



Dona Ponepinto

President, CEO, United Way of Pierce County

Dona is currently the President and CEO for United Way of Pierce County. Dona joined UWPC in January of 2014 and brings over 30 years of experience within the United Way network and a long history of working on behalf of children and their families. Since taking the reins in Pierce County, Dona led a ground-breaking three-state research project on the financial stability of families known as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), spearheaded the creation of the yearly, From Poverty to Possibilities summit, and launched the Center for Strong Families, that focuses on helping families increase their income, decrease expenses, build credit, and acquire assets. Currently, in partnership with the City of Tacoma, she and her team are leading the Guaranteed Income Demonstration project. Prior to joining United Way of Pierce County, Dona was a Vice President at United Way for Southeast Michigan (UWSEM) in Detroit, Michigan. Prior to joining UWSEM, she was with Orange County's United Way and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles. Dona has consistently been very engaged in her community and has demonstrated strong leadership through service and board membership. She is a member of the Junior League Tacoma and is currently the President of the Association of Junior Leagues International. In addition, she serves on boards of the Tacoma Art Museum, Wellfound Behavioral Health Hospital, South Sound Together and the Workforce Development Council. In 2019, she was appointed by Governor Jay Inslee to serve as a Board of Trustee for Tacoma Community College. Dona holds a BA in Psychology and a MS Degree in Counseling with emphasis in children and families from Creighton University.



Dr. Karen A. Johnson, Ph.D.

Director, Washington State Office of Equity

Dr. Karen A. Johnson, goes by Dr. J, is the inaugural Director for the newly created Washington State Office of Equity, established by the legislature and signed into law in April 2020. The office will work with agencies to increase access to equitable opportunities in order to bridge opportunity gaps and reduce disparities. The office will also work with communities to develop the state's five-year equity plan. An inspiring, authentic, servant leader with decades of experience in both managerial and leadership roles in the non-profit sector and in federal and state government, Dr. J is energized by helping others excel. She lives her legacy by unapologetically championing and challenging others to embrace, emulate, and embed a culture where everyone commits to collectively value, include, hear, and respect each other so that individual and organizational excellence is realized. She volunteers her time with people, places, and purposes focused on children, environmental justice, and underserved populations. A few examples of her current and former board service include the South Sound YMCA, Thurston Climate Action Team, the Making a Difference Foundation, Black Alliance of Thurston County, and the YWCA of Olympia. She holds a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy, a master's in public administration, and doctorate in Urban Services. She is also a member of the 2018 Leadership Women America cohort. Dr. J says, "I will work toward equity and justice for all... until justice rolls down as waters."



Melannie Cunningham

Director, Multicultural Outreach and Engagement,
Pacific Lutheran University

Melannie Denise Cunningham serves as the Director of Multicultural Outreach and Engagement in the Campus Ministry Department here at PLU. Regardless of her fun, jolly façade, she is hugely empathic and works tirelessly to advocate for diversity, inclusion, equity, and retention for the university's most underrepresented racial and cultural populations. Cunningham, a change-maker and palmy entrepreneur with a strategic mindset, founded awe-inspiring programs and interventions at PLU that support them in culturally authentic ways, i.e. The People's Gathering Racial Dialogue Convening, Leadership Symposium on Saturday, Monday Word Chapel Service, Gospel Experience Concert, Lute Nation Step Team, and the PLU Food Pantry. She works in concert with various entities, including the Office of Admissions, Diversity Center, Student Success, Academic Advising, Financial Services, Graduate Programs and Continuing Education, Degrees of Change, Foundation for Tacoma Students, and Northwest Harvest. The community took notice of her services and their providential effects on society at large. She was awarded The Greater Tacoma Peace Prize for her steadfast work in promoting racial reconciliation. The honor earned her a trip to Oslo, Norway, to attend the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony, where she presented her documentary titled "Peace Queen." Peace Queen later aired on public television and was recognized by the Northwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 2021 with an Emmy Award. "It is an honor to serve with Melannie," says Jen Rude, University Pastor. "People like Melannie Cunningham make this world a better place. Buoyantly she keeps doing what she does and keeps making those ripples in stagnant waters." Cunningham received her B.A. in General Studies from Washington State University and later earned her Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Pacific Lutheran University. She also earned a master's degree in Organizational Leadership and Change from Fielding Graduate University. Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Organizational Development, this self-proclaimed "continuous learner" says her journey underscores the importance of students thriving and finding deep campus connections. According to her, every student should know that they matter and belong at PLU.



Dr. Divya McMillin, Ph.D.

Professor of Global Media Studies, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation & Global Engagement, University of Washington Tacoma

Her participatory design methods in development communication and her analyses of soft power, global “smart” cities and convergence technologies, are widely published in top tiered journals and anthologies, meriting her Top Paper Awards from the

International Communication Association. Known as The Builder, McMillin has pioneered innovative curriculum and helped shape the mission of UW Tacoma. McMillin is recipient of the UW Distinguished Research Award (2012) and the Distinguished Teaching Award (2017). She serves on various international journal editorial and book publishing review boards, as well as the Tacoma Pierce County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and the Charles Wright Academy Board of Trustees.

Dr. Divya McMillin (Ph.D. 1998, Indiana University Bloomington) is Professor of Global Media Studies and Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Global Engagement at the University of Washington Tacoma. McMillin's three critically acclaimed books, International

Media Studies (Blackwell 2007), Mediated Identities: Youth, Agency, and Globalization (Peter Lang, 2009), and Place, Power, Media (Peter Lang, 2018) have transformed global media studies by interrogating ideologies and audience/user agency.

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Carol C. Mitchell, J.D.

Founder, Institute for Black Justice

Justice (IBJ) in September 2020. The purpose of the IBJ is to relentlessly pursue equity and justice for all. Mitchell has more than 20 years of public sector leadership experience, having served most recently in Pierce County, Washington. Her primary responsibility was to improve outcomes for individuals with behavioral health and substance use conditions who were caught in the grip of the criminal justice system. She has significant organizational and human resources experience, having served as the Chief HR Officer for the Port of Tacoma, Chief Organizational Development and HR Officer for Metro Parks, Public Relations Officer for Pierce Transit,

and as Executive Consultant for her own preventive law firm. Mitchell spent 17 years as the host of TV Tacoma's “CityLine,” a public affairs talk show. Her volunteer activities include an appointment to the Board of Trustees of Clover Park Technical College, Past President of the Fair Housing Center of Washington Board, past member of the Palmer Scholars Board of Directors, and Past President of the Tacoma City Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc. She is proud to be in service to her community, to her soon-to-be-85-year-old mother, her 3 adult children and her 6 grandchildren.

Carol C. Mitchell holds a Juris Doctor from Seattle University School of Law, a Master of Arts in Organizational Systems Renewal from Seattle University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Washington Seattle. She founded the Institute for Black

Justice (IBJ) in September 2020. The purpose of the IBJ is to relentlessly pursue equity and justice for all. Mitchell has more than 20 years of public sector leadership experience, having served most recently in Pierce County, Washington. Her primary responsibility

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Carlos Ortiz

Writer, Director, Producer, Filmmaker, Zeta-Maya Entertainment, Co-Founder and Chairman of LUNA

an exciting, new voice for the Latino community, and as a family man, filmmaker, community leader, educator, and mentor, he devotes his time to helping others achieve success in order to make a positive difference and make our world a better place as a way to leave a lasting legacy. His focus as a Writer/Director/Producer is on narrative feature films, featurelength

documentaries, and original TV series that are in some way groundbreaking, inspirational, educational, entertaining, and that tell timeless stories that are universal in their appeal. He has written, produced, and directed several short films, TV commercials, music videos, and documentaries. He has studied photography and liberal arts at East Los Angeles College, film at UC, Berkeley under 4-time Academy and Oscar® Award-winning sound designer Mark Berger, best known for his work on The Godfather II, Apocalypse Now and Amadeus, and has also studied videography at Clover Park Technical College and worked with 4-time Emmy® Award-winning videographer and editor Scott Blatman, best known for his work on Bill Nye The Science Guy, broadcast TV and King 5 News, and has also sat on the panel of judges for the Emmy® Awards. He is a marketing guru, the Co-founder and Chairman of LUNA, an education-based, charitable nonprofit helping underprivileged and under-represented youth pursue and attain a professional career, who has over 20 years of photography and video production experience, over 15 years of sales and business development experience, and over 10 years of marketing and advertising experience. He is passionate about working with the whole community, improving the lives of his fellow Latinos and others, and creating opportunity for the underprivileged, especially our youth. He plans on being one of the greatest filmmakers in the history of cinema.

Born and raised in East Los Angeles, California, (GO East Los!), but currently living, working and playing in Tacoma, Washington (The City of Destiny), Carlos with Zeta-Maya Entertainment is an experienced, unique and passionate independent filmmaker who knows about adversity and how to use education, storytelling and the power of positive thinking to overcome any obstacle, problem or challenge in life, as well as in the film business. He's

an exciting, new voice for the Latino community, and as a family man, filmmaker, community leader, educator, and mentor, he devotes his time to helping others achieve success in order to make a positive difference and make our world a better place as a way to leave a lasting legacy. His focus as a Writer/Director/Producer is on narrative feature films, featurelength

documentaries, and original TV series that are in some way groundbreaking, inspirational, educational, entertaining, and that tell timeless stories that are universal in their appeal. He has written, produced, and directed several short films, TV commercials, music videos, and documentaries. He has studied photography and liberal arts at East Los Angeles College, film at UC, Berkeley under 4-time Academy and Oscar® Award-winning sound designer Mark Berger, best known for his work on The Godfather II, Apocalypse Now and Amadeus, and has also studied videography at Clover Park Technical College and worked with 4-time Emmy® Award-winning videographer and editor Scott Blatman, best known for his work on Bill Nye The Science Guy, broadcast TV and King 5 News, and has also sat on the panel of judges for the Emmy® Awards. He is a marketing guru, the Co-founder and Chairman of LUNA, an education-based, charitable nonprofit helping underprivileged and under-represented youth pursue and attain a professional career, who has over 20 years of photography and video production experience, over 15 years of sales and business development experience, and over 10 years of marketing and advertising experience. He is passionate about working with the whole community, improving the lives of his fellow Latinos and others, and creating opportunity for the underprivileged, especially our youth. He plans on being one of the greatest filmmakers in the history of cinema.



Dr. Lori Pfingst, PhD

Senior Director, Economic Services
Administration, Washington Department
of Social and Health Services (DSHS | FSA)

labor markets, early learning, human services, criminology, and epidemiology. She is a published author and storyteller, using the power of data paired with community voice to foster long-term, systems-level change for children, families, and communities. Lori is a recipient of the Aspen Institute's prestigious Ascend Fellowship, an American Public Human Services

Association Racial Equity Champion, and a recent nominee for the Governor's Distinguished Manager Award. Prior to joining DSHS, Lori served in leadership roles at the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, Public Health-Seattle & King County, and the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington.



Adam Stein

Columbia Bank, VP, CRA & HMDA
Compliance Manager, CRCM

Adam is currently the Compliance Manager and CRA officer at Columbia Bank, overseeing the bank's compliance with regulations that ensure financial institutions do their share in the communities they are a part of, and managing technical compliance for the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) and Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA). Adam has been in banking for over 15 years, previously doing similar work at Umpqua Bank and the former West Coast Bank. Before beginning his career in banking, Adam served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mongolia from 2004 to 2006, as a community and economic development advisor, supporting Mercy Corps' Gobi Initiative program. Adam strongly supports the Bank On Initiative and Asset Building Networks, and serves in an advisory role for a number of coalitions throughout the Pacific Northwest.



Jim Walton

United Way of Pierce County Board
Member, Community Advocate

Mr. Walton is currently on the Board for United Way of Pierce County and a Tri-Chair for the United Way Centennial Campaign. He is a founding director of Commencement Bank, served the City of Tacoma for 32 years in several leadership capacities before retiring in 2005 from the position of City Manager. Prior to becoming City Manager, Mr. Walton served as Deputy City Manager, from 1990-2003 and Assistant City Manager from 1979-1990. His past and current community involvements include - United Way of Pierce County, Campaign Chair, 2005; County Charter Review Commission (elected office), Vice Chair, 2005; William M. Factory Small Business Incubator, Vice Chair 2006-2008; Foundation for Tacoma Schools, board member; Goodwill Heritage Foundation, board member; Tacoma-Pierce County Black Collective, lifetime member; Franke Tobey Jones Retirement Estates, board member; and Tacoma Sunrise Rotary, past President, member.



Debbie Wilkerson

GRIT (Growing Resilience in Tacoma) Recipient

Debbie, her son Shawn, and her grandson James are long-term renters in Tacoma that participate in United Way of Pierce County and the City of Tacoma's Guaranteed Income program, GRIT. Debbie works early mornings part-time and homeschools and cares full-time for her 12-year-old grandson James who has autism. James runs track and field for the Washington Special Olympics and bowls for a local club - activities that are supported in part by the guaranteed income payments. Their family has used a portion of the guaranteed income payments to clean up their credit and begin saving for a down payment on their

first home, while another portion goes to support Debbie and Shawn's capacity to care for James as he's more apt to thrive in a smaller group. As Debbie ages, she worries that if they are unable to purchase a home, she will be leaving James into the unknown hands of a care facility "I worry about getting older and watching James do the same. James will have to live in assisted living if we can't get ourselves a house. I want to make sure that he has his own place to live and that he will be looked after and cared for properly."