

## 2022 ATHENA Awards – Finalist Bios

### ATHENA Award

**Finalists:** Luz E. Blandon, Dr. Trisha Gadson, Hollie Geitner, Stacy Juchno, Cynthia Oliver

#### Luz E. Blandon

##### **Executive Vice President for Immigrant Children Services, Holy Family Institute**

Luz Esneda Blandon Gonzalez is happily married with two gorgeous children and resides in the Brookline neighborhood in Pittsburgh. Her oldest son, Elijah, studies piano at CAPA, and her younger son, Federico, is just starting 2<sup>nd</sup> grade! Currently, she is the Executive Vice President of Immigrant Children Services for Holy Family Institute.

Born in Colombia to a large, supportive, and loving family of agriculturists and ranchers, Luz has been most influenced by her grandmother and namesake, Esneda, who survived great hardship and trauma during La Violencia, a period of civil war in Colombia that lasted 50 years. La Violencia claimed her first husband's life, leaving her destitute with three children. Despite this picked herself up and thrived as a single woman with young kids. All six of her children have become highly successful and Luz attributes that to her grandmother's resilience. Esneda created a school for poor children in the surrounding villages and to this day continues to support numerous children in need, another reason why she continues to be an inspiration to Luz.

Luz has two brothers who both live and work in Australia while her parents continue to live in Colombia. Luz was born in a church in a remote village, Riomanza, in the mountains of Colombia. Her first job was as a child, selling lemons in the street from the tree that grew in her backyard. She owned her first business at the age of 17, later earned a BA in Business from the University of Bucaramanga, and is currently finishing her MBA at Penn State University. In 2005, Luz left Colombia with her husband and worked in international education as an educator and administrator. Along with her husband and oldest son, Luz did this for 10 years which took them to Ecuador, Tanzania, Kuwait, Guatemala, and Venezuela.

In today's society, there is a great deal of pessimism. People may see good reasons to think that way considering the many serious problems we face. However, Luz looks at adversity as opportunity: another opportunity to work and solve problems. She is optimistic about the future. She has an amazing family and friends, she loves her neighbors, and she is grateful for the community she has become a part of in Pittsburgh.

#### Dr. Trisha Gadson

##### **CEO, Macedonia Family & Community Enrichment Center (FACE)**

Dr. Trisha Gadson is the Chief Executive Officer of Macedonia Family and Community Enrichment Center (FACE), a community based, social service organization that specializes in engaging and partnering with families and communities. Trisha's mission-driven strategic skill set has enabled her to develop a team at Macedonia FACE that served over 4,500 households in the last year and—due to an unprecedented demand for service—led the agency to respond to a 200% increase in programmatic need. Following twelve years of service at Macedonia FACE, Trisha is leaving her current role at the end of September and will join the team at the Jefferson Regional Foundation as CEO.

Her educational training includes a Ph.D. in community engagement from Point Park University, a Master's of Science in professional leadership and program development from Carlow University, and a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Syracuse University. She also holds a national certification as a Bullying Prevention Program Trainer and Consultant from the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University, a Leadership Credential for Strength Based Family Workers from Temple University, and a Fostering Diversity & Inclusion Certificate from Yale School of Management.

As a result of her leadership and equity skills, when the Allegheny County Executive convened the Children's Fund Working Group to develop and design a model for funding Early Childhood and Out-of-School-Time programming throughout the region, Trisha was asked to serve as Co-Chair. She led a group of 26 experts in developing recommendations for a new County Department. She is respected as a change maker and mentor throughout Allegheny County. During her career in nonprofit management, she has transformed programs in under resourced communities. Her engaging leadership style is marked by her development of reciprocal mentoring relationships with some of the most impactful female leaders in the Pittsburgh region.

She served on advisory councils for the Bayer Center for NonProfit Management at Robert Morris University, the Hill District Community Engagement Center of the University of Pittsburgh, and the Department of Community Engagement at Point Park University. Trisha is a member of the Women's Leadership Council of the United Way, the African American Strategic Partnership and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. In the fall of 2019, she was recognized by the New Pittsburgh Courier as one of Pittsburgh's 50 Women of Excellence. In 2022, she was recognized by the Pittsburgh Business Times as a Woman of Influence.

### **Hollie Geitner**

#### **Director, Communications, Duquesne Light Company**

Hollie changes the world through storytelling. As Director of Communications for Duquesne Light Company (DLC), she uncovers and shares stories to help educate, inform, and inspire more than 1,700 employees and 600,000 customers.

Prior to her role at DLC, she was Vice President, Culture and Brand Ambassador for WordWrite, a public relations and digital marketing agency. During her eight years there, she counseled clients on bridging the gap between truth and misunderstanding, especially in times of crisis. In addition to her client responsibilities, she was accountable for the firm's sales and marketing efforts where she collaborated with the entire team to showcase WordWrite's expertise in the Pittsburgh region and beyond.

Before joining the agency world, Hollie held various PR and marketing positions, including roles at Highmark, Allegheny Energy, and the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership.

She belongs to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and serves as board member of the Pittsburgh Chapter. In 2019, she completed EDGE, a nine-month women's leadership program offered through the Pittsburgh Technology Council and EDGE Leadership Solutions, as well as the EDGE Compass Senior Leadership program in 2021.

She is actively engaged in the community as a member of the Women's Leadership Council (WLC) of the

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania and a member of the WLC Allegheny County Leadership Team. Additionally, she serves on the board of Pennsylvania Women Work and volunteers her time as a mentor for the 3 Cups of Coffee program. She also supports Light of Life Rescue Mission as a volunteer fundraiser.

She was recognized by Pittsburgh Magazine as a Woman & Business honoree in 2021, and in 2013 as a 40 Under 40 honoree—an annual recognition program managed by Pittsburgh Magazine and the Pittsburgh Urban Magnet Project (PUMP).

She graduated from Shippensburg University in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism/Communication. Outside of the office, she enjoys running the river trails, walking her chocolate lab, kayaking, reading, crafting at home, and inspiring her children to chase their dreams. Her family's dream is to one day own a lakefront home.

### **Stacy Juchno**

#### **Executive Vice President and General Auditor for The PNC Financial Services Group, PNC Bank**

Stacy M. Juchno is Executive Vice President and General Auditor for The PNC Financial Services Group. She is responsible for all aspects of the internal audit function providing assurance on the effectiveness of PNC's risk management, control, and governance processes to the audit committee and board of directors. Juchno is the executive leader of the PNC Military Employee Business Resource Group and a member of the PNC Foundation board of directors.

Prior to being named to her current position in December 2013, she served as Senior Vice President and Finance Governance and Oversight Director responsible for the oversight of enterprise-wide SOX section 302 and 404 activities, including the reporting of SOX matters to the SOX steering committee, disclosure committee, and audit committee. In addition, she led the defense activities to support the Finance Basel, CCAR, and regulatory reporting processes. Her role also included coordinating and monitoring compliance of the enterprise and operational risk programs impacting Finance. She was named Executive Vice President in April 2014.

Prior to joining PNC in 2009, Juchno was the director of Regulatory Compliance for a publicly traded telecommunication company in Pittsburgh, where she implemented the SOX 302 and 404 requirements and performed the internal audit function. Previously she worked at Ernst and Young for five years as an Audit Manager planning and performing external audit services of high-tech, hospitality, food and beverage, retail, and manufacturing companies with both domestic and international operations.

Juchno serves on the board of directors and finance committee of the Veterans Leadership Program. She is a member of the board of directors of the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania and is on the United Way Women's Leadership Executive Council. In addition, she serves on the advisory counsel for the Humane Animal Rescue and serves as the chair of the Finance and Audit Committee, as well as the board of trustees at Gannon University.

Juchno is a certified public accountant and a graduate of Gannon University (Erie, PA).

## **Cynthia Oliver**

### **Executive Director, Three Rivers Business Alliance**

Cynthia Oliver is currently the Executive Director of the Three Rivers Business Alliance, the LGBTQ+ regional Chamber of Commerce. She has spent the last 30 years working as a nonprofit consultant and CEO in addition to owning and running several small businesses.

After working for the county department of transportation and the local Private Industry Council, Cynthia started her professional ascent in 1987 as the youngest Executive Director of a Girl Scout Council at Thousand Island Girl Scout Council in upstate New York. Here she was in the first cohort to earn the professional designation of nationally certified Executive Director. She returned home to Pittsburgh to lead the Westmoreland Girl Scout Council, the Allegheny/Westmoreland County Mothers Against Drunk Driving Chapter, the East Liberty Chamber of Commerce, and Young Rembrandts school program. She considers her time and training at the Girl Scouts as the gold standard, giving her the solid foundation of skills and training needed to be a successful executive and teaching her to become a servant leader. She built upon this receiving the additional designation of Certified Fund-Raising Executive.

Throughout her career she supported her family's real estate business and has been an active consultant. She has provided professional support as a business advisor for the Small Business Development Center at Duquesne University and several local nonprofits including The Good Grief Center, The Lamp Theatre, The Pittsburgh Irish Classic Theatre, the Western Allegheny Community Library, and the Center for Creative Nonfiction.

Cynthia holds a Master's degree in public administration from Indiana University of Pennsylvania where she currently sits on the Eberly College of Business Advisory Board and served as the advisor for the student Eberly Digital Marketing team. She has completed coursework and exams toward her PhD in education. Her dissertation "*A Phenomenological Study on the Unique Motivations of Female Alumni Major Donors*" is a work in progress and humility.

She has remained active in her community serving as the President of Serra Catholic High School Board of Directors, Member of the Penn State Parent Advisory Council, and Member of the board of Dress for Success.

She takes pride in combining her career with the role of mom to seven amazing children—five girls and two boys—and grandmother to David and Quinn! She credits her mom as her role model in learning how to overcome obstacles and challenges to become a successful female executive.

### **ATHENA Young Professional Award**

**Finalists:** Aleta Heard, Sam Schmitt, Shireen Thomas

## **Aleta Heard**

### **VP, Senior Specialist, Product Owner, BNY Mellon**

Aleta Heard is an award-winning leader in the community and in her technical profession. She has been recognized as a Woman of Excellence by the Pittsburgh Courier in 2018, 30 under 30 by Pittsburgh Business Times in 2020, nominated for the Pittsburgh ATHENA Young Professional Award in 2018 and

Tomorrow's Promise – PA Bankers Award in 2022.

Aleta received a Business Management certificate and Associate of Science degree in Business from Community College of Allegheny County, a Bachelor of Science degree in Healthcare Administration and Management with an Information Systems minor graduating Summa Cum Laude from Slippery Rock University, and a Master's degree in Information Systems from Duquesne University. Aleta's education empowered her to pursue a technical career, beginning in 2016. She initially started out in Human Resources, hiring employees to fill technical roles then transitioned into a more technology driven career, configuring and concatenating networks and switches. Shortly after, Aleta migrated into a global technical support engineer role where she created and implemented new processes for an online ticketing system and published knowledge articles for users and clients, and she onboarded new employees. Aleta then accelerated her career by moving into a Field Technician role repairing computer software and hardware issues. Not long after being promoted into a Software Developer and Senior Systems Analyst role, she became a certified agile Product Owner and developed skills creating microservices, APIs, and working in iterative development and design. She transferred her skills from a national fintech company to a global investments bank where she is currently a VP, working in Asset Services and Digital as a Regulatory Business Solutions Product Owner over the United States and Canadian Custody territory. As an early careerist, Aleta is focused on mastering the regulatory innovation space and building her leadership skills.

Along with being a notable employee of BNY Mellon, she is also CEO and Founder of Masters of Maternity, a dual sided platform for moms to build their birth team and journey using modern technology. She created this platform in effort to reshape the trajectory of maternal care and to decrease the maternal and infant mortality and morbidity rates among women—especially Black women, as they are 2-3 times more likely to die from preventable causes during birth.

Aleta is also a founding mother of the PA Doula Commission and serves as Vice President on the Board of Directors. In her work with the PA Doula Commission, she strives to bring promotion, protection, and recognition to the doula profession.

Although Aleta has always been a champion for women, being in love with the maternal space started when she became a mother in 2018—arguably her most favorite role, in addition to being a devoted wife. In hindsight and from a full circle perspective, her expertise in technology and innovation, and her passion for women empowerment and community all align with her educational background. She is truly walking in her purpose. Outside the office, Aleta is passionate about family and friends, traveling, and she enjoys reading. Fun fact: Aleta was a skilled ballerina for about 20 years prior to her technical career. She gives her dancing career credit for her grit and competitive edge. When asked what is the one thing she is extremely good at, Aleta responds with “learning.” She defines success as a journey and measures it by the impact on the lives of people, inspiring them to think and act in ways that they may not have considered before.

**Sam Schmitt****Coordinator of Equity, Inclusion and Justice, Fanny Edel Falk School**

Sam Schmitt has been a lifelong Pittsburgher and an educator in the region for the past 14 years. Growing up in the Monroeville area with her parents and brother, Sam had always dreamed of becoming a teacher. She is a graduate of Duquesne University, obtaining degrees in Elementary Education, Special Education for grades K-12, and Administration K-12.

Beginning her career in the Duquesne City School District, she served as a general education classroom teacher, learning support teacher, Instructional Coach for Science and STEM, and Dean of Students. She credits her years at Duquesne for helping to develop her skills and passion for education. Currently, she serves as the Coordinator for Equity, Inclusion and Justice, as well as the Director of Student Services for grades K-5 at The Falk Laboratory School of the University of Pittsburgh. Within the role, she has the opportunity to work with students, faculty, and families to ensure equitable learning opportunities are available to all, as well as cultivate the celebration of all identities.

She is currently enrolled in the EdD program at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is pursuing an Educational Doctorate in Social and Comparative Analysis in Education. Sam resides with her husband and stepchildren in Connoquenessing Township in Butler County. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family, trying new restaurants in the Pittsburgh area, and reading.

**Shireen Thomas****Director, IT Operations - Office of the CIO, UPMC**

Shireen Thomas is Director of IT Operations for UPMC's Office of the CIO. In her role, Shireen is responsible for leading a team to facilitate all aspects of the Office of the CIO in the planning, organization, and execution of strategic technology initiatives for UPMC's Information Technology division, which employs over 2,300 IT professionals. Shireen has experience with collaborating and building partnerships with all levels of staff, executive management, and customers to facilitate strategies and operational plans for technology programs. Shireen is also one of the founding leaders of UPMC's Women in IT initiative, which aims to inspire, empower, and promote female technology career paths at UPMC and in the community.

Shireen recently began teaching as an Adjunct Instructor at the University of Pittsburgh. She teaches the Introduction to Health Information Technologies and Emerging Technologies course within the Health Informatics undergraduate program.

Shireen began her career in the inaugural cohort of UPMC's Information Technology Rotational (ITR) Program, which is an accelerated leadership development program where participants rotate through four unique IT areas over two years to develop a holistic perspective of healthcare technology. Shireen is now part of the leadership team that is responsible for managing UPMC's ITR Program and IT Summer Associate Internship Program.

Outside work, Shireen volunteers her time as a mentor for the Pennsylvania Women Work 3 Cups of Coffee Program. Shireen is also the former Secretary of the Western Pennsylvania Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) Board. Shireen holds a Bachelor's degree in Health Information Management from the University of Pittsburgh. She recently completed the

certificate of Leadership and Organizational Change from Robert Morris University and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Robert Morris University.

Shireen was recently recognized as an ACES Award recipient, which is awarded to fewer than 1% of UPMC employees for exemplifying UPMC's values and demonstrating exceptional customer service. Shireen has also had the honor of earning awards from Mission Critical Magazine, Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania, and RedChair Pittsburgh.