By Kevin Ellis

Business North Carolina collaborated with NC TECH to create the Next Tech Award to recognize North Carolina’s rising stars in our state’s tech and tech-enabled companies. The award is meant to spotlight those individuals who often work in the trenches of an organization, and who keep pushing projects and objectives forward.

Supervisors and colleagues submitted nominations for the inaugural awards and a selection committee picked 10 winners in one of three categories: tech and innovation, tech professional and sales and marketing. The winners solve problems at work, make teams better and contribute in ways that are not a formal part of the job description.

These 30 profiles of the winners share typically what these individuals do at their jobs, their motivations, those who inspire them, advice on how to succeed in tech as well as their passions outside the office. In many cases, those efforts outside work help others or advance a worthy cause, such as encouraging more women to seek job opportunities in technology.

JAMES ALBERQUE
GIS, emerging technologies manager | City of Raleigh
Raleigh

Alberque’s involvement in geographic information system (GIS) technology dates back to working with the city of Boston while a student at Framingham State University, where he earned a degree in geography. He joined the city of Raleigh 10 years ago and continued his work in the online mapping and property data field. He has created strong relationships across city departments and other local governments, while driving access to technology to help manage economic growth and provide better customer service.

Influence: My team is exceptionally talented and always willing to share knowledge and enthusiasm.

Success in tech: Curiosity and passion

What others say: “Jim’s expertise in technology has helped position the city as a technology leader. I often joke about his tendency to ‘nerd out’ on technology, but it really isn’t the technology that excites him, but the technology’s potential to impact the city’s work to make staff more efficient and ultimately provide better services to residents,” says Beth Stagner, assistant director of IT.

Outside work: My wife and I enjoy watching our three children participate in sports and other activities.

MIKE ALBRITTON
senior vice president, cloud | CData Software
Durham

Albritton executes CData’s cloud application and product strategy, which provides self-service data connectivity solutions for access to live data from hundreds of on-premises and cloud applications. Users rely on the Chapel Hill-based company to enable advanced analytics, boost cloud adoption, streamline operations, and create a more connected business. Albritton has a computer science degree from UNC Chapel Hill and an MBA from Duke University.

Influence: Gent Hito taught me a lot about building customer-focused products. He taught me how to make a product successful in the marketplace through careful attention to detail, explaining the value to customers, and how to price and sell the product.

Success in tech: Tech is an industry that changes rapidly, and in order to stay current, you must strive to be a lifelong learner and really enjoy what you’re doing. I learn something new every day, which is part of what makes this job very exciting.

What others say: “Mike is responsible for driving our cloud strategy and vision. Mike’s expertise in data technology made him central to the development of our latest product, which impressed our clients with its innovative features and functionality,” says Manish Patel, chief product officer at CData.

Outside work: Events like Spartan races and GoRuck challenges as well as golf, wakeboarding and spending time with my family. GoRuck challenges are team events based on military Special Forces training.
Howard spent four years in the Army before finishing his computer science degree at N.C. State University. He shifted from wanting to make video games to helping businesses and people achieve goals. “I’ve yet to find anything more professionally satisfying than helping a team come together to be more than the sum of its parts, and seeing how that experience changes people forever,” says Howard. Allstacks uses machine learning and AI models across data to improve software development outcomes.

Influence: “My experience leading soldiers in combat taught me more about the value and mechanics of teams than I thought possible to know. As a result, everything I do is centered around building trust to enable great teams,” says Howard.

Success in tech: The most important character trait is curiosity. Whether it’s about people or tools or business, a desire to know more is eternally valuable.

What others say: “From Jamie’s career in the military through his leadership roles at software companies, his career is marked by learning and practicing leadership. After he left the service, he developed his technical skills, and has been combining those with a desire to build and lead great teams to this day,” says Allstacks founder Jeremy Freeman.

Outside work: Playing board games with my family, disc golf and video games.

LANDRON is his company’s information security leader and adviser with expertise in building, securing and monitoring applications and platforms. He has a business administration degree from Campbell University and a master of information technology with a concentration in cyber security from Virginia Tech.

Influence: John Zemonek, managing director of Raleigh-based Aligned Technology Group, has been instrumental in creating an environment that fosters innovation and autonomy, allowing me the freedom to explore new ideas and take risks. His openness to honest communication creates a sense of trust, and I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and concerns without fear of repercussions. John’s unwavering support for both me and the entire team is truly commendable, as he always has our best interests at heart.

Success in tech: The ability to think critically, organize people, and communicate up, down, left, and right will always set you apart.

What others say: “Manny’s commitment to the technology community and our clients has made him a critical piece of the success of our team. His leadership and focus has enabled our organization,” says Zemonek.

Outside work: Spend time with family, play the violin and hike local trails.

With more than 350 issued patents, Keen is a co-recipient of the 2023 IBM Carolinas Inventor of the Year award. He is a regular presenter on the IBM Technology YouTube channel, covering topics like AI and data science, amassing more than 1.5 million views. His engaging approach transforms complex IT topics into digestible content. He manages the technical training team, creating digital and classroom courses that support IBM systems. He has a computer studies degree from Southampton Solent University in the United Kingdom.

Influence: Anybody who can take complex technical topics and explain them simply and clearly. To me, that is true mastery in understanding.

Success in tech: Engage with people through your deliverables and communications, and collaborate with domain experts.

What others say: “Our RTP site, while not an IBM Research center, has historically contributed around 12% of those patents each year. Consistently, Martin has been our most prolific producer of those patents coming out of RTP, serving as an inspiration to young inventors at our site. Martin is a joy to work with, always willing to help with tasks above and beyond his job role, especially within our IBM RTP community,” says Tim Humphrey, chief analytics officer, RTP site and N.C. state executive.

Outside work: Keen homebrewed 99 different beer styles in 99 weeks, and documented his products in a weekly YouTube series.

Lopez is a former middle and high school science teacher, Lopez has been with Lenovo since 2021. She previously worked for Cisco and SAS Institute. She is responsible for the daily operations of Lenovo’s Diversity by Design Process, which aims to make products more inclusive, including for the disabled. “By including individuals from different backgrounds, varying abilities, and unique minds in decision-making, we accelerate human advancement,” says Lopez. She serves on the advisory commission of the N.C. State Museum of Natural Science, as a board member of the Hispanics of Lenovo Associations and on the board for Dress for Success. She has degrees in biology and education from Florida International University.

Influence: Lenovo Executive Director Christopher Osborne has invested in my education, promoted my career growth, valued my ideas, and advocated for human-centric innovation.

Success in tech: Technology is constantly changing and evolving. Your future job may not yet exist. It’s essential to continually grow and learn.

What others say: “Ada is impacting our company, but even more importantly, she is impacting the communities we serve,” says Osborne.

Outside work: Spending time with my husband, son, daughter and our miniature schnauzers. Also visiting museums, zoos, aquariums and national parks; hiking, bicycling and cooking.
CRUZ NUÑEZ
senior developer | Code the Dream
Chapel Hill

Nunez was brought to the U.S. from Mexico at age 4, and went from English as a Second Language classes to advanced placement. At Durham Tech, he finished Code the Dream’s first round of classes. He eventually led a team of eight software developers. His job helps him promote racial diversity by helping train others.

Influence: “As a kid I heard the hate toward immigrants. Comments like ‘Go back to where you belong,’ and ‘they’re lazy.’ I refuse to let anything hold me back. They didn’t want me. They thought I would fail. I’ll be a winner, a leader, and a role model in society. I’ll kill them with success.”

What others say: “As an undocumented student, he understood his unique struggles and was an activist for immigrant rights. While attending community college, he discovered Code the Dream and completed its inaugural class, despite no prior experience with programming,” says Pamela Bash, director of development for Code the Dream.

Outside work: Strives to hit the gym and lift more weights than the last time. Music, traveling, photography, anime and movies.

JENNIFER SHEVACH
senior director, engineering | Pendo
Raleigh

Shevach helps build high-performing teams to solve complex customer problems. She started at the Raleigh company in 2017 as a back-end engineer. Shevach has a bachelor’s degree in computer science from N.C. State University and a master’s in computer science from Columbia University.

Influence: My husband encouraged me to return to the industry after spending 12 years raising our daughters. He is also in the computer industry and has been a great mentor for me as I have grown into a manager and director.

Success in tech: Teamwork is so important, as is diversity on a technical team. No one person can solve any problem, and you often need to lean on others.

What others say: “Jennifer re-entered the software industry after 12 years as a full-time mom to two special needs daughters and fitness business owner. Her diverse life experiences have inspired a passion for results and constant improvement, whether it be self, product, team, home, or community,” says Alivia Kasumov, a Pendo communications specialist.

Outside work: Visiting North Carolina mountains and using Peloton to stay in shape.

JULIA WARD
digital architect | GNC
Charlotte

Ward has degrees in chemistry and Hispanic studies from Carnegie Mellon University in her native Pittsburgh. While at school, she did research at the Human Computer Interaction Institute in tech education and learning science, which ultimately propelled her into the technology field. She has been with the health products and supplements company since 2019.

Influence: The opportunity to stay connected to innovation, creative solutions, and cross-disciplinary collaboration has kept me engaged and invested.

Success in tech: The landscape is constantly shifting, at an increasing rate, so it’s essential to show up prepared to listen, learn, and grow.

What others say: Julia is truly a force-multiplier. Any team automatically doubles in effectiveness, delivers an order of magnitude more quickly and learns a new level of camaraderie from Julia,” says Kevin Fiedler, vice president of infrastructure and operations at GNC.

Outside work: Knitting, crochet, any fiber arts. Guild member of CRAFT, which stands for Charlotte Region Arts Fibers and Textiles, a fiber-arts focused group.

KRISTEN WINTERHALTER
director commercial software | Align Technology
Cary

Winterhalter earned a business degree from N.C. State University, and went to work as a business analyst. When she joined a marketing agency interested in digital marketing, it took her career in a different direction. She joined Align Technology, an orthodontics products company, in 2018, and shifted to the full commercial software stack. “My passion lies in challenging the status quo and continuous improvement,” says Winterhalter. She also has an MBA from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater.

Influence: Whether it’s my family, friends, business partners, or our customers, I am driven by making a meaningful impact.

Success in tech: Tech moves fast. If you aren’t willing to continuously learn and adapt, you will quickly be behind or even obsolete.

What others say: “What really sets Kristin apart is her leadership style. She connects with her team, earning their trust and respect. She inspires her team to work together, communicate effectively, and strive for excellence,” says Eric Brown, vice president of technology, regional chief information officer.

Outside work: Spending time with my husband, kids, two dogs, boating and soaking in the sun. Supporting N.C. State athletics, cheering for my two kids in their sports activities.
ASHLEIGH ANDERSON
VP, head of global talent acquisition | Credit Karma
Charlotte

Santa steered Anderson toward technology when the jolly elf left her a computer in 1981. She started at Microsoft on the college recruiting team after graduating from Clemson University. “Helping someone find their dream job was such a rush — that’s when I fell in love with recruiting,” says Anderson. Since starting with Credit Karma in 2018, she has helped expand the East Coast headquarters from 50 employees to more than 600. By retooling recruitment, she has doubled the number of historically excluded employees, and within the last 18 months, 25% of Charlotte hires identify as Black.

Influence: My mother was a computer programmer in the 70s and 80s and set an example for what is possible for women when they aren’t afraid to use their voices in spaces where they are underrepresented.

Success in tech: Innovative thinking starts with being critical of your own work and not being afraid to take risks to make things better.

What others say: “Ashleigh’s been especially influential in diversity, equity and inclusion and a key voice of influence as I changed the composition of my leadership team to make sure we had more gender representation across our general managers,” says Credit Karma President Joe Kaufman.

Outside work: Cooking and traveling

JENNY MCLEAN
managing partner | Clarkston Consulting
Raleigh

McLean leverages business skills with engineering to transform the operations of global retailers and help them meet strategic goals from organization, to merger and acquisitions, to technology. The Asheville native has helped grow the retail industry into a core service for the Durham-based consultancy. She has electrical and computer engineering degrees from N.C. State University, and a Duke MBA. Her heart remains with the Wolfpack, she says.

Influence: Helping build a community of women at the highest levels of technology leads McLean to focus on mentorship, apprenticeship, and coaching.

Success in tech: Build your skills and expertise — you cannot let yourself get stale in tech. At the same time, be wary of getting distracted by trendy topics. Find the right balance between staying on top of innovation, while also understanding what is needed and what that organization can sustain.

What others say: Jenny was instrumental in guiding our firm to grow into new service areas, further penetrating Clarkston’s industry expertise in the retail industry, while developing and mentoring new talent,” says CEO Tom Finegan.

Outside work: Music festivals, traveling, good wine, and spending quality time with my husband, Tim, and Rose, our rescue pittie.

LIV EVANS
project coordinator | Ablr
Durham

Evans uses her bachelor’s degree in public health from Tulane University and her master’s in higher education administration from N.C. State University to run administrative, logistics and development programs at Ablr, which aims to place individuals with blindness into high-paying tech jobs. Evans says her job helps bring systemic changes through inclusion.

Influence: Ablr’s co-founder and CEO John Samuel pushes us to build toward a more inclusive and accessible world every day.

Success in tech: Embrace that there is always something new to learn and take every opportunity you can to gain more knowledge and experience.

What others say: “While learning the scope of digital accessibility, she focuses on making the world and workforce a more inclusive place for the disability community. She uses frameworks from both public health and education to drive her work to be human-centered and process-focused,” says Samuel.

Outside work: Raising puppies for Canine Companions, a national nonprofit providing service dogs to people with disabilities.

CARRIE MURPHY
director, solutions management | Veradigm
Raleigh

Born and raised in Northern California, Murphy migrated east to attend Florida State University, where she has a degree in information technology. She has been with the Chicago-based company for 20 years, and now manages a portfolio of revenue cycle solutions for healthcare provider clients.

Influence: Witnessing family members face health challenges has instilled in me a passion to leverage technology in order to enhance the quality of patient care and streamline healthcare operations.

Success in tech: Achieving success hinges upon possessing a fervent drive. This fuels the desire to learn and experiment with novel technologies and tools.

What others say: “Her dedication to driving the success of our company and the broader tech ecosystem is truly exceptional,” says Steve Mueller, vice president of solutions management at Veradigm.

Outside work: Visiting Disneyland with my family and watching Florida State football.
TRICIA ORY  
**senior vice president, finance | Flexential**  
**Charlotte**

While earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in accounting at the College of Charleston, Ory found a way to connect the technical and people aspects of the business world. That has helped her, she says, to solve organizations’ complex account challenges. “It’s not just about the numbers,” Ory says. She joined the company in 2010 after previous positions with Continental Tire North America, Arthur Andersen and Deloitte.

**Influence:** Dave Jones, founder of Peak 10 / Flexential. He accomplished with an empathetic leadership style and inspired me with his entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to building something better.

**Success in tech:** Focus in Tech — might be redundant, but I think the importance of translational leadership from the technical to every day is critical to help stakeholders understand the underlying challenges and larger picture.

**What others say:** “Ory is also instrumental in managing strategic M&A motions. All of these activities fortify our positive financial position which is foundational to achieving our goal to double in growth over the next five years,” says Flexential CFO Garth Williams.

**Outside work:** Spending time in Charleston, South Carolina, embracing the natural wonders of the Carolina Coast, boating, beach and oyster roasts.

RANDY SMITH  
**financial specialist | Office of State Controller**  
**Bear Creek**

Smith has 34 years experience in state government, starting his career with the Department of Commerce. He also worked for the state Wildlife Commission before starting his second stint in 2015 with the State Controller. The CPA has an accounting degree from UNC Greensboro. His role now involves replacing two 30-plus year mainframe applications with a modern cloud financial system. “I want to help create the future of accounting for the state of North Carolina,” says Smith.

**Influence:** Smith’s late father, Heiskell (pronounced like high school), owned Randy’s Grill, which was named after him, in Siler City. The bookkeeper for the restaurant made a difference in the business, and Smith said working with numbers came naturally to him.

**Success in tech:** You don’t need technology for technology’s sake; it needs to allow the user to do their task more efficiently and more accurately. You also need a great team to work with and share the common goal of success.

**What others say:** “Randy is a well-respected leader who is critical to the success of the (financial services) project,” says John Doyle, managing director of Deloitte Transactions and Business Analytics.

**Outside works:** Smith and his wife, Lisa, love to travel. He has a goal of visiting all 50 states, and has been to 34. He is music director and treasurer of Faith Baptist Church in Siler City.

KAUTILY VATS  
**Delivery director | Benekiva**  
**Bermuda Run**

The native of India has called North Carolina home for 20 years. Before joining Benekiva in 2021, Vats held leadership positions with Lincoln Financial Group, IBM and Blue Cross Blue Shield. He has led several large-scale digital transformation initiatives to success, and is passionate about digital, cloud and AI technologies. Vats, who works remotely, has an MBA from UNC Greensboro. Iowa-based Benekiva helps insurance companies manage claims.

**Influence:** Adam Grant’s work-life podcast is a must-listen for everyone working in the corporate space.

**Success in tech:** Focus on problem-solving. There are simple solutions for complex problems.

**What others say:** “He shares knowledge and best practices with the product team and mentors his team members to help them grow and develop their skills. He demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous learning and process improvements,” says Amanda Kennedy, Benekiva’s human resources and project manager.

**Outside work:** Avid runner, spending time at his farm in the Appalachian Mountains and F1 racing.

CHI VO  
**diversity, equity, and inclusion manager | CarGurus**  
**Durham**

Vo came to Durham as an immigrant from Vietnam, which influenced her decision to work in her current role for the Cambridge, Mass.-based automotive research company. “Focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the tech industry allows for that creativity and innovation to flourish and, most importantly, uplifts our people to change the world,” she says. She has a psychology degree from N.C. State University.

**Influence:** My family came to N.C. when I was young. I missed my parents when they were working 12-hour shifts and overtime to pay the bills. It was never easy for them to be immigrants in this country, but I don’t take for granted that they brought me here and supported me all these years. Their strength, resilience, and generosity are what I hope to bring forth in this world.

**Success in tech:** A culture of belonging is the key to success in tech. When an organization cherishes and cares for its employees, people can be successful.

**What others say:** “Her unwavering integrity, dedication to social justice, her communities, and the employees she supports are unsurpassed,” says Ciara Grogan, the company’s senior manager, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

**Outside work:** Teaching arts and crafts, 3D printing and planting trees.
CAITLIN WALSH  
director | KPMG  
Raleigh

Walsh started her own company after earning a bachelor’s degree in political science and business from Siena College in New York, which paved her path to consulting. She joined KPMG in 2013, and now supports its hiring and business development, while also working with public sector clients. “Supporting the public sector gives my work purpose and meaning. Working in consulting always challenges me to continuously learn to solve complex problems.”

**Influence:** Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist and bestselling author. His books and podcast changed my view on work life and how to build and lead teams.

**Success in tech:** Working in tech is about enabling others. A client may come to you for a specific tool or an application, but the problem they are really trying to solve is resolved in a better way. Great communication and understanding the problem you’re being asked to solve will help you be successful.

**What others say:** “She is passionate about great team culture, which requires building diverse teams that leverage each other’s strengths directed toward a collective goal,” says Young Kim, a KPMG principal in Raleigh.

**Outside work:** Gardening, beekeeping and traveling around the U.S. in a converted sprinter van with my partner and our dog.

SHARI WHITAKER  
director of the cloud business office | LexisNexis  
Raleigh

Whitaker scored high on her entrance exams while joining the Air Force at age 17, decided to give IT a try, and now has more than 30 years experience in technology. She provides cloud governance and process improvement across finance, security and cloud operations, while also designing, implementing and managing cloud-based solutions. She has bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Strayer University in computer networking and communication technology, respectively.

**Influence:** “I love solving problems, setting strategy, and developing people passionate about solving problems using technology. I want other women to see someone they can identify with and who looks like them in key or leadership roles. I am passionate about not only increasing the number of women (especially of color) who enter into technology, but also who remain.”

**Success in tech:** Just being tech savvy will not be enough. You will need to complement your tech skills with soft skills like effective communication, leadership, teamwork, problem solving, collaboration, etc.

**What others say:** “Shari continues to expand her impact within the company, by taking on more and more responsibilities. Shari successfully engages with senior stakeholders and drives the organization to significant cost savings and compliant practices,” says Matthew McKeever, head of cloud engineering at New York-based LexisNexis.

**Outside work:** Spending time with my family, coaching/mentoring women, traveling, trying new restaurants, and participating in ministry activities.

AMBER COBB  
VP Business Development | OnLogic  
Cary

The East Stroudsburg University graduate leads South Burlington, Vermont-based OnLogic’s efforts to boost revenue and growth for customers. “What I love most about technology is that technology, innovation and invention will always be present but the how and why changes, sometimes daily,” says Cobb.

**Influence:** “Eight years ago, I was asked a question about being a ‘woman in tech’ on a podcast. It was the first time that I ever thought of myself that way. From that moment on, I looked at myself, my career path, and accomplishments differently. Recognizing myself as a ‘woman in tech’ despite not having a technical education background has made me work harder, become more innovative, and challenged me to make my voice heard,” says Cobb.

**Success in tech:** Be willing to adapt to that environment. Technological discoveries and new innovations sometimes happen before you fully understand what came before it.

**What others say:** “Amber is a firm believer in technology being the great equalizer and a champion of emerging and disruptive technology. She is passionate about supporting women and minorities in technology,” says Bryan Zorn, OnLogic’s director of business development.

**Outside Work:** A mom to two beautiful, crazy smart kids, Sophia, 5, and Benjamin, 7, and wife to a supportive husband, Eddie. We are avid board game players, amateur chefs and hockey fans.

MICHELLE COVIELLO  
VP of Client Development | Dualboot Partners  
Charlotte

Coviello joined the Raleigh-based software and business development company in 2018, and has more than 20 years experience in IT. She is an adviser for NC Tech Association and its ambassador of the year. She’s also a board member of SIM Charlotte, a group of IT professionals who share ideas, philanthropy and leadership development. She graduated from Boston College with a degree in economics.

**Influence:** My father taught me to aim high, work hard and value your relationships.

**Success in tech:** Developing soft skills like problem-solving and communicating effectively can help set you apart.

**What others say:** “Michelle joined our company very early and has helped us grow into a team of over 400 people in five years. I am even more proud of her community involvement. She serves on several non-profit boards and volunteers at many local non-profits,” says Todd Buelow, principal at Dualboot Partners.

**Outside work:** Hiking and being outdoors with my family.
Ellis credits his time playing football for the Tar Heels with teaching him teamwork. He has economics and sports administration degrees from UNC Chapel Hill, and also coached college football one year. He started with IBM and has been with Slalom, a Seattle-based tech consulting firm, since 2016.

Influences: My family and professional mentors who have invested endless amounts of time in me.

Success in tech: Technology evolves so rapidly, every project and conversation is an opportunity for your next career break. Apply tenacity toward everything you do so you are able to capitalize when opportunity arises.

What others say: "Sam’s passionate about utilizing modern technologies to fuel innovation for his clients. Sam is adept at cultivating relationships and is coveted as a trusted adviser among his clients," says Todd Christy, general manager at Slalom.

Outside work: Exploring new areas and establishments, watching and playing sports, spoiling my dog, traveling with my wife, live comedy.

---

Gray joined Cisco in 2013 right after graduating from N.C. State University with a degree in technology, engineering and design education. A part-time job as a technology assistant for a K-8 school while in college fueled his interest in IT/networking. He now works directly with N.C. state agencies to find technical solutions.

Influence: Working for a company like Cisco that is deeply committed to social justice and powering an inclusive future for all.

Success in tech: If you are comfortable with embracing change, you will have a much higher chance of being successful.

What others say: Jacob is a brilliant technologist, staunch customer advocate and is always willing to go above and beyond,” says Liz McCormick, sales regional manager.

Outside work: Spending time with my wife, Kaitlyn, and our beautiful baby boy, Aaron, born in September. I also race cars at local asphalt short tracks such as Wake County Speedway and Orange County Speedway.

---

Ferrell started out in sales, but found behind-the-scenes communication and marketing more rewarding. She’s board chair of the March of Dimes and president of the Junior League of Raleigh. Before joining Lenovo in 2019, she was marketing head at UNC Chapel Hill. She has a marketing degree from Roanoke College.

Influence: My team influences me every day. They inspire me, they work tirelessly and they make work fun. I enjoy watching them successfully navigate programs and initiatives that drive Lenovo’s business to new levels.

Success in tech: Dream big and always innovate.

What others say: “Lisa Marie has long applied the genuine caring and concern she has for her family to her colleagues and the greater good of the community. She has elevated how our company engages and connects with customers, tells its story to the world, and works with partners to encourage inclusivity and diversity in our company and the community,” says Gerald Youngblood, Lenovo’s chief marketing officer.

Outside work: Needlepointing, yoga, dog lover and global traveler.

---

Joyner started with Charlotte-based CliniSpan Health because of its mission to expand diversity and equity in clinical studies. Joyner, who holds kinesiology and exercise science degrees from UNC Chapel Hill, oversees CliniSpan’s business development and manages the company’s community initiatives and partnerships.

Influence: Seeing my mother work as hard as she did for my sister and me to have a better life without ever complaining encouraged and motivated me to work just as hard as her. She is my superhero!.

Success in tech: You have to be willing to fail and not be discouraged. There will be many ideas that you have that you try and may not work out. Never give up after those failures because your next success is only one attempt away.

What others say: “Although this is VeQuain’s first position in the healthcare field, he has been able to effortlessly transition due to his strong leadership and management skills which have transformed our organization,” says Michael Galloway, the company’s chief operating officer.

Outside work: Spending time with my family and participating in adult basketball leagues, also hiking and fishing.
MARY JUDGE

director of demand generation | Intelerad Medical Systems

Durham

Judge has 12 years experience in sales and marketing, and has been with the Raleigh-based healthcare software company since 2021. Originally from Virginia Beach, she led sales teams before moving to North Carolina in 2015 and joining the UNC School of Government to help generate revenue through sales and product marketing. She has environmental policy and sociology degrees from College of William and Mary and an MBA from N.C. State University.

**Influence:** Chief Marketing Officer Marissa Carlson taught me what it means to lead a team consistently focused on moving the needle.

**Success in tech:** Communicate openly and often about every step you’re taking, share each number of progress and each milestone, even the ones you miss. Your peers will respect the transparency, your team will rally behind the goal, and you will learn more about your potential as you push yourself to achieve it.

**What others say:** “Those that work for Mary appreciate her supportive leadership style, and her peers recognize her for always being willing to jump in to get the job done,” says Marissa Carlson, chief marketing officer.

**Outside work:** I love living in Durham with my dog, Mango. Huge fan of baseball’s Washington Nationals and Durham Bulls, and a lot of the spring and summer involves enjoying baseball with family and friends.

DEBBIE NEAR
enterprise product coach in onboarding team | Jackrabbit Technologies

Charlotte/Myrtle Beach

Jackrabbit provides online class management software to kids’ activity centers on programs ranging from dance to cooking to cheer. Near worked in banking and finance after earning a business degree from UNC Charlotte. She started with Charlotte-based Jackrabbit in 2011.

**Influence:** The co-founders of Jackrabbit Tech put our core values to work in our company every day.

**Success in tech:** I am a people person, a not-so-techy person in a tech company. Be able to understand what your client needs. Listen before you talk. Learn how to explain what they need to hear in layman’s terms.

**What others say:** “Debbie always owns issues yet manages to interject positivity with her team. She has insight into her team and helps team members to see the positive in everything,” says Ray Hayes, sales and onboarding director.

**Outside work:** I love the beach. I live a half-mile walk away, and this is often my lunch break exercise.

BECKY SCOTT
total community manager | JumpCloud

Morrisville

Scott is a regular speaker to groups on women in tech, innovation and community. She also sits on two tech nonprofit boards, Association of IT Professionals RTP and Carolina Women in Tech Raleigh. Scott has an English degree from San Diego State University, and an MBA from Pfeiffer University. She manages Louisville, Colorado-based JumpCloud’s community outreach.

**Influence:** Former Cisco colleague Ken Russell nudged me to speak in front of ever bigger audiences about how community can help businesses achieve value and connect with customers.

**Success in tech:** A lifetime of learning keeps you young at heart and makes you a more interesting — and employable — person.

**What others say:** “At her core, Becky is a community builder, connector of people and resources and an enabler for networking, awareness, outreach, insights, and yes, connections,” says Eric Brown, vice president of corporate marketing at the enterprise software company.

**Outside work:** Everything from writing to mixed media, a pottery class at Liberty Arts in Durham, reading and hanging out with my 12- and 15-year-old children.

MANNY VELOZA
account executive for the state of N.C. | Dell

Raleigh

Veloza is responsible for Dell’s overall relationship with the state and Duke University. He has been with Dell since 2018 and his focus has been on helping the state find better ways of providing service to residents. He has a business management degree from Albertus Magnus College in Connecticut.

**Influences:** I have the incredible honor and privilege to have two leaders throughout my career that believed in me, and it helped me redefine what I was capable of.

**What others say:** “Experienced technologist with a demonstrated history of success. Critical thinker, proactive leader, and blazer of new paths,” says Jeff Fleetwood, Dell regional director for North Carolina.

**Success in tech:** Everything we do is with the customer’s best interest in mind; then trust is earned. Trust is everything.