

# 2020 WOMEN OF INFLUENCE



HEATHER BURTON



EVE FISCHBERG



TIFFANY MATHIS



GRACE NANAVATI



MELISSA REMOLINA

Security Bank's  
**WOMEN**  
of Influence

*Security Bank and Springfield Business Journal are proud to present the 17th annual Women of Influence. This program honors local women for their contributions to the Springfield area community. Selected by their peers through submitted nominations, all have made important contributions to their community at large.*

*A reception and awards program to celebrate their achievements will be held at Island Bay Yacht Club at a later date. Follow SBJ on Facebook or sign up for the weekly Biz Bites newsletter to receive additional information about this event.*

# Heather Burton

By Lana Shovlin

Photos by Josh Catalano

When Heather Burton was young, she had dreams of working for the *Chicago Tribune*. She loved writing and always thought she would pursue a career in journalism. She had visions of walking to work through the crowded streets of Chicago and writing articles that would be read worldwide.

However, those plans changed when she and her father, a laid-off coal miner from Auburn, Illinois, found themselves simultaneously attending Sangamon State University. In a chance conversation with her father one night about some gerontology classes that were being offered at the university, the trajectory of Burton's life changed. She instead began imagining what it would be like to become the administrator of a nursing home. Soon after that conversation with her father, Burton made the decision to change her major. Two years later, she graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in health services administration.

After graduation, Burton was working at Central Illinois Service Access when her supervisor sent out an email asking if any employees would be interested in taking a training class to learn how to write grants. Although she was now working in health care, Burton still loved writing, and she jumped at the chance to volunteer. She figured that not only could this opportunity benefit her employer, but perhaps it could provide the opportunity to finally be paid for her writing.

During this time, Burton was moonlighting as a part-time bartender at a golf course. One night at work, she was having a conversation with a patron about her grant writing training. As luck would have it, the CEO of Central Counties Health Centers, a facility that provides health care to the underserved people of central Illinois, was sitting at the bar. Overhearing Burton's conversation, he explained that grant writing was part of his job. He told her that once she completed her grant, he would be happy to look it over, and Burton took him up on the offer.

This led to the CEO encouraging Burton to apply for a job at CCHC as the development director, a newly created position. She spent the next five years in that role before making the difficult decision to resign after the CEO who had hired her left the organization and things began heading in a different direction.

In 2014, just 18 months after submitting her resignation, the board of directors from CCHC reached out to Burton asking for her help in writing a federal grant. In the time she had been away, the company had lost 70% of its employees, 4,000

patients and almost \$2 million. What had once been a successful nonprofit was now an organization on the verge of collapse.

Soon after she was contacted about writing the grant, CCHC began advertising for a new CEO. After encouragement from her family and friends, Burton applied for the job, and much to her surprise, she got it.

Today, under Burton's leadership, CCHC is once again a thriving facility. She refuses, however, to take sole credit. Instead, she praises the "team of rock stars" who work alongside her to provide quality care to anyone who walks through the doors of CCHC. Together, they have worked tirelessly to rebuild broken relationships and to establish a new level of trust among the community.

Burton believes the reason they were able to turn things around for CCHC so quickly is because she and her team believe that quality health care is a fundamental human right. Together, they provide quality and affordable primary, dental and behavioral health care to anyone who needs it, despite any social or economic barriers, including the inability to pay. She wants people to know that if you need medical care, all you have to do is pick up the phone and call CCHC. Someone there, especially Burton, will be happy to help you. SBJ





# Eve Fischberg

By Cinda Ackerman Klickna

Photos by Josh Catalano

Whether she is working with children or artists, patients of Parkinson's or those experiencing dementia, Eve Fischberg has spent a lifetime developing and delivering new ways to help.

A lover of dance and music, in 1982 she worked with others in Springfield to develop and run Prairie Grapevine, a nonprofit that promotes folk arts with music, dance and storytelling.

Her interest in art also led to the concept of a children's art festival in Springfield. She and others presented the idea to the Springfield Area Arts Council and for the first three Children's Art Festivals (1986-1989), Fischberg helped develop the activities and volunteered at the events.

In Loami, where she lives, Fischberg provided art outreach in the schools for over 15 years and often volunteered for fundraisers to support music and sports.

Today, Fischberg provides a unique opportunity for people with Parkinson's and related disorders and dementia patients. Knowing the importance of exercise for physical and emotional well-being, Fischberg offers movement and dance to groups several times each week. The concept of "dance" takes on a new understanding when one sees Fischberg leading a group.

The participants may be sitting down, moving in their chairs, lifting their legs, circling their arms or playing hand-to-hand games. These are the sessions she offers through the nonprofit she founded in 2016 called Joy of Movement. Those experiencing balance and walking difficulties due to their disorder are accompanied by a care partner; together, they participate in the choreographed movements that Fischberg has designed with each person's ability in mind.

Mary Jo Wasser expressed appreciation for the program, saying, "Springfield is blessed to have Eve's commitment to serving the Parkinson's community in such a unique, therapeutic and creative manner."

Jane Treadwell attends as a care partner and says, "The way Eve conducts the classes, showing profound respect for each of the dancers and injecting a sense of fun and discovery throughout the process, causes all of us to engage with each other with empathy and makes it possible for that hour or so to forget about Parkinson's and to enter into the dance, truly, with joy."

To Fischberg, this is not just about dance and movement. "I know that isolation can be so hard on people facing these disorders so, to me, this is about trying to keep people connected and caring about each other," she said.

Joy of Movement is just one part of her extensive occupational therapy work over a 40-year career. She also offers Stepping Up, an evidence-based program that was developed after responding to proposals from the SIU School of Medicine Center for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders. She leads the classes, designs home exercise programs, instructs the volunteers and presents training programs so other Stepping Up programs can be expanded around the state.

Fischberg received her bachelor of science in occupational therapy from Washington University in 1980 and a master of arts in occupational therapy for developmental disabilities from New York



University in 1984. She worked short stints in both St. Louis and New York City, but mainly in Springfield, serving as an occupational therapist at Memorial Medical Center (1984-1989) and at St. John's Hospital (1989-1998). At both facilities she developed home-based therapy services for infants and toddlers and occupational therapy for adults.

She was a founding faculty member of Lincoln Land Community College, and a professor and academic fieldwork coordinator, teaching occupational therapy assistants (1998-2015).

It was around 2014 when she was helping her father, who had a Parkinson's-like condition, that she came across a brochure about the Mark Morris Dance Group in Brooklyn, New York, which trained people in dance for Parkinson's patients. She took the training in the Midwest and began work to form the nonprofit program.

Even during the current stay-at-home order, she is helping to arrange online classes and discussions for her Joy of Movement and Stepping Up participants to keep them from feeling isolated.

Vinod Gupta, who nominated Fischberg for the Woman of Influence says, "I have known Eve for 20 years. I have been so impressed with her dedication and passion."

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# Tiffany Mathis

By Carey Smith

Photos by Josh Catalano



Our most difficult times are often when we reach deeply to find the courage to persevere. It is not always evident from appearances how far we have come in life, but the desire to persevere is demonstrated in Tiffany Mathis.

In 2014, Mathis found herself in tremendous pain from a herniated disk but was informed she was too heavy for back surgery. Instead, she had to undergo weight loss surgery. Lying in bed in pain, using a walker to get around, Mathis vowed, "If I get better, I will never sit again." After losing 150 pounds, she had surgery to repair her back.

Two years after her initial injury, Mathis regained mobility and proceeded to make the most of her vow. "I want to use up those 24 hours each day as much as possible, doing as much as I can, using my energy to help others and myself. I learned two lessons in that time. First, changing the world happens by doing one small thing at a time. Second, mobility is a gift. Going through something like that puts a lot into perspective," she said.

Mathis is the CEO and executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Illinois (BGCCIL), overseeing nine facilities throughout Springfield, which includes 179 staff and serves 1,356 youth. Mathis began her time with Boys and Girls Clubs through a two-year AmeriCorps placement. She later served as the director of fund development and community placement, and then as a central unit director. Mathis is also a member of Boys and Girls Clubs of America's National Advisory Council for LGBTQ+ issues, where she focuses on youth inclusion.

Kristina Barbee, who is a member of the Rotary Club of Midtown Springfield, where Mathis serves as president, states that Mathis "is not the type of leader to demand others follow her, but instead, she is a leader who looks to her peers as equals in the group's journey and creates a culture that has others enthusiastically following her."

As a Springfield District 186 school board member, Mathis cherishes a role that allows her to work with parents, administrators and staff. Mathis also serves as the vice chair of the Serve Illinois Commission for Volunteerism and Community Service, which oversees AmeriCorps; is on the board of trustees for the Hoogland Center for the Arts; and she is an Eastern Star through the local Masonic Lodge.

Barbee further states, "What I admire most about Tiffany is that her work in serving others isn't just for one demographic or one group. She knows that when one group rises, we all do. Through her time in this community she has served countless individuals, from women, men, boys, girls and certainly non-binary folks, in all areas, from personal growth, education, service and leadership skills."

Mathis learned firsthand what it means to serve one's community through her mother, Alison Williams, who was a dedicated advocate for families, directed multiple daycare facilities and was involved in the Parents as Teachers program. Miss Alison, as she was known, included her daughter in much of her volunteer work, helping families succeed by connecting them with resources in the community.

"She taught me that no matter what you have going on, you always have time to be of service to people. As small stones make ripples in a pond, small random acts of kindness can be impactful," said Mathis. She now brings her own three children with her in her volunteer endeavors to observe what it means to be the change you want to see in the world.

Another woman of influence in Mathis' childhood was her father's mother, Emma Williams, who lived through segregation in Jacksonville, Illinois. Williams worked multiple jobs, went to college and instilled in Mathis a strong work ethic. "I appreciated her stories and her leading by example. She taught me that I am not in competition with other women," said Mathis.

Indeed, one of the best times of Mathis' life was taking part in Leadership Illinois, a group of diverse women united by the desire to be a catalyst for positive change. As a strong woman and a person of color, Mathis' views and opinions were valued, and said, "I instantly felt connected and supported."

As Barbee states, Mathis' "journey toward leadership has been a road of hard work, dedication and perseverance that truly shows with her humbleness and dedication to public service and others."

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# Grace Nanavati

By Karen Ackerman Witter

Photos by Josh Catalano

Grace Luttrell Nanavati has loved dance for as long as she can remember and has been dancing since she was four years old. Nanavati has directed, choreographed and performed in countless productions. Now, as director emeritus of the Springfield Ballet Company, she still teaches dance lessons six days a week. Her students range from the age of two to women her age and older. Dance is her hobby, avocation and profession. "How can you go wrong doing what you like?" exclaims Nanavati.

As a teacher and mentor, Nanavati has touched the lives of thousands of young women. By growing and expanding the arts in Springfield, she has enriched the lives of our citizens. Future generations will benefit from Nanavati's dedication to creating a vibrant arts community.

Nanavati is a Springfield native and product of District 186 schools, graduating from Springfield High School. She loves Springfield and says, "Bigger cities don't have the heart we have. There are smart people in many communities, but not all come with their heart attached to their brains."

Her mother was a dancer, and Nanavati has fond memories of dancing as a child. She took lessons at the Mack Studio of Dance where her instructor, Betty Jo Mack, "brought the arts forward with a heart." When that studio closed, Nanavati danced at the Caskey Dance Studio under Mildred Caskey. She danced all through high school and was an assistant dance instructor, so it is no surprise she earned a fine arts degree in dance, graduating from Butler University in Indianapolis. At that time, only a handful of universities offered a degree in dance.

After graduation, Nanavati had job offers elsewhere, but her mother persuaded her to return to Springfield. The Caskey Dance Studio had become Dance Arts Studio, and Nanavati's mother bought the studio for Nanavati to run. Plus, a regional ballet company needed a director. That was 1973, and she was only 21 years old. Two years later, Nanavati was the driving force in forming the Springfield Ballet Company by merging two existing ballet companies. To enhance her business skills, she earned a master's degree in community arts management at the former Sangamon State University.

The Springfield Ballet Company and Dance Arts Studio were a perfect fit for Nanavati's love of kids, teaching and choreography. She brought her artistry and passion to performing, training performers, choreographing performances and creating backdrops. She used her many professional connections to enhance the local ballet community. She served as artistic director of the Springfield Ballet Company for 22 years and owned and operated Dance Arts Studio for 45 years. Both flourished under Nanavati's leadership, organization skills and tireless energy.

Many of Nanavati's students have gone on to illustrious careers in dance and performing arts. She has had the opportunity of teaching third and fourth generations of students. However, Nanavati is not only a teacher, but also a mentor who helps guide her students to succeed. She teaches them that how they lead their lives sets them up for success. She advises them to choose a path based upon what they love. She also instills in her students the



importance of being a helper and asks what good deeds they have done.

Nanavati's passion for teaching extends beyond the dance studio. She taught an integrated curriculum in the school system, using the arts to help elementary school students learn about science, history and geography in a fun manner. She has taken dance to schools and developed and directed Dance in Illinois for fourth-graders held at Sangamon Auditorium. She is a teacher who challenges her students to question everything, which she says helps make her a better teacher.

Dennis Bringuet asked her to get involved in developing a community arts center in the former Masonic Temple. She accepted immediately, calling herself "a sucker for causes." This led to becoming a founding trustee of the Hoogland Center for the Arts and she devoted years to bringing this to fruition. Now it is home to over 20 arts organizations. With all these organizations under one roof, there are many opportunities for collaboration.

"Everyone is empowered to move up, and the whole arts community is better as a result," says Nanavati.

Nanavati is deeply devoted to her husband, P.J., and their son, Buzz. She has a zest for life and enjoys hiking, camping, Scuba diving and downhill skiing with her husband and son. She is a living testimonial to the value of an active lifestyle. She goes out of her way to leave an impact, and Springfield is a better community as a result of Nanavati's life's work.

At this challenging time in our world today, Nanavati's simple question to her students is good for all of us to consider: "Have you done something good for someone else?" SBJ



# Melissa Remolina

By Carey Smith

Photos by Josh Catalano



Melissa Remolina is an agent of change in our community, both through her employment and her volunteer efforts. A native of Lincoln, Illinois, Remolina grew up with a younger sister and parents who were (and still are) engaged in volunteer activities. She learned at a young age that “reaching out to help others when you can is an important part of life.”

Nominator and coworker Michelle Eccles McLaughlin states that not only is Remolina “a wife, mother, daughter and sister who is passionate about being there for her family and making sure they are getting what they need, but she does the same for nearly everyone that crosses her path. If someone is in need, she will move mountains to get them the help they require. If someone is succeeding, she is the first to say ‘congratulations’ and to shine a light on them.”

In her work life, Remolina is a clinical supervisor for the Integrated Assessment Program (IAP), working through Northern Illinois University on contract with the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services. She manages a team of six clinicians who complete a broad assessment of children and the adults who care for them, parents and foster parents, to evaluate their emotional,

medical, behavioral, developmental and educational needs and strengths. The clinicians determine a path of permanency, putting together recommendations to support each child and adult in the process.

Remolina started with IAP when it began in 2004 and was able to have a hands-on role in the development and innovation of the program. McLaughlin asserts Remolina “is diligent, conscientious, focused and obsessed with making sure what her team does allows each person to have access to the services they need to make better life choices.”

No less diligent in her public service, Remolina is in her fourth and final year as president of Southeast High School's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Remolina has enjoyed coordinating activities that engage parents and their children, encouraging positive interactions that grow connections and helping to uplift the image and reputation of Southeast. In encouraging Spartan pride, she works to support teachers, parents and children in whatever ways she can.

Remolina also serves as a coordinator for The Committee for Children, an organization dedicated to preventing child abuse and supporting the emotional and social growth of children in Sangamon County. The Committee has existed for nearly 40 years, with Remolina taking part as a coordinator since 2001. Remolina helped implement the Someone Special program, which helps pay for extracurricular activities for children in K-12 who are identified by their teachers, social workers or other agencies as having a need.

“I believe that Melissa has touched the lives of many people,” said Barbara Coffinbarger, who has worked with Remolina through The Committee for Children for 15 years. “She has definitely had a direct impact on young people and has always helped anyone who was in need. On a personal basis, I have to say that I have never known anyone who was as caring about people and concerned about everyone.”

Remolina recalls that her mother was the most influential woman of her life, volunteering in her Girl Scout troop, her church youth group and many other community programs in Lincoln. She observed her mother in action, seeing firsthand that, “What you give, you get back. One of the best ways to understand yourself is by helping others,” she explained. As an adult, Remolina values her strong friendships, each of which influence her in a different way and strengthen each other in their interactions.

Remolina desires to improve the well-being of both individuals and our community. After her term with the Southeast PTO is up, Remolina says she will continue to address equity and diversity in Springfield and focus on programs that improve health and well-being.

Remolina noted, “The healthier the individual, the healthier our community.”

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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE  
**2020 WOMEN OF INFLUENCE**

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

Heather Burton • Eve Fischberg • Tiffany Mathis • Grace Nanavati • Melissa Remolina

*"Security Bank continues to recognize women who make an impact on our community. Professionally and through volunteerism, these women will leave a positive influence on those they have touched for years to come."*

**-Stephan Paul Antonacci, President and CEO**



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



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