



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Laurie Cappelli, CEO of Rockledge-based Community Credit Union, and William Chivers, CEO of RUSH Construction in Titusville, will be inducted into the Space Coast Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame March 1 at the Raddison Resort at the Port in Cape Canaveral. This will be the organization's 39th annual Gala. The event is open to the public. Mark Malek and wife Laura Canning Malek hosted a reception for the Laureates at their home in Indian Harbour Beach. From left: Mark and Laura Malek; Chivers; Jack Pladdys, president and CEO, Junior Achievement of the Space Coast; Cappelli; and Larry James of Northboro Builders and Relentless Private Equity Group who is the Gala committee chair. Sponsorships for the event are available in a range of prices.

JA Business Hall of Fame to induct Cappelli and Chivers at 39th Gala

By Ken Datzman

INDIAN HARBOUR BEACH — Laurie Cappelli and William Chivers, the 2025 Junior Achievement of the Space Coast Business Hall of Fame Laureates, both started their careers working in entry-level jobs and rose to become CEOs in their respective industries.

They both said building high-performing teams has been the centerpiece of their success.

Cappelli is CEO of Rockledge-based Community Credit Union of Florida and Chivers is CEO of RUSH Family of Companies in Titusville, which includes RUSH Construction, RUSH Facilities, and RUSH Marine.

They have deep roots in the community, embrace the entrepreneurial spirit, volunteer their time with nonprofits, have mentored others, and have built successful careers.

Cappelli started her credit-union career 44 years ago in Rapid City, South Dakota. She grew up in the eastern part of the state. Cappelli attended college and worked part time at a credit union in Rapid City. "I was a work-study program participant and was placed at a credit union. I was

a secretary in the collections department. I quickly came to embrace the credit-union motto of 'people helping people.' I worked at a Rapid City credit union for 13 years in various capacities and never looked back. I have spent my entire career with credit unions."

The federal work-study program allows students to work on or off campus to earn money for their college expenses.

As CEO of Community Credit Union, Cappelli oversees an organization with 174 employees and roughly \$1.3 billion in assets. It has about 57,000 members across six counties.

She was named CEO in 2018, moving up from senior

vice president. Before that Cappelli was vice president of lending. Under her leadership as CEO, Community Credit Union has seen more than \$500 million in asset growth.

"We have many tenured employees who have been with Community Credit Union for more than 15 years," she said. "They — and everyone else working for our organization — are dedicated to being involved in the community and helping our members thrive. We also have the great support of our board. We are a not-for-profit entity. Our board members are volunteers."

When Cappelli first started working in her field, credit

Please see Junior Achievement of the Space Coast, page 23

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Junior Achievement of the Space Coast

Continued from page 1

unions primarily used basic teller machines and did manual recordkeeping.

"We had minimal technology. We were handwriting contracts. Account updates and loan approvals were still done manually with paper forms. Later, electric typewriters with memory were used. Then came the computer age and the technology gates opened."

She continued, "It has been interesting to watch the industry evolve. When I first worked in South Dakota, the credit union I was with had just been approved to start offering checking accounts. Today, Community Credit Union is a full-service financial institution, including providing mortgages and commercial loans to its members."

Cappelli moved to Brevard in 1996. Her husband was in the U.S. Air Force and was assigned to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station.

Chivers started his construction career in 1977. Originally, he had his sights set on a career in music and attended college. "I wanted to be a band director, but I took a summer job in construction working in Palm Bay and that experience shifted my direction in life. After a couple months of working in the Florida sun, I realized that the construction industry was my path forward."

He added, "I talked to my girlfriend at the time, Pat, soon to be my wife, and she completely supported my decision."

Chivers said he started in the field as a laborer for a construction company.

"I stood in a ditch in Palm Bay with a shovel in my hand. I had on a hard hat and rubber boots," he said. "I have worked in the construction industry for 48 years. It has been a great experience. If I ever considered writing a book about this industry, I would probably title it 'Ditch-Digger to CEO.' It has been an incredible ride, way beyond anything I ever imagined."

His employee-owned company posted a record revenue year in 2024, exceeding more than \$100 million. RUSH Construction marked its 40th year in 2024. The firm has 144 associates.

"Business has been strong. We currently have work in Jacksonville all the way down the coast into Brevard," he said, adding, "We just finished a project in the Panhandle and one in Key West with our Marine Division. But our work is heavily concentrated in Brevard."

When he joined the company 28 years ago, RUSH Construction had six staffers. "Our growth has been organic. It took years to get to where we are today," he said.

Chivers said he worked in the field for about four years, "took some classes and then had the opportunity to work for a general contractor in Cocoa, the city where I grew up. At that job, I learned how to build structures. I learned about working with people, managing people, and leading people. I was able to apply that knowledge when I joined RUSH."

Annually, Junior Achievement of the Space Coast Business Hall of Fame honors influential, visionary leaders who have made a significant impact in the community, have inspired young people to dream big, and are role models for the next generation.

Each year, Junior Achievement puts out a public call for nominations. Board members and previous Laureates are asked to participate in the process, too.

"I had a fantastic time talking to Laurie and William," said Jack Pladdys, who was recently named the new president and CEO of Junior Achievement of the Space Coast, succeeding Anne Conroy-Baiter who led the nonprofit organization for 10 years and is now the president and CEO of the Melbourne Regional Chamber.

"Laurie has been committed to Junior Achievement over

the years and William loves what JA does, especially its focus on entrepreneurship. They are both outstanding Laureates," said Pladdys.

He added, "They really light up when they talk about their grandchildren. That is exciting because their grandchildren represent the next generation. Laurie and William are plugged into the community through their volunteer work with nonprofits. And they both moved up the ranks in their respective industries. That embodies the Junior Achievement mindset — keep moving and pushing forward."

Their decades of wisdom working in business is invaluable to people who are interested in starting a business or just looking to elevate their current careers.

Pladdys, who has a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from Indiana Wesleyan University, has in-depth experience in educational and nonprofit leadership, and community engagement in Florida. He previously was president and CEO of Gabriel Coaching and Consulting, where he provided strategic guidance to nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

"When the president and CEO position opened, I was asked to put my resume in the hat, and I did. I had a couple of interviews. Through those interviews, I just fell in love with the Junior Achievement mission. It relates to what I have long believed in — being able to inspire young people to succeed, especially in Brevard County."

Cappelli and Chivers will be honored at the 39th annual Junior Achievement of the Space Coast Business Hall of Fame Gala Saturday, March 1, at the Radisson Resort at the Port in Cape Canaveral. The socializing begins at 5:30 p.m. They will be recognized for their achievements and empowering the next generation.

Entrepreneur Larry Jarnes is chairing the Business Hall of Fame Gala, which is open to the public. "I am honored to be the chair for the 2025 Business Hall of Fame Gala," he said.

"We're excited about this year's theme, 'A Night in Napa.' It's my second year chairing this event. Last year's was a big success. We have two amazing Laureates, Laurie Cappelli and William Chivers. They are well-deserving of this award. We are looking forward to a fantastic evening."

Tickets and sponsorships are available for the Business Hall of Fame Gala. For sponsorship inquiries or to purchase tickets, contact Anna Lunt at (321) 522-6621 or email Anna@JASpaceCoast.org.

Jarnes, founder of Northboro Builders Inc. and managing general partner of Relentless Private Equity Group LLC, said the CEO transition from Conroy-Baiter to Pladdys has been smooth.

"Jack kicked off 2025 with a bang as our new CEO. He has the full support of the board. He is looking forward to continuing the mission and growing the organization. We're excited about the future of Junior Achievement of the Space Coast," said Jarnes.

Patent attorney Mark Malek and his wife Laura Canning Malek recently hosted a reception at their home for the inductees. Malek, who co-founded Widerman Malek PL, was a Business Hall of Fame inductee last year. He is a Junior Achievement of the Space Coast board member and has been involved with the organization for years.

"I love the pillars of Junior Achievement — financial literacy, workplace readiness, and entrepreneurship — and what they do for our community," said Malek. "We recently had a board meeting and it was acknowledged that Junior Achievement of the Space Coast reaches on a percentage basis, more students than most JA organizations in the United States."

Malek added, "The board's goal is to provide JA programs to every student in Brevard County. Hopefully, that will happen in my lifetime. We are seeing strong

support in the community. What we are doing is invaluable. Our programs have changed the lives of young people."

A recent study conducted by Junior Achievement USA and Big Village reveals a significant gap between the demand for financial education and its availability in schools. According to the survey, 68 percent of teens "would eagerly" enroll in a financial literacy course if offered, but only 31 percent report having access to such courses at their schools.

Pladdys has already met with Brevard County school officials and is looking to expand his organization's reach in the region.

"Jack is doing a great job following in the steps of the outstanding work Anne Conroy-Baiter and her team did for the last 10 years," said Malek. "We hope to have Jack in the community for many years."

His team includes Candice Hodge, vice president of education; Anna Lunt, operations and event manager; Bianca Booz, education coordinator; and Rose Hudson, HOPE project manager.

The Business Hall of Fame Gala is one of the largest events in the county attended by the business community. Cappelli and Chivers have enjoyed successful careers and are now angling toward retirement.

"My last day at Community Credit Union will be May 30 of this year," said Cappelli, adding that a national search is underway to find her successor.

She and her husband have purchased a home in Rapid City, known as "The City of Presidents," a designation earned by its proximity to Mount Rushmore and the ambitious public art project comprised of 43 life-size bronze statues of presidents placed on street corners throughout downtown.

"We plan to spend the winter months in Brevard County and summers in South Dakota," said Cappelli. "So, we will still have our Brevard connection."

Chivers said he has cut his work schedule to being in the office only two days a week.

"I'm winding down my career. I have been with RUSH for 28 years. I am incredibly proud of the organization that we built, the team of people we have been able to recruit, and the company culture we have fostered. The company is philanthropic and believes in being a great community partner."

He added, "Ever since I joined RUSH, we have given back to the community. Though there were times when we had some rough years in the industry, we still supported nonprofits."

A turning point in Chivers' career took place in the late 1990s when Delaware North expanded at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex with the construction of the Apollo/Saturn V Center. The Apollo/Saturn V Center opened in December 1996.

Chivers was the project manager for the Apollo/Saturn V Center and worked for a different company. "It was during that time that I met Ed Rabel, who owned RUSH Construction. I got to know him and he began telling me about his plans for the future for RUSH Construction. I was interested in what he was saying. In January 1997, I joined RUSH Construction as executive vice president. I just fell in love with the organization. He had always dreamed of having an employee-owned company and that really spoke to me as well."

Seven years ago, the company added two divisions — RUSH Facilities and RUSH Marine. The presidents of those two divisions report to Chivers. The two divisions are growing.

"We're humbled and grateful for the success we have been able to achieve. The bottom line is it has taken a

Please see Junior Achievement, page 22



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The Garden Club by the Sea to present 'Pollinator Fair' Feb. 23 at Nance Park

By Jeri Glynn-Ronaldson
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President
Garden Club by the Sea

INDIALANTIC (Jan. 10, 2025) — The Garden Club by the Sea will be presenting a free, family friendly "Pollinator Fair" from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 23, at Nance Park in Indialantic. Attendees will experience the world of pollinators and interact with birds, bees, bats, butterflies, and plants that support the local ecosystem. There will be interactive children's crafts and exhibits, food trucks, vendors, Master Gardeners to answer questions from attendees, plants for purchase, and more.

The Garden Club by the Sea is especially grateful for the support of its key sponsors, including Alan H. Landman, PA, Outdoor Enhancements, and the Peterson Family Foundation.

For more information on this and other Garden Club by the Sea events, go to <https://www.sbgca.org/gardenclub-by-the-sea-1>, or visit its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GardenClubbytheSea>.

Junior Achievement

Continued from page 23

dedicated team to achieve this success. The team of people we have assembled have made it happen," said Chivers.

Cappelli's first position at Community Credit Union was in 1996 as a lender in the "contact center," which provides information to members about accounts, loans, and transactions. Community Credit Union hired Cappelli to "add lending to the mix. I began training individuals in the department to start taking loan applications. That grew into the position of credit manager. I was the credit manager for several years, then was promoted to senior vice president and to CEO in 2018 following the announcement of David Brock's retirement as CEO of Community Credit Union."

Cappelli said she has been involved with Junior Achievement of the Space Coast for more than 12 years and is honored to have been chosen as a Business Hall of Fame inductee.

"It's rewarding to be part of an organization that focuses on the next generation of leaders. And it all begins with community leaders volunteering their time teaching the JA programs in the classrooms. Through hands-on activities and lessons, the students gain important knowledge, including how to manage money, they learn about various careers, they learn about starting a business, and they learn about the economy. These are things that will help them succeed in life."

She added, "The Business Hall of Fame honor is something I will long cherish."

Chivers said when he received a call from the Business Hall of Fame selection committee informing him of being chosen for this honor, "I thought it might be a prank. But it wasn't a joke. I wasn't expecting this. It's very humbling to think that I would even be considered to join the list of distinguished people over the decades who have been inducted into the Business Hall of Fame. It's a tremendous honor to be recognized by Junior Achievement of the Space Coast. But I look at it as our company being recognized, not me. The company has given me the platform to excel."

"We are going to have an exciting ceremony March 1 at the Raddison Resort at the Port. This will be my first Business Hall of Fame event as CEO of Junior Achievement of the Space Coast. We're honoring two outstanding community leaders," said Pladdys.

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