

2024

# *Women Who Inspire*

## Friends of the Firm



In celebration of Women's History Month, Steptoe & Johnson presents the fourth installment of our "Women Who Inspire" series, featuring female leaders who will share reflections on women empowerment, opportunities for professional women now and in the future, and the women they have looked up to throughout their careers.

## 2024 Honorees

**Victoria Carling** – City National Bank

**Nancy McCaskell** – Masonboro Energy LLC

**Karen Morrison** – OhioHealth Foundation

**Rina Teran** – Constellium SE

**Lynne Rhode** – Hope Utilities

**Jo Carol Farmer** – Hope Utilities

**Jonell Carver** – Hope Utilities

**Ruth DeLost-Wylie** – Hope Utilities

**Melissa Dykes** – Hope Utilities

## Women Who Inspire

*"It's normal to face moments of doubt, but remember that each challenge is an opportunity for growth."*

### Victoria Carling

Senior Vice President, Commercial Lending Division  
City National Bank



### Victoria Carling

#### Senior Vice President, Commercial Lending Division | City National Bank

Victoria Carling is a Senior Vice President in the Commercial Lending Division for City National Bank with 30 years of industry experience in the Lexington, Kentucky market. A graduate of Centre College with an MBA from Xavier University, she focuses on client retention, new client development, portfolio growth, and risk management. Victoria is deeply engaged in her community and currently serves as the Advisory and Scholarship Chair for Women Leading Kentucky. She is also involved in numerous organizations benefitting the arts, young women in her community, and economic development.

#### What would you consider the greatest success of your career?

The greatest success of my career has been in solving issues for customers in a way that directly contributes to the bank's success. Achieving the status of being the first call for customers signifies their trust and reliance on me, which I consider fundamental not only for nurturing client relationships but also beneficial for the bank. This mutual trust is a cornerstone for both the clients' and the bank's success.

#### What advice do you have for younger female professionals who are navigating through their career?

My key piece of advice to younger female professionals is to cultivate and maintain self-confidence throughout your career. It's normal to face moments of doubt, especially when you're unsure about your next steps, but remember that each challenge is an opportunity for growth. Some of the biggest rewards in my career came from when I really messed up big time and I learned and grew from it. Embrace your mistakes, as they are often the catalysts for significant learning and development. Stay focused on your goals, ignore the naysayers, and trust in your ability to overcome obstacles. Keep moving forward with confidence, knowing that perseverance and self-belief are crucial for success.

#### What organizations do you support that empower women?

I've been involved with a women's empowerment organizations most of my career. An initiative dear to me is Girls on the Run, which targets young girls, teaching them about self-expression, physical fitness, and mental well-being. This organization emphasizes the importance of overcoming challenges and the value of mentorship, highlighting

the need for strong female role models in both personal and professional contexts. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the power of support and empowerment at all stages of life.

In reflecting on the importance of community involvement, I want to emphasize the need to stay active and refreshed in our engagements. It's crucial to not only join boards and committees but also to know when to step aside to make room for new energy and ideas. I'm a strong believer in the cycle of giving and growing within our community efforts. I've come to realize that many people want to get involved but often don't know how to start, which is unfortunate. It's our responsibility to guide and mentor these individuals, opening doors for them just as others have done for us. This approach ensures a vibrant, evolving community that benefits from the diverse talents and perspectives of its members.

**What are your thoughts on pay equity for women? Do you believe it's an issue? How might it be addressed?**

The essence of addressing pay equity, in my view, lies in the value one brings to their role, particularly in customer-facing positions where results can more easily demonstrate an individual's contribution. Ultimately, success and equitable treatment are achieved by focusing on delivering results and fulfilling one's responsibilities diligently. This approach has helped level the playing field for me, underscoring the importance of being proactive and goal-oriented in any professional setting.

**Who are the women who have inspired you?**

The woman who has inspired me the most is my mother, embodying qualities that I deeply admire and strive to emulate. These qualities include achieving success both at home and in the workplace, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, being proactive and continuously willing to learn new skills regardless of age, and possessing a positive, can-do attitude. My mother has also shown me the importance of community involvement and giving back, teaching me that no matter how busy you are, contributing to a vibrant community is crucial for creating a nurturing environment for families and for personal growth. Her life demonstrates the power of balance, mentorship, and the willingness to help others, qualities that have shaped my own approach to life and career.

**How can we create more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-Suite?**

To create more opportunities for women in the C-Suite, we need to focus on mentorship, education, and experience. It's essential to have mentors who recognize and nurture talent, encouraging women to take the next steps in their careers. This support is vital for growth and development, as it provides someone to guide and push you forward. Offering women opportunities to gain real-world experience is crucial; for instance, you won't know if you're adept at customer interactions until you're given the chance to engage with them. This means organizations must be willing to invest time in allowing women to learn, grow, and expand their capabilities.

## Women Who Inspire

*“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”* (Mary Oliver, American Poet)

**Nancy McCaskell**  
President  
Masonboro Energy, LLC



### Nancy McCaskell

#### President | Masonboro Energy, LLC

Nancy McCaskell, CPL, is president of Masonboro Energy LLC, a consulting firm focused on energy and landwork. Active in leadership roles at the local and national level, McCaskell sits on the Dallas Association of Petroleum Landmen board of directors and serves as AAPL's first vice president — only the second female in the association's 70-year history to hold the role. Among her honors, she was named DAPL's 2023 Landman of the Year and received AAPL's 2020 Blankenship Family Horizon Award, which recognizes an exceptional female land professional and role model. Additionally, McCaskell is an advisory member to the University of Oklahoma College of Law MLS and LLM programs in energy and natural resources, and she has served on several community nonprofit boards. She and her spouse, the Rev. Mary Stewart Hall, live in Dallas and enjoy traveling, art, and music.

#### What do you consider the greatest success in your career?

Reflecting on my career highlights, I've identified two defining successes. The first was a daunting challenge: changing regulations in Louisiana to allow for longer lateral well drilling, a task deemed nearly impossible. Determination and collaboration with a diverse team led to securing permits and transforming industry standards in the state. The second, and perhaps more significant, was the realization early in my career that embracing my authentic self and unique voice was the key to true success. It's a lesson I'm passionate about sharing, highlighting the importance of not trying to be somebody else but finding your own voice, trusting it, and using it.

#### What advice do you have for younger female professionals who are navigating through their career?

I've realized the power of pausing to breathe and the critical role an advocate plays in one's career. This was highlighted by a young female landman who, after having twins, faced a six-week training far from home. Her employer's support, in allowing her mother to accompany her with covered expenses, showcased the importance of a work environment that values and supports its employees' personal lives. This experience taught me that balancing family and career is achievable with the right support and thinking creatively to overcome challenges. It's crucial for professionals, especially young women, to seek out advocates and be open to assistance, emphasizing that success and parity come from leveraging support systems and not going at it alone.

Starting my career as a field landman consultant, I later transitioned to an in-house role for much of my career. While working on an article for Landman Magazine, I quoted Mary Oliver, asking, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” This question prompted a profound reflection on how I intended to live my life. Just days after submitting the article, I resigned, revived my old LLC, and relaunched my consulting business. This experience underscores the importance of listening to the words and stories that inspire us, regardless of our age or stage in life, and confronting the essential questions of identity and aspiration. Life is an adventure, and embracing the things that move and drive us towards new opportunities is key to finding happiness.

**What organizations do you support that empower women?**

I advocate for the Women’s Energy Network and AAPL, both dedicated to empowering women through mentorship and leadership opportunities. Working with AAPL to accredit university programs is rewarding, especially when guiding individuals new to the energy sector.

In recent years, AAPL’s outstanding graduate was a young woman from California who attended Texas Tech. She didn’t know a single thing about energy, but the program offered her a view of what and how our industry impacts everything from eyeglasses to iPhones, electricity to solar and wind power. She fell in love with it and she’s now one of our stars.

**How can we create more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-suite?**

We need to ensure that every woman gets the management, leadership, and technical training required to be in the C-suite. We need to put younger women in the room where decisions happen and support one another to help drive involvement and engagement. We also need to give one another tricks to maneuvering meetings when most participants are male. I remember learning that the female Justices of the United States Supreme Court would practice talking over one another so that they would ensure their voices would be heard. They practiced opening the floor to one another when the men were drowning them out or talking over them. If the most powerful women in America have to practice being heard, we have to be in it together to help one another.

**In your experience with Steptoe & Johnson what have you seen that embodies our dedication to the empowerment of women?**

I’ve participated in several calls with individuals associated with Steptoe & Johnson, including a memorable one on diversity and inclusion with your Director of Diversity, Michael Flowers. These discussions opened my eyes to various initiatives aimed at involving, mentoring, and training people from diverse backgrounds. I was particularly excited when Steptoe & Johnson began its land administration group led by a young woman I had previously worked with. The opportunity for female professionals to thrive in an environment like Steptoe & Johnson fascinates me. I appreciate the firm’s affinity programs for veterans, women, and parents, as well as their thoughtful and innovative approaches to building an inclusive community.

## Women Who Inspire

*“Surround yourself with trustworthy individuals who inspire you, as mutual learning fosters growth.”*

**Karen Jefferson Morrison**  
 President, OhioHealth Foundation  
 Senior Vice President, OhioHealth



### Karen Jefferson Morrison

President, OhioHealth Foundation | SVP, OhioHealth

Karen Jefferson Morrison, the President of the OhioHealth Foundation and Senior Vice President of OhioHealth Corporation, is a seasoned healthcare executive with over three decades of experience. In her role, Karen leads the enterprise strategy for external relations and manages the local, state, and federal advocacy strategy. As Foundation President, Ms. Morrison provides executive fundraising leadership and oversees the Foundation’s strategic operations. Morrison’s board memberships and accolades are extensive, including directorships at Greif Inc., Palmer-Donavin, SafeAuto, Fifth Third Bank advisory board, the Columbus Board of Health, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. She is a founding director of Adelphi Bank, a minority depository institution, where she chairs the governance committee and serves on the audit committee. Morrison is a known leader in her community, receiving numerous recognitions and accolades over the past decade. Recently, Morrison was an inaugural recipient of the Columbus Business First Woman of Influence Award as the “Businesswoman of the Year” in 2023.

#### What do you consider the greatest success of your career?

Reflecting on my career, I am most proud of harmonizing my passion for health and wellness with my professional role, particularly in advancing health equity and improving access to care for vulnerable populations. Over my 35 years at Ohio Health, I’ve dedicated myself to addressing health and economic disparities, striving to make a significant positive impact on the health and wellness of communities. This journey has not only been a fulfillment of my personal passion but also a contribution to a cause much greater than myself, embodying the essence of purposeful work that leaves a lasting legacy.

#### What would you tell the younger women professionals on how they can think about navigating their career over the next decade or however long their career is?

For younger women navigating their careers, I recommend seeking roles that align with your purpose and fulfill you, recognizing that your path may evolve beyond your initial skill set. Surround yourself with trustworthy individuals who inspire you, as mutual learning fosters growth. Embrace feedback from all levels within your organization to enhance your development. Prioritize excellence in your current responsibilities, understanding that success in

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the present sets the foundation for future opportunities. Cultivate humility and curiosity, essential for continuous learning and adapting. My journey, including returning to school for law as a non-traditional student, highlights the importance of lifelong learning and the value it brings to personal and professional growth. These strategies have been pivotal in my career and can guide you in building a rewarding professional journey.

**What organizations do you think have been successful in empowering women across your career?**

Throughout my career, The Links Incorporated has stood out as a key organization in empowering women, with its commitment to advancing initiatives in health, education, domestic and global issues, and the arts. As a 40-year member and former board member, my involvement has enriched my ability to mentor and support other women. The YWCA, with its focus on racial justice, equity, and housing, has also played a significant role in uplifting women, especially through its housing facilities for those in need. Lastly, the Executive Leadership Council (ELC) offers development opportunities specifically for African American female executives, focusing on board and C-Suite development. These organizations have profoundly impacted my journey and the empowerment of women across various sectors.

**In your view what is the cause of, and are we making ground gaining and closing the pay equity gap for women?**

**What should we be doing to try to get rid of this disparity?**

Addressing the persistent issue of pay equity, I've observed that despite various efforts, the gap remains significant, with women earning 82 cents to every dollar for men, and the disparity even wider for women of color at 63 cents. This reality underscores the need for intentional action and advocacy. In my experience, having women in decision-making roles can foster a more equitable approach to compensation, ensuring fairness and recognizing value appropriately. Being in positions of influence, whether in governance roles or on executive compensation committees, allows us to ask critical questions and provides guidance towards more equitable practices. Beyond organizational efforts, individual advocacy plays a crucial role. Engaging in advocacy, whether through legislative channels or public discourse, is essential for raising awareness and pushing for change.

**What do you see looking down the road as far as opportunities for young women in the business world?**

The landscape for young women in the business world is increasingly promising, particularly in sectors like healthcare, finance, technology, and law. The growth of women in medical schools heralds a more inclusive future in healthcare, reflecting the importance of diversity in patient care. Finance and technology, especially emerging areas like FinTech, offer substantial opportunities for innovation and leadership. The presence of women in IT and coding is growing, breaking traditional gender barriers. The overall trend across these industries points to expanding opportunities for young women, driven by a combination of advocacy, changing corporate cultures, and the increasing recognition of the value of diversity in professional settings.

**Who are the women that have inspired you?**

The women who have inspired me most deeply include my mother, my grandmother, and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Justice Ginsburg's legacy as a trailblazer for gender equity and women's rights deeply resonates with me. Her eloquence, tenacity, and advocacy for justice and equity, alongside her belief in fighting for what you care about in a way that inspires others to join, have profoundly shaped my perspective. My mother, a strong, intentional, and independent woman, taught me the values of aiming high, persistence, resilience, and the importance of kindness, compassion, and service. She believed in learning from failures and moving forward with grace. My grandmother, also a formidable influence, emphasized the power of education, preparation, and the significance of surrounding oneself with people of similar values. As a successful real estate entrepreneur in Miami during the 1930s, she broke barriers with her persistent and intentional approach to business and life.



**How can we create more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-Suite?**

To increase the presence of women in the C-Suite, sponsorship plays a crucial role. It's about advocating for those not yet in the room, highlighting their talents and achievements to those who can make a difference. My approach has been to actively speak up for women ready for advancement during discussions with my peers, ensuring they're considered for opportunities that arise. This kind of sponsorship—intentionally promoting individuals based on shared values and demonstrated success—is key. These actions, coupled with hard work and visibility, pave the way to the C-Suite. My career has benefited greatly from such advocacy, with mentors and colleagues who've supported and promoted me, underscoring the importance of being both a sponsor and a beneficiary in this process.

## Women Who Inspire

*“Embrace resilience, and remember that persistence, coupled with the ability to demonstrate your value, is key to long-term success.”*

### Rina Teran

U.S. Chief Counsel, Chief Securities Counsel, and Assistant Corporate Secretary, Constellium SE



## Rina Teran

### U.S. Chief Counsel, Chief Securities Counsel, and Assistant Corporate Secretary | Constellium SE

Ms. Rina Teran offers over 20 years of in-house experience in securities, compliance, corporate governance, and transactional matters to her role at Constellium, where she has served as US Chief Counsel, Chief Securities Counsel, and Assistant Corporate Secretary since October 2013. With a focus on U.S. public company governance and reporting, she advises executive teams and the board on these matters and also oversees the legal function for Constellium in North America. Her background includes various in-house counsel roles in the entertainment, office supply, and water technology sectors, and a position in securities and corporate finance at a NYC law firm. Teran holds a JD from Benjamin Cardozo School of Law and a bachelor's from Columbia University.

#### What do you consider the greatest success in your career?

I often laugh when asked about my greatest career success because it feels like I'm not quite done yet and there are still opportunities I'm chasing. However, if I had to choose now, I'd say my proudest achievement is becoming a well-rounded lawyer and a good leader to my team, helping them develop and grow. I'm a product of education and opportunities, and I strive to learn daily and pass that on to the people I work with. I take great pride in these relationships that I get to nurture every day. And despite the challenges, I keep pushing forward. That persistence and the impact I have on others' growth is what I cherish the most so far in my career.

#### What advice do you have for younger female professionals?

My advice to young female professionals is to develop and maintain confidence and focus, despite inevitable setbacks. It's critical to embrace and showcase your strengths and opinions, even when facing obstacles. Success and progression in your career go beyond just hard work; it involves strategically navigating workplace dynamics and seizing opportunities to highlight your capabilities. Often, as women, we may find fewer opportunities handed to us, making it essential to proactively seek or create them. Embrace resilience, and remember that persistence, coupled with the ability to effectively communicate and demonstrate your strengths and value, is key to long-term success.

**What do you see as the biggest opportunity for females in business?**

The biggest opportunity for women in business today stems from the increased focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This movement, especially in the last few years, has opened doors significantly, with corporate boards, organizations and government agencies emphasizing diversity. This shift is creating substantial opportunities for women in businesses. However, it's crucial to distinguish between companies that merely aim to "check the box" and those genuinely committed to nurturing and actively advancing women's careers. As women, we must seek out and support firms that truly believe in DEI, fostering environments where women can advance and thrive. Choosing to work with or for companies that value women's contributions and provide them with growth opportunities is a step towards leveraging the DEI movement for real change. Supporting each other is also vital. It's about creating strength in numbers and ensuring women not only have a seat at the table but also a voice that is heard, pushing for genuine inclusion and opportunities to lead and influence.

**How can we create more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-Suite?**

Creating more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-Suite requires leveraging the momentum of DEI initiatives and fostering a culture of support among women and men who are in positions of influence. It's essential for those of us who have reached a level where we can impact decision-making to actively choose and advocate for women in professional settings, whether it's in hiring decisions, the career developing process, selecting service providers or external counsel. This approach extends beyond mere advocacy; it's about sponsorship and pushing boundaries to ensure women are considered for high-level opportunities. For example, in my experience, I've seen the power of sponsorship in practice when men in leadership positions have recommended women for roles or projects, challenging the status quo, and demonstrating a commitment to gender diversity, but it is still rare. The distinction between mentoring and sponsoring is crucial here. While mentoring is about guidance and advice, sponsorship involves actively and proactively advocating for someone's advancement. To truly create opportunities in the C-Suite for women, it's about management recognizing the importance of giving women a real chance, actively supporting their development and visibility in leadership roles, and openly increasing their responsibilities. This commitment can lead to a more inclusive and diverse executive level, benefiting the entire organization.

**In your experience with Steptoe & Johnson what have you seen embodies our dedication to the empowerment of women?**

My experience with Steptoe & Johnson has truly shown me the firm's dedication to empowering women, setting it apart from other places I've encountered. This commitment goes beyond mere numbers on paper; it's about actively creating opportunities for women within the firm. Examples of this commitment include Chris Slaughter and Rodney Bean's willingness to support and promote women, which I've personally witnessed. Steptoe & Johnson stands out for its leadership structure too, with a notable presence of women in key positions and leading departments. This not only reflects a genuine commitment to gender equality but also positions Steptoe & Johnson as a role model for other firms. The firm's environment, leadership, and actions—like the significant tenure of Susan Brewer as CEO which ended just a few years ago—demonstrate a forward-thinking and inclusive approach that's refreshing to see in the legal industry. It's clear to me that Steptoe & Johnson doesn't just talk about empowerment and diversity; it lives these values, making me proud to work with them and have them as a partner. It also makes me hopeful for the future of women in law and leadership positions.

## Women Who Inspire

*“Helping communities thrive through our efforts at Hope embodies what I consider my greatest success.”*

**Lynne Rhode**  
Senior Vice President &  
General Counsel



### Lynne Rhode

#### Senior Vice President and General Counsel | Hope Utilities

Lynne Rhode, the Senior Vice President & General Counsel at Hope Utilities, has a diverse legal background in the natural resources, environmental, and utility industries. Her prior roles include Assistant Deputy General Counsel at Norfolk Southern, Chief Legal Officer for a large Florida community-owned utility, and leader of the Environmental and Natural Resources Department at the Virginia Attorney General’s Office. The early part of her career was spent at a national law firm in Virginia. A Virginia native, Rhode balances her professional life with a passion for soccer, hiking, animal rescue, and enjoying travel and family time with her husband Bryan and their two boys.

#### **What organizations do you support that empower women?**

I believe that supporting community-focused organizations (whatever your passion) inherently empowers women by providing a platform for engagement and contribution beyond our professional and personal responsibilities. My involvement has varied from animal rescue to coaching youth soccer to assisting local organizations in collecting essentials for homeless shelters and disadvantaged school children. These activities offer a way to make a significant impact within the community, demonstrating that empowerment can come through diverse forms of outreach and support, enriching both the individual and the community at large.

#### **What do you consider the greatest success in your career?**

Working at Hope has been the pinnacle of my career, offering a deeply fulfilling experience. Joining a dynamic team dedicated to responsibly growing the business for the community’s benefit has been exceptionally rewarding. Our focus on bringing family-sustaining jobs and fostering economic growth in West Virginia and the other jurisdictions where our utilities operate makes me incredibly proud. Helping communities thrive through our efforts at Hope embodies what I consider my greatest success.

#### **What have you seen that embodies S&J’s dedication to the empowerment of women?**

I’ve been immensely impressed with the team at Steptoe & Johnson, including female partner Alex Lay and her team. Working closely with the firm’s team, I’ve noticed their responsiveness, intuition, and proactive approach,

which exemplify the firm's commitment to client representation. Their support has been invaluable to me as a general counsel. The firm's dedication to effective one-on-one communication, which has significantly facilitated our work, has been crucial in enabling us to achieve our goals. And S&J's sponsorship of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce's 2024 Women's Leadership Summit, which Hope also sponsors, reflects our mutual commitment to furthering female leaders in the communities we serve.

**What do you see as the biggest opportunity for females in the business world?**

The business world is increasingly focused on merit and the value of bringing multiple perspectives to the table, offering significant opportunities for women. Success, now more than ever, hinges on professional flexibility, creativity, teamwork, and a focus on positive outcomes. For those willing to be adaptable and dedicated, the current landscape presents a fertile ground for growth and achievement for women and men, marking a promising shift towards inclusivity and equal opportunity for all, regardless of gender.

**Anything else you would like to share with the audience about your journey where you have been supported as a female?**

Being part of Hope, where the leadership team is predominantly female with a female chairperson for our board of directors, has been a unique and empowering experience for me, especially coming from the legal field where such representation is rare. This environment, fully supported by our CEO, showcases a seamless integration of women in high-level positions, highlighting a shift from traditional norms. In contrast, the legal industry often poses significant challenges for women aiming for senior roles. However, this trend is slowly changing, and I am hopeful for a future where female leadership is as normalized in law as it is in companies like Hope.

## Women Who Inspire

*"We all have unique strengths suited to our roles, underscoring the significance of resilience in achieving success."*

**Jo Carol Farmer**  
Senior Vice President of Regulatory  
Affairs & Government Relations



**SJ** STEPTOE & JOHNSON  
PLLC



### Jo Carol Farmer

#### Senior Vice President, Regulatory Affairs and Government Relations | Hope Utilities

Jo Carol Farmer is the Senior Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and Government Relations at Hope Utilities, with over 20 years of experience in natural gas utility rate regulation. Starting her career with the Department of Defense and transitioning through various roles in the gas industry, she played a pivotal role in rate regulation at Dominion Energy West Virginia before taking on her current position. A West Virginia University graduate with a degree in Computer Science, Farmer also holds a certificate from Harvard Law School's online Negotiation Mastery Program. Farmer is a graduate of the Developing Dominion Leaders Program and a member of the 2014 class of Leadership West Virginia. A West Virginia native, Jo Carol resides in Bridgeport with her husband and their beagle.

#### What do you consider your greatest success in your career?

My greatest career achievement was significantly contributing to the passage of Senate Bill 390 in 2015, which allowed natural gas utilities to recover costs for updating aging infrastructure and expanding into underserved areas. The bill was passed in its first year of introduction. Initially, I was quite excited about our team's legislative success. However, I hadn't realized the true value of this accomplishment until last year when I learned of its profound impact on West Virginia's economy and its residents. A story shared by our CEO about a local businessman whose life was transformed by the increased job opportunities the bill facilitated highlighted its far-reaching benefits. This legislation didn't just represent a professional triumph; it was a catalyst for economic growth and job creation in the state, enriching the lives of its people and underscoring the deeper significance of our work.

#### What did you learn from that experience?

Through my involvement in passing Senate Bill 390, I learned the importance of adaptability and flexibility in navigating the legislative process, a stark contrast to the structured environment I was used to. This experience highlighted the unpredictability of legislative schedules and meetings. It pushed me out of my comfort zone by challenging my preference for organization and meticulous planning. It taught me the value of being able to adjust plans on the fly and the importance of embracing discomfort for personal and professional growth. I came to appreciate that each of us has unique strengths suited to our roles, underscoring the significance of resilience in achieving success.

**What organizations do you support that empower women?**

I support the Buzz Henderson Learning Academy at Jewel City Church in Meadowbrook, West Virginia. The Buzz Academy is an afterschool program designed to meet the needs of local kindergarten through eighth-grade students. Set to launch in August 2024, it offers meals, faith-based character development, STEM programs, sport leagues, and homework assistance. This initiative addresses the community's needs, particularly benefiting struggling families, single mothers, and grandmothers by providing essential support for their children. While focusing on youth, the academy indirectly empowers women by aiding them in family care. The program is a testament to our church's commitment to strengthening the community, with most staff being volunteers led by a paid coordinator.

**What do you see is the biggest opportunity for females in the business world?**

At Hope, five of our six leaders who report to the CEO are women. The presence of strong female leaders on Hope's executive team is a testament to the opportunities available for females in the business world. This representation is not just a statistic; it's a powerful motivator for women at all stages of their careers within our organization. It showcases that leadership positions are attainable and encourages them to aspire for such roles. I believe we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to foster this excitement and inspiration among our female colleagues. Encouraging and supporting each other extends beyond the professional realm into our everyday lives, reinforcing the importance of women uplifting women. This principle is crucial, not only for those in executive positions but for women in all roles and at every career level.

**What does Hope do in the community to make it a better place to work, play, and live?**

At Hope, we're dedicated to making a positive impact in our communities through our five pillars of giving, which supports projects in all 37 counties we serve. I'm proud of our matching gift program, where employee donations are matched dollar for dollar. Our new mascot, Blue, brings joy to local events, and our employees are deeply involved in community service, including food pantries, veterans' programs, and Habitat for Humanity projects. This culture of giving back, strongly advocated by our CEO, inspires all of us to contribute to making our communities better places to work, play, and live. It's truly rewarding to be part of an organization that goes above and beyond in its commitment to community engagement.

**In your experience with Steptoe & Johnson, what have you seen that embodies our dedication to the empowerment of women?**

Steptoe and Johnson's commitment to empowering women is clear through initiatives like the Women Who Inspire series and the leadership within your energy team. Leaders like Sharon Flanery exemplify the success achievable with Steptoe and Johnson's support. The transformation of traditionally male-dominated areas, highlighted by the presence of strong women leaders on S&J's energy team such as Lori Dawkins, Bridget Furbee, and Alex Lay underscores the firm's dedication to fostering an inclusive environment. This support enables women to excel and ascend in their fields, reflecting Steptoe & Johnson's genuine dedication to women's empowerment.

## Women Who Inspire

*“With passion and perseverance, there is no ceiling to success.”*

Jonell Carver  
Chief Operating Officer



**SJ** STEPTOE & JOHNSON  
PLLC



### Jonell Carver

#### Chief Operating Officer | Hope Utilities

Jonell Carver currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer for Hope Utilities and has over 22 years of experience in the oil and gas industry. A graduate of West Virginia University with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering, she began her career at Dominion Energy and ascended to Director of Operations before transitioning to her current role. Outside of work, Carver is devoted to her three sons and managing Turtle Ridge Farm in Doddridge County, where her passion for the outdoors and local community enriches her professional endeavors in the state's energy sector.

#### **What advice do you have for younger female professionals that are navigating through their career?**

I would tell any young woman starting her career that there are no limits to what she can achieve. Despite working in the traditionally male-dominated oil and gas industry, I've learned that the boundaries we often perceive can be overcome. I've seen firsthand that hard work and determination can break down barriers. The industry has evolved during my career, becoming more inclusive, and I believe that for young women today, the opportunities are even greater. Challenges will always exist, but they are becoming less formidable over time. My journey from engineering to operations and back, and finally to a leadership position, exemplifies that with passion and perseverance, there's no ceiling to success.

#### **What organizations do you support that empower women?**

I strongly support the Society of Women Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers for their role in empowering women in the early stages of their careers by highlighting the vast opportunities in engineering. However, my deepest commitment lies with the West Virginia Education Alliance, where I serve on the board. This organization is close to my heart because it aims to educate the youth of West Virginia about the vast opportunities available to them without having to leave their home state. By fostering partnerships between young people and local businesses, like Toyota and Hope, we show that it's entirely possible to pursue a technical or college education and build a successful career right here in West Virginia.



**What do you see as the biggest opportunity for females in the business world?**

The greatest opportunity for women in the business world today is the chance to grow and lead within organizations. Women's evolving presence in the workplace has now reached a point where their unique strengths, such as multitasking, level-headedness, patience, and understanding, are highly valued. These qualities are increasingly recognized as vital for strengthening organizations, paving the way for women to make significant contributions and assume leadership positions. This shift marks a significant opportunity for women in business.

**How can we create more opportunities for women to be involved in the C-suite?**

Creating opportunities for women in the C-suite involves valuing individual contributions over gender. My experience, especially under our CEO's leadership at Hope, demonstrates the impact of such an approach. His executive team, of which five out of the six members are female, exemplifies merit-based recognition. This approach, focusing on what each person brings to the table rather than their gender, has led to a significant shift in leadership diversity over my 23-year career. It has opened doors for many roles like CEO, COO, and CFO, which might have been inaccessible before. This shift towards inclusivity and meritocracy in executive positions marks a positive change in the business world, offering more opportunities for all, regardless of gender.

**What does Hope do in the community to make it a better place to work, play, and live?**

At Hope, we're deeply involved in enhancing our community, focusing on education by introducing young people to diverse career paths, from technical roles to traditional professions, all within West Virginia. We're embedding ourselves in educational systems, partnering with institutions like the Monongalia County Technical Education Center to potentially create an oil and gas program, aiming for statewide expansion. Our efforts extend to economic development, where we actively seek to attract businesses to West Virginia, showcasing our commitment to supporting their energy needs and fostering partnerships. Under leadership that emphasizes collaboration and community support, we're redefining Hope's role in the community and the state's economic landscape, striving to be stewards of positive change and growth for future generations.

## Women Who Inspire

*“Confidence in your abilities and the space you occupy is key to making your mark.”*

Ruth DeLost-Wylie  
Chief Administrative Officer



### Ruth DeLost-Wylie

Chief Administrative Officer | Hope Utilities

Ruth DeLost-Wylie is the Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer of Hope Utilities, with over 30 years of experience in Information Technology, specializing in utility services. Before joining Hope, she led significant IT and customer service initiatives in the utility sector and is recognized for her leadership in overseeing major system conversions and acquisitions. An acclaimed figure in her field, Ruth has received multiple awards in Pittsburgh, including the 2023 CIO Lifetime Achievement Award, and she actively contributes to the United Way’s Women’s Leadership Council and the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

#### What are some of the organizations that you support that empower women?

I’ve actively participated in organizations aimed at empowering women, primarily in Pittsburgh before relocating to Morgantown. Notably, I’ve been involved with the Women’s Leadership Council for the United Way and Leadership Pittsburgh, which both foster community involvement and career advancement. At my previous company, I contributed to “Women with Energy,” focusing on mentorship and support for women in the utility sector. Currently, at Hope, we are introducing opportunities for leadership development programming and volunteer opportunities to support women. We aim to introduce the first pieces of this initiative in March, aligning with International Women’s Month, to offer various forms of support and advancement opportunities.

#### What advice do you have for younger female professionals who are navigating through their careers?

Reflecting on my career, the most impactful approach has been to immerse myself in the company’s culture from the start, aiming to be a part of the solution rather than highlighting problems. For younger female professionals navigating their careers, my advice is to actively seek to solve issues, bring positive energy, and contribute ideas. Rather than assigning blame or highlighting problems without offering solutions, focus on being a constructive force. This mindset not only solves immediate issues but also significantly enhances your reputation within the organization. Colleagues and leaders will recognize you as someone who is solution-oriented and a valuable team member, which in turn opens up numerous opportunities for advancement. Being seen as a proactive problem solver can greatly accelerate your career progression and help you stand out in any professional setting.

**Where do you think the biggest opportunities for women are?**

From my early days in a male-dominated manufacturing sector to the present, I've witnessed a dramatic expansion of opportunities for women across all fields, marking a significant shift from when such prospects were scarce. Despite this progress, challenges persist, notably with ensuring our voices are heard in professional settings. I've experienced and addressed situations where women's contributions are overlooked or attributed to male colleagues, highlighting the need for continuous vigilance and advocacy for recognition. Encouraging awareness and proper attribution in team interactions is a strategy I employ to combat these biases. It's clear that while the professional landscape has opened up for women, the journey towards full equality requires ongoing effort to educate and correct ingrained behaviors within the workplace.

**Who are the women who have inspired you?**

I am profoundly inspired by working mothers who expertly balance their careers and family responsibilities. The call center representatives in Morgantown, West Virginia, exemplify this resilience. These women manage to excel in high-pressure customer service roles while caring for their families and handling everyday challenges with grace and professionalism. Their ability to maintain empathy and effectiveness, despite the pressures of work and home, truly stands out to me. Their dedication and strength in seamlessly navigating both personal and professional spheres are what inspire me the most.

**Any other words of wisdom you want to impart to our audience?**

Embrace a solution-oriented approach and maintain a positive outlook, especially in challenging situations. Remember, as women, we often possess the skills and determination to excel. It's crucial to carry this confidence into every aspect of our professional lives. Assert your presence confidently, taking up space both physically and metaphorically, without hesitation. Your achievements are a testament to your capabilities, so approach each challenge and opportunity with the assurance that you are just as entitled and capable as anyone else in the room. Confidence in your abilities and the space you occupy is key to making your mark.

## Women Who Inspire

*“We live in an era brimming with opportunities for women, which is incredibly uplifting.”*

Melissa Dykes  
Chief Financial Officer



### Melissa Dykes

#### Chief Financial Officer | Hope Utilities

Melissa Dykes currently serves as the Chief Financial Officer of Hope Utilities, bringing extensive experience in utility operations and finance leadership to the company. She previously served as interim CEO and COO at JEA, the largest community-owned electric utility company in Florida, where she led operational improvements for reliability and safety, and in her time as CFO, significantly contributed to the financial health of the organization, translating to more than \$1 billion in cost savings to the community. Dykes' diverse background includes roles in investment banking at JPMorgan and The World Bank Group, and she is actively involved in various boards in northeast Florida.

#### What organizations do you support that empower women?

I've had the privilege of serving on the board of the local United Way, an organization that uplifts entire communities, including women and girls, ensuring everyone has access to hope—a term that resonates strongly with us at Hope. Recognizing the significant underrepresentation of women in politics, I also support The Policy Circle. This organization is dedicated to informing, equipping, and connecting women with important community issues and empowering them to take a more active role in politics. It fosters not only great conversations but also the building of meaningful friendships.

#### What do you see as the biggest opportunity for females in the business world?

We live in an era brimming with opportunities for women, which is incredibly uplifting. By channeling our passion and bringing our best selves to our chosen fields, the possibilities are limitless for women in the business world. At Hope, I've had the honor of working with some of the most dynamic, talented women I've ever met, in an industry traditionally dominated by men. A glance at a photo of our executive team showcases the opportunities available to us.

#### Who are women who have inspired you?

I am constantly inspired by the incredible women I work with every day at Hope. These women excel in all areas of business, bringing their whole selves to work, and leading with strength, compassion, intelligence, and commitment. It's an honor to be part of such an amazing team. On a personal note, my grandmother has been a profound source

of inspiration for me. Her life taught me the importance of bravery in adversity, the value of not diminishing my intelligence, the necessity of hard work, and the joy of loving wholeheartedly. She also showed me the significance of finding time for laughter and play. I miss her dearly and strive to live up to the example she set.

**What does Hope do in the community to make it a better place to work, play, and live?**

I'm proud to be part of Hope, where our deep commitment to community is a core part of our culture. We actively improve the places we work, play, and live through our corporate giving pillars, which focus on education, basic human needs, economic development, environmental conservation, and leadership support. Our efforts, like donating to the Mountaineer Food Bank and supporting the Dollar Energy Fund, alongside our employees volunteering over 1,160 hours in 2023, showcase our dedication to making a real difference in our communities across West Virginia.