



# Women *of* Excellence

Celebrating  
inspirational women  
who are making a  
difference in the  
community.

## 'Saipan is an island of many opportunities'

**A**manda J.A. Dunn—Ms. Amanda to her students—is a woman of positive influence, of determination, and meaning. Over the past decade and a half, she has pursued health and higher education while serving as a beacon for Saipan Community School as its principal and superintendent.

"The island and the opportunities I have encountered here have truly pushed me to grow as a leader and a member of the community. ...The best way I can articulate what motivates me every single day is my 'Why Statement.' The reason I do what I do is 'To create joy and serve with love so that I can contribute to the lives of others and glorify God!' This gives me hope and [remain] focused on what is important in my life," she said. "I know that I am where I need to be. This is solidified every day as I strive toward my personal mission statement: 'Move! Take action in what you believe with truth and integrity.'"

As a mother of two little children—Liam Otto, who is almost 5 years old, and Rufio, who is turning 2 in a month—Dunn says she feels the dynamics of life changing all the time. "I am still learning to juggle my commitments. This is an aspect of my life with many successes and many failures. My goal is to learn from both the successes and the failures alike as I continue to move forward," she added.

Dunn said there are four main areas that she hopes to have balance in her life—her

professional work, her personal relationships, her spiritual journey, and her health/wellness. "I consistently learn something new about who I am and who I want to be. This is true in aspects of my personal life and in leadership. ...I couldn't do it alone and I am thankful to have a very supportive and loving husband, Trey, who is my confidant and best friend," she said.

Dunn said her diverse passion and interests have led her to invest her time and be part of worthy organizations that include the Pacific Century Fellows, Women in Science, Saipan Ultimate, Ladies Bible Study, National Speech and Debate, Saipan Community Church, and Saipan Community School, which was her reason for moving to Saipan.

"It is my hope that my values and beliefs of dependability, work ethic, honesty, truth, integrity, adventure, achievement, and faith are what positively influence the employees and peers that I have had the opportunity and blessing to work with," she added.

To kick off 2021, the three most important things that Dunn wants to accomplish are: one, planning and hosting a COVID-19-conscious Ultimate Frisbee tournament with her husband; two, rebuilding the next phase of Saipan Community School's campus with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and repairing the damage caused by Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018; and three, to make time to have meaningful video chats with her sister and parents in the U.S. mainland.

Amanda J.A. Dunn and her two boys—Liam Otto, who is almost 5 years old, and Rufio, who is turning 2 in a month.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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*Mili* **SAIKI**

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## 'Working with the youth is inspiring everyday'

**M**ili Saiki is never without energy, will never let you pass without saying 'Hola!' (hello) and always comes along or shows up at the right time, like any mentor, teacher, and friend. They say nobody can inspire people like teachers, but for Mili, who has worked as business manager of Saipan International School for 25 years, the feeling is mutual.

"At SIS, I do [many things], from taking care of the office business, to helping students, teachers and parents, coaching volleyball, organizing fundraisers—you name it, I can do anything. Why? Because when you're working with children and young adults, you are inspired," she said. "They are our motivation and before we realize it, we become very passionate in what we do. Class after class I have seen students graduate and become great professionals. What more motivation do I need?"

The year 2020 was a trying time for Saiki and many schools due to the pandemic but her good spirit and bubbly personality have kept her afloat. "Enjoy every moment and love what you do because there will be difficult days and difficult people, but when you try to see the best in every experience, you get the best results and to me that is a good measure of success. When you work with children, they are your priority and sometimes is hard to balance it but I always try," she said.

Saiki also loves to cook and considers that her break but she also revels in eating out, watching the sunset, and being with friends, "knowing that each of us are important because there is nothing more rewarding knowing that you are an inspiration in somebody's life and even better when you make a difference in theirs," she said.

Saiki considers herself lucky to be living on Saipan. "That may sound cliché but I am very fortunate to live in this kind of community. Last year was difficult with the COVI-19 and the political situation we all saw in U.S. and the world. [Yet] we live in peace on Saipan, with so much respect regardless of where you come from. We embrace our cultural differences, learn from each other, and it is only on Saipan you will have the opportunity to feel like being in the United Nations, with friends from Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Czech Republic, and eating lumpia, coco, sushi, kimpab, and dumplings, all in one table," she said.

Her goals for this year is "to work toward a better world" and that includes hugging her daughters, seeing her family, traveling to Peru, finishing this school year with face-to-face classes, having a face-to-face senior graduation, and more. "We recently formed the SIS Saipan Cares for Animals Club and we are happy and proud of that. ... We live in paradise and when life is difficult, we must remember where we are and be thankful for that," she added.



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**HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY!**



*Kelsey*  
**MCCLELLAN**

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## Constantly inspired by marine life

**K**elsey McClellan wears two hats—she is a marine biologist at Johnston Applied Marine Sciences and is an environmental planner for the Pacific Coastal Research and Planning. Doing both entails study and gathering information so we know how to take care of the environment better, which, in turn, inspires fascination with the ocean world.

“At Johnston Applied Marine Sciences, Dr. Lyza Johnston and I are working on several projects conducting marine debris surveys in the Tinian Harbor and southern Saipan lagoon with Mariana Island Nature Alliance or working at the coral nursery with our two amazing Northern Marianas College interns, Richelle Ramon and Logan Mister, with other rotating cast of volunteers,” she said.

Right now, her favorite project with the Johnston Applied Marine Sciences is the Ruth Gates Coral Restoration Innovation Grant, which is a three-year project. As McClellan explains it, that project is where JAMS will test “a new settlement substrate for coral larvae in order to scale up coral restoration efforts through the outplanting of sexually derived juvenile corals.” Whew, very “sciency” stuff. Simply put, it means finding new ways to restore coral reefs in the CNMI.

That project will also build local capacity to implement coral sexual propagation. The project itself is named after Dr. Ruth Gates, who was a role model for women

in science, particularly for women in coral ecology. McClellan said it is an “incredible honor” to be working on this project in memory of Dr. Gates.

Meanwhile, at Pacific Coastal Research and Planning, McClellan works alongside Becky Skeelee Jordan and a Community Advisory Committee to develop a shoreline master plan for a section of the Froilan C. Tenorio Beach Road Pathway, incorporating blue and green infrastructure to mitigate erosion, while promoting and supporting all recreational and fishing activities that occur along Beach Road.

McClellan said the impact of the work she does keeps her motivated. “The work we are doing will have a positive impact on the coral reefs here [on] Saipan, and hopefully will help to scale-up the CNMI’s coral restoration efforts. ...The content of the projects I’m working on really drives me forward and I love the work that I do with JAMS and PCR. Coral conservation and restoration is a really rewarding field and the hands-on work is really gratifying. Our interns also motivate me to accomplish my goals.”

McClellan said she is grateful to be exactly where she is. “I love Saipan, I love our community, and I am so thankful for the friends and colleagues that I have here. I think gratitude is probably the biggest secret to success, but maybe not always the easiest to remember. Also, I always want to be in a position where I can support others’ endeavors, successes, and failures,” she added.

With all the work that McClellan does, she admits caffeine is her best friend along the way. Most of her professional goals to accomplish are project-oriented and deadline-based. Her current plans involve finishing work in what she calls the “Structure from Motion” dataset that she has been working on (“We’re getting near the deadline!”)

She also works with Project HOPE (Healthy Ocean & People Empowerment) that was launched by Friends of the Marianas Trench Monument. This involves working with ocean elders and teaching middle-schoolers of the Public School System about ocean science.

“There are a lot of amazing scientists and ocean elders who come together to teach the students scientific methods and traditional knowledge of the ocean and lagoon, and it’s a wonderful opportunity to get involved with future marine scientists,” she said. “I believe collaboration is a key to success and in order to collaborate it’s important to listen and understand where folks are coming from. ...Gratitude, listening, understanding, and supporting are the biggest skills that will help you find and achieve success.

McClellan describes her personal goals as simple and accomplishable: learning how to play a few songs on the guitar, which she has just started to learn, continuing to fatten her savings account, and making sure her dog gets a daily walk and lots of attention.

## ‘I have strong feelings for self-determination and love seeing people grow’

**M**any successful women are early to rise, are in tune with the times, promote a healthy lifestyle, and are serious about helping others and the community develop and progress. Women who consistently do these are always willing to take chances and are not afraid of failure and such is Laurie Peterka.

All these years, Peterka has been highly productive: managing Practical Solutions LLC, a consultancy firm she created in 1998 to help other companies focus on bringing the best end-product to their customers, while also being a founding member and past president and now executive director of Friends of the Mariana Trench, plus a founding member and past president of the Northern Marianas Islands Volleyball Association.

“...I have strong feelings about self-determination and love seeing people grow. ...I endeavor to provide vision, structure, leadership and a platform for projects to come to life. I helped co-found FOMT in 2008...the NMIVA, I helped co-found in 2004 and in January, I officially retired from my role. ...I helped create these organizations at the request of others who needed help and I opted to help because I was interested in their mission and concepts,” she said.

“I took a personal interest in the outcome of seeing these ideas come to life. ...We don’t have control in this world over very many things. But we can choose how to show up in our community. I want to be a good community citizen

and use my skills to contribute to the highest potential of this community,” she added.

Peterka is always curious and always hungry for the next level that would move the needle forward in collaboration with others. “I value teamwork and I love applying just the right amount of support to help others see or achieve possibilities they want to reach and helping them own those successes.” Sometimes, that involves “being able to articulate visions so that the stories are infectious and these stories lead people to action. Listening to others, valuing their point of view and treating what you hear with respect without exception.”

Peterka admits that balancing her personal life and work is a challenge that she tries to work on every day. “...I am working on seeking balance all the time. I find myself in a space in time where what I do just doesn’t feel like work. I don’t ‘have’ to do what I do, I ‘want’ to do what I am doing. I justify to myself that being unmarried and with no children of my own allows me to give more of myself in my community efforts,” she said. “I still need to stop the world and breathe. ...I also take time out every day to exercise a little, have play time with my dog and cats who make me laugh and have hobbies—I love being in nature and exploring outdoor spaces. Generally, I try to keep a healthy lifestyle and rely mostly on natural healing.”

This year, Peterka may have eliminated some responsibilities but that only made her take on other equally worthy causes. “I have successfully handed the NMIVA over to a

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*Laurie*  
**PETERKA**

new board whom I have every confidence in that they will take NMIVA to a whole new level of success. ...I have more time for creativity, so I will be shuffling my priorities around to allow maximum time in places of joy.” That includes working with various Friends of the Mariana Trench community partners on three new grant projects—two that are focused on capacity building and one that is about constructing a proposal for an ocean/marine science hub in partnership with both CNMI government agencies and various educational institutions.

“I see ways to help individual national federations strengthen their organizations and working with the Northern Marianas Sports Association as an at-large board member to help them facilitate this through resources available from the Lemmai/Mei Incubator project at the MANGO is one. I can also see how the work that I’ve started with the [Northern Marianas College] to cultivate college sports and college sport administration will need a new agenda for the next FISU

funding cycle,” she added.

With all of the work and achievements under her belt, Peterka keeps herself grounded and is full optimism, courage, and hope. “I didn’t always believe in myself and I had a lot of help along the way and paying it forward is a lifestyle choice for me. I do my best to give people around me latitude to explore, be a sounding board, and access to my experience and I encourage trial and error. I hope for individuals to truly believe that they are capable, that anything is possible, but to also realize that it’s up to them to see their way through to making their visions into reality.

“...you have to take the risk. Both success and failure are gifts because it means you tried. It’s not trying that is ultimately the harder thing to live with. ...When I see the joy others experience, that they too can believe in themselves, that motivates me to keep interacting with people and projects to create more of those moments. I want to inspire others to their highest potential. Seeing that motivates me,” she added.

Her soul is fierce,  
her heart is brave,  
her mind is strong.  
She is a woman.

— R. H. Sin

*Happy  
International  
Women's  
Day!*



*Hafa Adai!*  
**Saipan Tribune**  
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER



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## Love for home, community, and environment

**M**aria Terlaje is the reigning Miss Northern Marianas Earth 2020. At just 19 years old, she may be young but her wisdom precedes her and keeps her priorities on track. In fact, she describes her winning the NMI Miss Earth crown not in terms of a simple beauty pageant but as a manifestation of the love she has for her home and community and an example of showing kindness to Mother Earth.

"My advocacy relays the importance of choosing love and kindness. I believe that love and kindness within yourself manifests a positive attitude for what is around you, including our environment. I achieve each goal by initiating them with the purpose to inspire through my advocacy. As Miss Earth, I do my part to create projects that embrace both love for one another and the islands we live in. From beach cleanups to speaking to our youth, every small step to make a difference will set examples to the people of the Marianas," she said.

Terlaje said her goal at a minimum is to inspire one person, hoping that that person will inspire another, allowing chain reactions of love for the environment to grow and inspire more trends for the community. "The secrets I have for success evolved from the obstacles and challenges that strengthened my abilities to accomplish many things. The bricks that were thrown at me, helped me build a foundation to envision the woman I aspire to be. ... Taking my own hardships and forming them into my weapon for success diminished potential downfalls and cleared an open path for opportunity because

life's journey is not always easy but I made it my own and that's all it takes," she added.

As the CNMI's Miss Earth 2020, Terlaje said there are many things she wants to accomplish. First is to launch a campaign that focuses on leadership and empowerment for the youth and the development and preservation of the islands, from land to sea. Second is working with schools and nonprofit organizations to help educate the community about the importance of doing their part for the environment. This also include speaking with CNMI lawmakers about coming up with bills or laws that create an eco-friendly CNMI. Third is creating more initiatives that motivate community involvement in important causes for the environment. Fourth is encouraging women to participate in leadership organizations, including running for Miss Northern Marianas Earth 2021, saying this organization is an effective tool to spread environmental awareness.

Terlaje admits that this new lifestyle of balancing school, taking care of herself and Miss Earth duties has required her to make huge adjustments. "...It helps to stay focused on what is important to you. Before my day starts, I list down my agenda and what I need to accomplish that day. Writing down a list of what is most important helps my mind come together to achieve everything that needs to be done," she said. "Being a leader for our youth, women, and the environment motivates me to leave something special in everyone I come across. Through my love for the environment and my community, I hope to instill the desire to make a difference through community involvement in my projects and plans."

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*Maria*  
**TERLAJE**



*Leisha*  
**DELEON GUERRERO**

## 'It started with a heartfelt vision'

**L**eisha Deleon Guerrero became Miss Northern Marianas Earth in 2019 but she says that actually got started as just a generalized "heartfelt vision" to serve people. Winning the Miss Earth tiara has transformed that vision into one that is focused on raising environmental awareness, working with organizations to support environmental efforts, creating opportunities for environmental initiatives, and representing the Marianas here and abroad.

"2019 was indeed a year of achievement for me and for those who supported and embraced the Miss Earth Northern Marianas endeavor. From the physical representation and voice of the Marianas amongst worldwide beautiful delegates to the momentous waving of the CNMI flag at the monthlong international Miss Earth Pageant tour, every step was an accomplishment. The partnerships and continuous service to many are my valued achievements," she said. "I'm still learning and growing in all areas of my life."

She has been able to partner with numerous schools, organizations like the Ohala Foundation, and government agencies, and she is excited to create more partnerships in the future. "I really want people to see my

passion, kindness, dedication, and professionalism when I meet them. I want to show others that I value their time, their work while inspiring others and to do more our community," she added.

Deleon Guerrero said she has since learned that each season has its purpose in her life and she has faith that she has a purpose that will be made clear and will unfold through the seasons. "My passion to do good works must be led by faith. I need to realize the purpose of my goals personally and to those around me, and to be diligent in accomplishing my ambitions with the will that comes from my heart and not expectations. Most importantly, be led by faith, allow God to lead you toward His desired path, and give every ounce of glory to Him," she said. Deleon Guerrero is currently a full-time student but is still busy doing and supporting environmental causes. She said balancing the two highlights the importance of time management. "I focus on prioritizing responsibilities and deadlines as much as possible and allow leisure time in between. ... For this year, I also want to focus on nurturing my faith and my studies, making healthier choices, dedicating my time to school and studies and learning to appreciate every moment life gives me."

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Women demonstrate their passion by allowing love to grow their accomplishments. Love grows everything. It grows what's in you, what's around you, and what will come to you. Choosing love on the environment will grow generations of pride in our culture, community, and all things Land and Sea.

*Maria Lael Terlaje*  
2020 Miss Northern Marianas Earth

f missnmiearth @ missnorthernmarianasearth



# Happy International Women's Day!

"Above all, be the **HEROINE** of your own life..." -- Nora Ephron



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**L. JONES**

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## Starting the day with 'I can do better' mindset

**R**amona L. Jones has worked most of her life. As chief executive officer of Jones & Guerrero Inc., a Guam-based family business, Jones handles various businesses on Saipan like the KFC and Taco Bell franchises, the Townhouse Furniture and Appliances store, and real estate and rental properties. Jones said that what makes her productive and purposeful every day is always thinking, "I can do better."

"My day starts the night before because I want my creative mind to work while I'm sleeping. I think about what I need to accomplish the next day or ruminate on a problem that I haven't quite figured out yet. In the morning sometimes I have a solution, or at the very least I have an action list for the day," she said.

Jones said she also tries to say a prayer each morning before opening her eyes ("There must be a reason why God wants us here on earth another day, right?")

She also always think "I can do better." "This motivates me in a positive way. That attitude brings freshness to daily tasks, reassurance to things I consistently fail at and perseverance to large jobs that take a long time to accomplish," she added.

Jones had a taste of work when she was 12 at their family farm called the "Bar K Ranch" on Tinian. Equipped with a business sense at a young age, coupled with a bachelor's degree in international business and finance from the University of San Francisco, Jones honed herself and with the support of others to be who and where she is now.

"One of the secrets to my success is that I ask for help and I am able to recognize good advice when I hear it. I also have the confidence in myself and abilities to create my own path," she said.

One other little mental motivation that Jones uses, which she calls her little "click" and not "trick," is to tell herself, "I get to" instead of "I have to"—like "I get to pick up my kids now," "I get to go to work," "I get to call my husband, etc."

"This makes me feel grateful and empowered at the same time," she said.

"...I also look to simplify life. I think most people can handle themselves but it gets so hard when you are trying to balance other people's lives and priorities too. I try to be very realistic about how long things will take and stick to those limits. Proper planning, scheduling and empowering people, even children, to pull their fair share is good for everyone's development," she added.

In addition to running many businesses, Jones is a dedicated mother. "Since school has been at home for most of the year, my worthy cause has been helping my children with online classes and the PTA," she said. That experience has created in her a sense of empathy for families that have two or more young ones at home. "It must have been next-to-impossible. ...My heart goes out to them," she said. "I think this 'missing year' will be the most serious issue we'll need to address as a community."

Jones said she continues to support and be supported by the Women's Chamber and the Chamber of Commerce because sharing information and best practices "are so important during unusual circumstances," she added.

For the new year, Jones is looking at how to effectively implement customer satisfaction, which is crucial in any business. "A lot of what we are focusing on now is digital advancement of our existing business to align with what our customers want. ...While our business can't wait for the whole tourism engine to roar back to life, we are looking at other revenue opportunities in the next few months...and trying to figure out the right way to prepare for visitors' to return and adjusting to supply chains that are out of whack," she said.

Jones added that being authentic and engaging with co-workers is always part of her day. "I would love for them to have fun when we are working together. I love to laugh with my co-workers. If they can walk away with a smile on their face and clear meaningful purpose—happy, super-charged, and raring to go, then that is my goal."

## 'I've always been goal-driven'

**K**imberlyn Kay King-Hinds looks at juggling a law career, civic duties, being a wife and mother all "a work in progress." Multitasking may be daunting for most women but she believes that if you have a goal then you will have time and energy for everything.

"...Getting up in the morning and doing what I do every day is just how my parents raised us. ...I was raised by very progressive single mother who entered the workforce at the age of 14 and went on to become one of the first women to serve in the 1st CNMI legislature. She later met my Dad who equally instilled the importance and value of service to the community," she said.

"If there's a secret guide to success, I wish someone would share that with me because the older I get, the more I realize how little I actually do know. But in all seriousness, I've always been goal-driven and once I set my mind on completing a goal, I'm like a dog with bone. I'll keep at it until I scratch it off my list. I don't think there is a secret to success. It's basically how much you want to accomplish something and what you are willing to do to get there," she added.

For two years now, King-Hinds is the first woman to sit as board chair of the Commonwealth Ports Authority. "As chair, I am the contracting officer, which means I have a duty to review and sign off on all contracts, leases and other legal instruments on behalf of the board and the agency. ...This requires a lot of reading and working with the CPA executive team and industry partners to understand the issues so that I can have a better understanding of how I can best serve CPA and the community," she said.

King-Hinds said she only has one goal for CPA this year and that is to stay solvent without having to furlough or implement a "reduction-in-force" this year. "We are living through a time where there are so many unknown variables with an indeterminate time frame that it's difficult to plan. 'Wait-and-see' has never been a sound planning model or revenue forecasting tool but yet here we are, with so many of our industry partners needing definitive answers with regards to rates and charges so that they can figure out how they can stay solvent," she added.

Aside from CPA, King-Hinds is also involved in other cause

worthy organizations. "I do a lot of community work but two things that I enjoy the most is coaching the Tinian High School Mock Trial team and being the co-founder of Friends of San Jose Church, Tinian. Tinian and Rota kids have a hard time when it comes to programs like mock trial because they don't have access to resources that are readily available on Saipan. My husband and I volunteer to coach because we want Tinian kids to have some of these opportunities that allow them to see and learn about different paths that they can choose from as career opportunities," she said.

Her biggest goal at the moment? To build a new Catholic Church on Tinian. "Together with three amazing human beings from Tinian, we formed Friends of San Jose Church Tinian to do just that. We completed the first phase of our project with the completion of the Tinian Social Hall and its subsequent turnover to be used as a temporary place of worship. We have started working on the second phase and we are just so blessed and so excited to be able to give back to our community in such a meaningful way," she added.

King-Hinds recognizes that she won't be able to do many things if not for the understanding of her family. "I feel as though I'm constantly sacrificing time with my family, especially my husband and daughter, to keep up with work and civic engagement. My daughter is graduating from high school this year and over the course of these last 17 years, I've been dragging her from one thing to another. I've missed so many of her games and activities because I'm either working or doing stuff for the community," she said.

"I remember being her age and being so angry at my mom for not having the time that I wanted with her because she was doing the same thing I am doing now. ...Finding that balance has been a challenge for me that has come at the cost of losing valuable time that I will never be able to get back with my husband and daughter. Fortunately for me, my daughter has grown to be a kind, loving, smart, beautiful, driven young woman despite my shortcomings as a mother and my husband, Chester, the coolest cat on the planet," she added.

With all of the things that need to be done, King-Hinds is a busy woman who is also trying to keep it real. "...I have a lot



*Kimberlyn Kay*  
**KING-HINDS**

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of shortcomings and patience is not one of my virtues. I have the attention span of gnat on most days and try really hard not to be abrasive. ...But all that is a work-in-progress and so I pray every day that my thoughts, my words, and my deeds are reflective of goodness and kindness," she said.

"...I want to quit smoking, grow my private practice and hone into an area of law that I actually enjoy, spend more time with my family, curse less, be kinder than I was last year. ...I hope that after someone meets me, I give them reason to believe that despite the craziness, there are people in the world who genuinely care," she added.





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# WOMEN'S History Month



*"A Toast to All the Women of Excellence"*





Grace and Aria Keilbach.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Sister act

Sisters Aria and Grace Keilbach got started with a simple group page on Facebook, to feature stray dogs on Saipan and create some awareness about the plight of these dogs they find roaming, neglected, or injured on the road and streets of Saipan.

They have been helping stray island dogs or “boonie” dogs for about three years already and, in that time, has managed to generate more and more support across the globe, leading to the birth of the Boonie Babies Saipan Organization.

“We work to rescue, rehabilitate, and adopt out boonie dogs. This involves daily feeding rounds for strays spread across the island, rescue missions, administering medical care, and taking home the worst cases we find to foster them until they can be adopted out. We also are working behind the scenes on our social media platforms to spread awareness and help make a difference for the lives of the boonie babies,” Aria said.

“You can’t look into these puppy eyes and say ‘no’. Animals, and dogs in particular, have always been something that we are passionate about, so when we saw the neglect and abuse that boonie dogs face, it was an easy decision to step up and do something about it,” Grace said.

Although the dogs stay with them temporarily before getting adopted, the two sisters treat each and every animal as part of their family. “If you are hanging out with us, you have to like dogs because there will be lots of them involved. Luckily, all of our friends are very understanding and our work life (the dogs) fits right into our social life. At times it is overwhelming and we definitely rely on each other to make it work,” Aria said.

As co-founders of Boonie Babies Saipan Organization, the two sisters concede that providing a home and rehabilitating rescued animals take a lot

of work but they see possibilities for these dogs beyond the island. “Part of our advocacy this year is to make off island adoption accessible. However, due to COVID-19, that is extremely difficult for now but it is on our list. We are also [collaborating] on efforts to find a traveling veterinarian to visit the islands and hopefully find one willing to stay for a longer period of time,” Grace said.

The Boonie Babies Saipan Organization also wants the community to be more involved in their mission and help animals on the island. “We are working to get rid of the stigma that boonie dogs aren’t good pets and are dangerous. Overall, we would like to make a sustainable difference and get as many dogs as possible off the streets and to their forever homes,” Aria said.

“Boonie Babies Saipan Organization is our main focus with just Grace and I running the entire thing. From taking care of our currently nine foster babies to feeding rounds to social media outreach and much more, we are completely dedicated to our cause and unfortunately don’t have time for much else,” she added.

Grace said the Boonie Babies Saipan Organization is inclusive and welcomes anyone to join them help more boonie dogs. “We want people who work with us to walk away with a feeling of purpose and enlightenment. Simply knowing how big of a difference they alone can make in the lives of these animals is a message we would be grateful to share.”

“We want them to value the importance of compassion and learn respect for not only the dogs we rescue but for other aspects of their lives as well. These boonie dogs are our passion and have had such a huge positive impact on our lives and the way we appreciate the world around us that we would like to be able to share that experience with others,” Grace added.



Aria Keilbach.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Aria and Grace KEILBACH

By BEA CABRERA  
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CORRESPONDENT

## A volunteer, teacher, and a leader

As one of the newest addition to the 22nd CNMI Legislature representing Precinct 5, Rep. Leila Haveia Fleming Clark Staffler (D-Saipan) operates with the goal “to do the most good and leave our place better than we found it.”

That means her heart has always bent toward service to the community and that got started when she was fresh out of Willamette College Oregon in 2001, when she accepted a job as an art and English teacher at the Tinian Jr. Sr. High School, her alma mater, from 2001 to 2007. She then moved to Saipan and worked as an English teacher at Kagman High School until 2010.

“I really loved teaching because I truly felt like I could change someone’s life through education. I took a leap and became the KHS vice principal in 2010 when I had just been voted as the KHS Teacher of the Year that year. I felt that if I could do so much for the 120 students in my classes, imagine what I could do for the whole school!” she said. “I took on the responsibilities of instructional coach, teacher mentor, PRAXIS support, AP program director, disciplinarian, super substitute, problem solver, facilities manager, and the list goes on.”

In 2013, Staffler became the KHS principal, where she took on the added roles of instructional leader, event planner, transition process coordinator, Student Council adviser, disabilities advocate, principal representative, program innovator, and so much more.

After almost 13 years in public education serving the KHS and Kagman communities, Staffler thought about scaling up her service that will affect more lives in the community. “My goals have always been to give back to my community. As a recipient of the 7-32 full scholarship, that was always an expectation that was drilled into me since high school. The way I have given back to my community has changed over the years, depending on my ability to give,” she said. “As a young person, I volunteered time and energy to help my community and the environment. As I have gotten older, I began to be the one coordinating volunteer activities for youth. I

learned through my experiences and research how important it is to build connections in our community through volunteer work and for several years, I worked to embed the value of volunteerism into the culture of graduating seniors at CNMI public high schools. Today, as an elected public servant, my goals still rooted in giving back to my community through volunteerism and access.”

As chairperson of the Committee on Education and Workforce in the CNMI House of Representatives, Staffler said she is “super motivated.”

“I am motivated by the call of our people and community to make a difference for the future of our Marianas. I am motivated because I truly feel like the CNMI could be a model of progress and efficiency through interagency collaboration and long-term planning,” she said. “I am still far from accomplishing some personal goals but I know I will get there one day and I am where I need to be for now. My formula for success would be to always be your best, don’t procrastinate and always read the directions—a shout out to my former students! (laughs).”

In the first six months of 2021, Staffler plans to establish routines, conduct outreach and gather feedback and input for all things coming through the pipeline at work. According to her, these foundations support the Democratic values of accountability and transparency. This will be further reflected in the 22nd Legislature’s rules and operating procedures.

Staffler believes that restoring public trust in government can be achieved through transparency, accountability and open communication. Also, she is guided by the twin principles of “doing the most good,” which was coined by Evangeline Booth, the humanitarian leader of the Salvation Army in the 1930s; and “Leave this place better than you found it”—the guiding principle shared with her cohort of the Pacific Century Fellows, as stated by former Honolulu mayor Mufi Hannemann.

“These principles highlight volunteerism and public service in a way that I try to live and hope to impart on people who work with me,” she said.



## Leila Haveia FLEMING CLARK STAFFLER

By BEA CABRERA  
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CORRESPONDENT

*Biba*  
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The strongest action for a woman is to love herself, be herself, and shine amongst those who never believed she could.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

*Happy Women's Day!*

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# Left Saipan as young girl and came back a physician

**E**ven at a young age, Norma Ada knew she was going to be a physician. But to do that, she had to leave home and flourish somewhere else first. She graduated from Tulane University School of Medicine in 1993 and, after four years of residency training at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York, she returned to Saipan in September 1997, now with the title “Dr.” affixed to her name.

“It was always my intention to come back to Saipan after completing my educational and training requirements. I left as a 17-year-old high school graduate in 1985 and coming home as a doctor in 1997 was one of the most joyful moments for me and my family,” she said.

Ada said she is very close to her family and growing up on Saipan meant she knew at an early age how valuable being healthy meant and the role a physician has in influencing the health of others. “My decision was definitely made even easier after spending four long years in upstate New York, so I was ready for year-round sunshine,” she added.

Ada tells people that pursuing medicine is not a career but a vocation. “...It is a way of life that many of us chose and enjoy tremendously. When you enjoy what you do and are passionate about it, then that is what motivates you to come to work. To be able to wholeheartedly care for the sick is a grace you may not realize, and not many people can do it, so whether you care for the sick in your home, clinic, or hospital, you are doing what comes naturally to you,” she said.

Life in the field of medicine challenges one’s life balance, Ada said. That means sometimes thinking about a patient or their circumstances but also making the time to be “present” in the presence of one’s family. “My husband, Jayson, will attest that this is not always the case. I try not to be everywhere and do everything but I am gently reminded to simply ‘slow down,’ as my mom would say, and make the time for God, family, and friends,” she added.

After many years in medical practice, Ada is still always thinking of how Saipan can grow as a place ideal for everyone. “...I have bounced this idea to others that Saipan needs a safe designated beach area for our disabled folks to swim and do aquatherapy. I have started to research ideas on placing a ramp so one can walk with assistance or wheel themselves close to the shoreline and wade in the water to enjoy our ocean or safely do water-based physical therapy.

“I tell patients that we have the best swimming pool along our western shoreline and we need to figure out a way to make it more accessible to those who would benefit from being in the water and I have received encouraging feedback from my focus group. ... This is hopefully the year that the world begins to come out of the pandemic, so I want to continue to help in the efforts of encouraging others to be vaccinated or answer their questions if they are still hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccines,” she added.

Aside from giving medical prescriptions, Ada also generously dispenses life advice. “...I often tell the young members of my family and they would laugh at this but a career that requires many years in higher education and specialty training is ‘delayed gratification.’ It takes hard work, grit, and most importantly, support from your family and friends who believe in you and cheer you along the way and pick you up with words of encouragement and love. ... Care for yourself and others, keep your mind, spirit and body healthy, and never stop learning, especially reading books,” she said. “I also encourage having a well-rounded life. ... Nurture other passions and interests or engage in activities with others, be it in sports, arts, music, dance, cooking, or anything that takes you outdoors and brings out your creativity. You want to hang out with folks who will get you out of bed or off the couch to go walking, biking, fishing, swimming, or simply laughing and enjoying each other’s company. We live on an island where being outside is a great reason to keep your mind and body healthy.”

*Dr. Norma*  
**ADA**

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## VOX POPULI

### The woman who inspired you

By **BEA CABRERA**  
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Behind the success of every person is a woman that pushed them to be the best they can be, taught them to treat others kindly, be strong, laugh and live with gratitude so these attributes can move forward and touch other people too.



“We signed a ‘Women’s Month’ proclamation earlier and in my speech, I said a mother in a home is what makes it a home. I am a man and I appreciate how my mother struggled to raise five boys and one girl. I love my mom and my sister and we are supposed to respect our ladies every day. March is a special month for [women] and I congratulate all the women leaders, business partners and everyone of them that step up and give back to the community. I want to encourage the CNMI women to get out of the box because I believe in women and in their leadership.”  
— **Gov. Ralph DLG Torres**

“Most definitely my mother, Gemma. She inspires me because when I was a little girl, I vividly recall she always told me that independence was important. To stand on my own, to always be able to take care of myself regardless whether there was a man in my life or not. That taught me to be strong and independent at a young age.”  
— **Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio**



“My grandmother, Dorothy. She was educated by experience and believed in the power of positive thinking. There wasn’t a single day when she wasn’t ‘perfect’ and she didn’t believe you could give too much of anything— love, money, and time. She was truly an inspiration.”  
— **Heather Popa of Papago**



“I would say Wendy Herring. She was my general manager back at Pacific Islands Club in the late ‘90s. I consider her a mentor, I loved her management style, the way she treats people and staff and in a lot of the ways, I manage Triple J’s businesses and people in the same manner and style that I learned from her.”  
— **Jay Santos, general Manager of Triple J Five Star Wholesale Foods**

“My wife, Rosemond Santos, because she is a hard worker. She worked her way through school in the [United] States and that is a very daunting task for an island woman. But she persevered and got through it. She has also been a member of the CNMI Legislature but gave it all up so she can take care of her mom, who was ailing at that time.”  
— **Gary Sword, member of the Governor’s Council of Economic Advisers**



8<sup>th</sup> March

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HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY!



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Let's take time to appreciate the driving forces of the world, without them our existence is impossible.

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

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— Author Unkown

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— Hyoun Min Oh & Doyi Kim

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