


15 WOMEN TO WATCH IN 2015

COMPILED BY CARRIE WILLIAMS & MARISSA BERGMAN

POKEY CHATMAN


Head Coach/GM, WNBA Chicago Sky



Pokey Chatman, a former gold medalist who played for USA Basketball, has paved the way for women's basketball to succeed in Chicago. Joining the organization five years ago after coaching for 15 years at Louisiana State University, she took the Sky from several below-.500 performances to topping the Eastern Conference in 2013 and securing the first playoff birth in franchise history. And last year, they went all the way to the WNBA Finals. Although the Sky lost the series to the Phoenix Mercury, Coach Chatman is poised to lead her team to its third consecutive playoff appearance and first championship.

AMINA ELAHI


Reporter, Blue Sky Innovation



After spending a couple years covering digital startups and social media as a freelancer, Amina Elahi joined *Chicago Tribune's* Blue Sky Innovation team one year ago. While she has reported on emerging business, inspiring leaders and tech events, she's also managed to uncover some of the less-savory aspects of the community...namely, issues faced by women and minorities. No matter the angle, Ms. Elahi believes theirs are the stories worth telling.

BETH ENGEL


Senior Vice President, Senior Advisory Fiduciary Specialist, Wells Fargo Private Bank



Mother of five-year-old twins Beth Engel goes above and beyond for her children. When they were set to transfer schools, Ms. Engel contacted the Daisy troop leader to secure a spot for her daughter, Carley, to help ease her transition. Hearing the troop was full, Ms. Engel called the Girl Scouts and was told the amount of girls in each troop was solely up to the leader. Relaying that information to the troop leader, she was told that adding another scout would deter the other girls from "having the ultimate Daisy experience." Shocked and saddened, that didn't stop her from getting Carley into Girl Scouts. Ms. Engel launched a troop, which now has 13 girls and plenty of help from their moms.

ALICIA GONZALEZ

Founder/Executive Director, Chicago Run




In her short career, Alicia Gonzalez has impacted massive change leading Chicago Run, a non-profit that provides free physical activity and nutrition programs to Chicago Public School

students. Since launching the organization in 2008, Ms. Gonzalez has promoted health and wellness to over 14,500 students, 45 schools and 32 neighborhoods across the city. It's no wonder she was a recipient of the Latina Entrepreneur of the Year in 2012, especially when you factor in her position as vice president of the Board of Directors of the Instituto Justice and Leadership Academy and a member of the Founding Advisory Board of Good Sports.

SARAH ROSE GRABER


Performer/Director/Teaching Artist



Having attended Northwestern University to study theater, Sarah Rose Graber also trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and developed an interest in international theater. She then won the Circumnavigator Scholar Grant and traveled around the world to multiple countries and continents to explore theater for social change. Most recently, Ms. Graber spent a year in the UK as a highly prestigious Fulbright scholar researching a form of collaborative theater. She's worked for many theaters in Chicago, and her latest project is directing a new show called *Worthy* at Adventure Stage Chicago (opening April 14th).

SHANON LAVIN


Navy Ensign, USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)



A native of Taipei, Taiwan, Shanon Lavin spent most of her childhood in the Chicago suburbs. She then went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the United States Naval Academy. As if she weren't already enough of a trailblazer, Ms. Lavin was founder and captain of the Naval Academy Dance Team, in addition to playing women's ice hockey. Since her graduation from the Naval Academy in 2014, Ms. Lavin has been based out of Mayport, Florida, as an operations intelligence division officer.

FAWN LOPEZ

Publisher/Vice President, Modern Healthcare & Modern Physician



Fawn Lopez has dedicated her professional career to Chicago-based publishing. After spending over two years at *Crain's Chicago Business*, Ms. Lopez jumped to one of its sister publications, *Modern Healthcare*, the industry's leading source of healthcare business and policy news, research and information. Now publisher and vice president of both *Modern Healthcare* and *Modern Physician*, Ms. Lopez has developed a passion for community service healthcare causes related to cardiovascular disease and obesity, particularly in women, children, minorities and low-income communities. Her expertise has been crucial for her work as a board member of the Asian Health Care Leaders Association and American Heart Association-Chicago.

DR. NEGAR MANSOURIAN-HADAVI **Founder/Director, Chicago Persian School**



With a PhD in materials science and engineering from Northwestern University, it might seem unusual that Dr. Negar Mansourian-Hadavi founded the Chicago Persian School, a 501(c)(3) organization that offers Persian language and cultural education to children and adults. But when looking for a Persian school for her daughters in 2007, she realized the need for such a community and took it upon herself to pull it together and create a rigorous language curriculum. It's crucial to Dr. Mansourian-Hadavi that the Chicago Persian School be open to anyone with an interest in the culture, without any religious and political affiliation.

CRYSTAL NOACK **"I Ride With MS" Ambassador**



Warrenville native Crystal Noack received a life-altering diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS) in 2009. Although it's an unpredictable disease affecting and usually disabling the central nervous system, she was determined to stay active and tackle the physical challenges while living with MS. She joined Bike MS, a cycling event sponsored by the National MS Society held in over 100 cities across the country every year, and participated in her first ever Bike MS: Tour de Farms ride in 2011. The largest charity bike ride in Illinois, Ms. Noack's ride in June 2014 spanned over 110 miles in two days.

CAMILLE PADDOCK **Founder, Cam's Dare to Be Different**



Sixteen-year-old Camille Paddock suffers from Alopecia Areata, an autoimmune disease that causes hair loss and other serious health complications. After being bullied by classmates who didn't understand her struggles, she fell into a deep depression and contemplated suicide. Fortunately, she decided to take a stand and start an anti-bullying campaign on Facebook to give kids like her an outlet and support group. The online community quickly became a 501(c)(3) non-profit, and this year Ms. Paddock is launching her anti-bullying program in schools nationwide as well as releasing a book. Her goal is to speak to as many kids as possible, fight bullying and prevent teen suicide.

DR. REV. MARCENIA RICHARDS **Executive Director, Fierce Women of Faith**



Working hard to break down the walls society has built between people of different faiths, Dr. Rev. Marcenia Richards believes religion does not need to become a blockade when seeking peace for Chicago's youth. Since Fierce Women of Faith's inception in 2013, she has gathered hundreds of women together from different neighborhoods and religious backgrounds with a goal of ending youth violence. She also speaks on non-violence throughout the country, and her teachings extend through Africa, Canada, Europe and, most recently, South Korea at the World Alliance of Religions Peace Summit.

SMITA SHAH **President/CEO, SPAAN Tech Inc.**



The daughter of immigrants, Smita Shah was raised on the principle that you must always support your community. And Ms. Shah has been doing just that, in an extreme balancing act of entrepreneurship and philanthropy. She founded her flourishing infrastructure firm, SPAAN Tech, Inc., a mere two years after graduating from MIT with a master's in science in civil engineering. She's also vice chairman of the President's Council for the Museum of Science and Industry and co-chair of the 2015 Heart Ball for the American Heart Association, to name a mere few of her charitable pursuits.

KIM SIMIOS **Managing Partner, Ernst & Young**



Traveling to Israel last May with her church on a learning expedition, Kim Simios went with the purpose of meeting people from different backgrounds to gain an understanding about what formed their perspectives. This included people from Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths, military, educators, refugees living in camps and Arab environmentalists. For Ms. Simios, the trip provided clarity that as a leader it's important to understand context before forming opinions or making decisions. And that has been most helpful for her as she navigates her role as managing partner at Ernst & Young's Chicago office.

BOLAJI SOSAN **Founder/Editor, SocialLifeChicago**



Who said Millennials are lazy? Bolaji Sosan, a new media entrepreneur, is proof to the contrary. Ms. Sosan founded SocialLifeChicago, a digital magazine she started as a hobby in 2011. Now it's a booming lifestyle website that covers the best of Chicago's social and philanthropic scene, plus the city's next generation of rising stars. Ms. Sosan also dedicates her rare free time volunteering with Chicago Cares and the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, in addition to serving as a member of the Associate Board of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.

AMY THOMAS ELDER **Teacher, The Odyssey Project**



With three college degrees, it's clear that Amy Thomas Elder is passionate about education. She teaches in the University of Chicago Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults and is academic director of the Bard College Clemente Course in the Humanities. However, perhaps Ms. Thomas Elder's most remarkable achievement is directing the Odyssey Project, an Illinois Humanities Council program offering college courses to adults with low incomes at absolutely no cost. Director of the program since 2000, she recently left the position (while remaining a teacher) to write a book on adult education in the humanities.