

#### PRESENTS

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## **2024 TENNESSEAN** OF THE YEAR - BUSINESS

The Frederick W. Smith Family, headed by the founder and executive chairman of FedEx Corporation, has committed a \$50 million challenge gift to the University of Memphis, the largest gift in University history. This gift will provide much-needed upgrades and modernization of the community's two most important sports venues, FedEx Forum, and the Liberty Bowl, increasing the attractiveness of Memphis as an entertainment destination around the FedEx Forum and the Liberty Bowl.

Richard W. Smith said in a press release, on behalf of the Smith Family. "The upgrade and modernization of this community's two most important sports venues, the FedEx Forum, and the Liberty Bowl, is of paramount importance to the future of FedEx's headquarters city. In the same vein, increasing the attractiveness of Memphis as an entertainment destination around FedEx Forum and the Liberty Bowl both is essential for economic growth and increased employment. Tourism is our second largest industry after logistics, and this will help to drive additional activity and development here in our home city.

# 2024 INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR



**Bob Higgins** is the President and CEO of Barge Design Solutions, an accomplished engineering and architectural firm, boasting more than 25 years of leadership and industry experience. A Vanderbilt University Civil Engineering graduate and a proud U.S. Air Force veteran, Higgins is celebrated for his strategic leadership and dedication to technological advancement in the industry.

He recently ventured into a realm of generative artificial intelligence (AI), recognizing its transformative potential for all businesses. In early 2023, Higgins embarked on a journey into generative AI, catalyzed by a course on AI prompt engineering led by Dr. Jules White of Vanderbilt University. This experience not only integrated AI into his daily workflow but also inspired him to advocate for its application across the business spectrum.

Understanding the critical role of AI in enhancing productivity and decision-making, Higgins collaborated with Vanderbilt University's Future of Learning and Generative AI Initiative to educate executives on how to embrace and harness this groundbreaking technology in business leadership. Bob and Dr. White co-created a new course, 'Generative AI for Leaders,' which is the first of its kind hosted on Coursera and is part of its new Gen AI Academy, which aims to improve executive and foundational literacy worldwide. With his commitment to helping others in mind, the course is applicable to leaders at businesses of all sizes.

Higgins' dedication to community service remains steadfast. He serves as Chair of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Chair of the Board of Visitors for Vanderbilt School of Engineering, and holds positions on the Downtown Partnership and Ascension Saint Thomas System Board, where he chairs the Finance Committee. His efforts have not gone unnoticed, earning him recognition as a Veterans Awards Winner and a Most Admired CEO by the Nashville Business Journal for his military service and impact on Nashville's business community.

Passionate about mentorship, Higgins has also played a pivotal role in establishing a new Leadership Professional Engineer (PE) program in Tennessee aimed at enriching mid-level engineers with leadership skills critical to their professional growth.

Higgins' journey reflects a seamless fusion of traditional leadership, community engagement, and forward-thinking embrace of generative AI, positioning him at the forefront of technological innovation within the engineering and architectural industry.

# 2024 CHANGEMAKER

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Dr. Adrienne Battle is Superintendent of Metro Nashville Public Schools, the first woman and first graduate of the school system to serve in this role. Under her leadership, MNPS was named a Level 5 district - the highest achievement - in the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System in both 2022 and 2023. The district recently received national recognition from Harvard and Stanford University researchers in the Education Recovery Scorecard for its work on post-pandemic academic recovery, ranking in the top 10 among large urban districts for growth in both reading and math in the 2022-23 school year - an achievement matched by only one other district nationally. Because of the fundamental changes Dr. Battle has led, MNPS was used as a case study in the same report for having a set of clear innovative strategies to raise student learning outcomes. Dr. Battle also has spearheaded the creation of University MNPS, a partnership with local colleges and universities that has created four-year, full-ride scholarships and on-campus supports for many of the district's graduates.

Dr. Battle was named the Professional Educators of Tennessee's 2022 Superintendent of the Year and the 2021 Tennessee Principals Association Supervisor of the Year and received the Nashville NAACP's Legacy Award. She is a graduate of Leadership Nashville and is a member of Leadership Tennessee's 2023-2024 class. In 2015 she received the William J. and Lucille H. Field Excellence in Tennessee Secondary Leadership Award from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville as a result of leading Antioch High School to become the first zoned high school ever to be named a Tennessee Reward School, the top distinction a school can earn in Tennessee. She has spent almost her entire career at MNPS, previously serving as a teacher, assistant principal, academic principal, executive principal, principal supervisor and community superintendent. A Nashville native, Dr. Battle is a graduate of John Overton High School, Missouri State University and Tennessee State University, where she earned her master's, education specialist and doctorate degrees in Educational Administration and Supervision. She is a proud mother and wife.

2024 CEO OF THE YEAR

**John R. Ingram** was named Chairman of the Ingram Industries Inc. Board of Directors in April 2008, having served as Vice Chairman of the Board since 1999. He is also Chairman of Ingram Content Group LLC.

Mr. Ingram is a graduate of Princeton University, where he received a B.A. in English in 1984. In 1986, he received his M.B.A. from the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University.

Mr. Ingram joined Ingram Industries Inc. in 1986, serving early in his career as the Assistant Treasurer and also as President of Tennessee Book Company (which became part of Ingram Content Group in 2009). He later served as President of Ingram Book Company, Vice President of Purchasing for Ingram Micro Europe, and Director of Purchasing for Ingram Micro Inc. He served as a member of the Ingram Micro Inc. Board of Directors from 1996 to 2016.

In 2017, as lead investor, Mr. Ingram spearheaded the effort to bring Major League Soccer to Nashville. In December of that year, the MLS Board of Governors awarded the city of Nashville an expansion team, a huge success for the city and Nashville soccer fans. On May 1st, 2022, Nashville Soccer Club opened their brand new, 30,000 person stadium – the largest soccer specific stadium in the United States.

Mr. Ingram is married with four children.



# 2024 TRI STAR AWARD STATEWIDE IMPACT



BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) is a taxpaying, not-for-profit health plan serving 3.4 million members. The mission-driven company is building on its commitment to understand and address health disparities with the release of its Health Equity Report, a review of health disparities aimed at highlighting issues and informing ways to improve care delivery and outcomes. The report analyzed data from publicly available sources, as well as data from BlueCross members who get health coverage through their jobs, on the ACA Marketplace or through the state's Medicaid plan. The report focuses on how race and social factors impact health outcomes, providing insights around: Behavioral Health, Cancer, Child & Adolescent Well-Care, Chronic Condition Management, and Maternal Health. "We wanted to get a better picture of the health issues and barriers to care faced by our members and Tennesseans as a whole, so that we could more effectively partner with health care providers to address those issues." said Dr. Andrea Willis, chief medical officer. "Understanding this data helps support progress that will ultimately deliver better health for everyone, regardless of their background."



**Brad Paisley** has earned his place in country music history as one of the genre's most talented and decorated male solo artists. For more than 20 years, his songwriting and unmatched showmanship have won him more than 40 music awards including a highly coveted Entertainer of the Year honor. He and Carrie Underwood together, are recognized as the most successful CMA Award co-host in its history, with 11 consecutive years. A member of the Grand Ole Opry since 2001, Paisley has written 21 of his 25 No. 1 hits and has amassed nearly 5 billion career streams.

His philanthropic endeavors are endless including the 2021 nationwide campaign to promote Tennessee tourism with Governor Lee, "Tennessee on Me." In 2020, Brad and his wife Kimberly Williams-Paisley, alongside Belmont University, co-founded the nonprofit organization The Store, a free-referral based grocery store which aims to empower low-income individuals and families in the Nashville area. The Paisleys have also been recognized by Belmont for their endowed scholarship fund and the strong example Brad sets for students. In 2021, Belmont dedicated the "Brad Paisley and Kimberly Williams-Paisley Ballroom" in the University's Fisher Center.

Additionally, Brad has also stepped up to help the '1 for All Campaign for the First Amendment' in conjunction with MTSU, Band Against Cancer with Sarah Cannon, the Boys & Girls Club of Tennessee, Nashville's annual 'Dance Party to End Alzheimer's', the Nashville Film Festival, St. Jude's Country Cares, the Nashville Comedy Festival, Vanderbilt University's 'Gratitunes' program to recognize nurses on the frontlines during the pandemic as well as their 'Take The Shot' PSA and the capital campaign for the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Williamson Medical Center. Brad headlined Nashville's 'Let Freedom Sing' concert in 2021 and 2023 and is the only artist the city of Nashville asked back to perform.





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