve. Overall, Trapani says, Identity is on pace to boost revenue by 20 percent in 2014. — *R.J. King*

