

Jacki Dezeliski

President and CEO • Manatee Chamber of Commerce

With a rise from Communications Manager to President and CEO of the Manatee Chamber of Commerce, Jacki learned every aspect of the organization through previous positions at the Chamber. Equally important is her in-depth knowledge of her hometown community and the business members that she serves. She believes she's the first woman to serve as CEO at the Manatee Chamber.

Remaining at the same organization for 20 years that a person joined shortly after college is a testament to the culture and values of the organization as well as the employee's commitment to its mission. With a rise from Communications Manager to President and CEO of the Manatee Chamber of Commerce, Jacki Dezelski learned every aspect of the organization through her previous positions at the Chamber. Equally important is her in-depth knowledge of her hometown community and the business members that she serves. She believes she is the first woman to serve as CEO at the Manatee Chamber.

"As the Communications Manager, I learned what the Chamber does by working with every staff member. As Vice President, I added community development which included education, workforce development, healthcare, and leadership development (including Manatee Young Professionals which I launched and Leadership Manatee). In 2014, I became the Executive Vice President and assumed more responsibility for strategic planning and budgeting," Jacki says.

With the untimely death in February of the former Chamber leader Bob Bartz, Jacki filled the role on an interim basis until her appointment in May. She says, "I am forever indebted to Bob for his mentorship for 20 years, for his style of leadership, and the culture he instilled in the Chamber. He set the stage for the Chamber's success by his attention to the staff team and for the leadership roles that he encouraged Chamber members to take. As Bob did for 35 years as the Chamber's leader, I come to work every day to make a difference for businesses. We work on issues related to education, infrastructure, transportation, healthcare—all those subjects that impact the local economy and quality of life. I place the Chamber members at the heart of all we do. Our mission is to build a positive business environment and enhance the quality of life of the community. The interdependence of these two require that we work on both sides of our mission."

Jonathan Fleece, Managing Partner of Blalock Walters, P.A., a Platinum Member of the Manatee Chamber, says, "Jackie is a true servant leader in every respect. She puts her family, church, and the Manatee Chamber of Commerce above all else. Her passion to achieve the common good for local businesses and other stakeholders in our community is contagious. I'm beyond excited to see where Jacki leads the Manatee Chamber in the years and decades to come."

The Manatee Chamber of Commerce was founded to meet the needs of the business community and is one of less than one percent of the 7,000 Chambers nationwide that has earned 5-Star Accreditation and Reaccreditation indicating that the Chamber exceeds standards and benchmarks for the industry. Jacki says the Chamber's role is to serve as the convener and to recruit informed people to address issues and devise solutions for workforce development, an essential component for current business owners and important to prospective businesses.

Another initiative is the Manatee Young Professionals group—the longest-operating such group in the Tampa Bay area—that meets the challenges of young professionals with networking events, professional development, volunteer opportunities, and resources to assure that professionals aged 21-40 reap the benefits of working and living in Manatee County. A third issue that the Chamber is addressing is infill redevelopment for workforce/

attainable housing.

Jacki says, "The Manatee Chamber traces its roots to 1889 with the creation of the Bradenton Board of Trade. We've had tremendous success and I believe that the future leadership of the Manatee Chamber is even more critical for our businesses. The Manatee Chamber is the largest Chamber in the Tampa Bay region with 2,100 members who employ 74,000 workers. As a membership organization, we have a high level of engagement of business leaders on 25 committees and task forces. More than 500 members lend their brainpower to tackle tough issues like infrastructure, workforce development, healthcare, natural resources, legislation, and more. Last year we hosted 519 meetings and events at our two offices (Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch)."

Jacki says a challenge she faces is carving out time to think differently about the inevitability of change. She realizes that she must be mindful and take time to brainstorm and think creatively about the future. She says she has been committed for the long term and acknowledges that change is not easy but you have to stay with it. She says the key to her longevity with the Chamber is her passion for the mission and the dedicated staff and Chamber members.

The Manatee Chamber was named the National Chamber of the Year in 2007 from the American Chamber of Commerce and received Florida Chamber of the Year four times since 2004—the sole Chamber to receive this recognition four times. Jacki was named the 2015 Florida Chamber Professional of the Year and was recognized as a "Wonder Woman" by the Women's Resource Center in 2015, *SRQ Magazine* Women in Business Nominee 2014-2017, and *Gulf Coast Business Review* (now known as *Business Observer*) Top 40 under 40 Honoree.

Jacki was born in California and moved to Manatee County in 1980. Her family has farmed near Traverse City, Michigan, for decades where she and her family continues to vacation at the family home. Her mother was a public school teacher and her father worked for Delta at Sarasota Airport. Her sister is a licensed clinical social worker and lives in Virginia.

Jacki received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in graphic design and an MBA from the University of Florida. She earned IOM (Institute of Organization Management) Credential from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 2011. She is married to Mike Kennedy (who she met at a Chamber after-hours event), Director of Discipleship at Harvest United Methodist Church in Lakewood Ranch, and who was formerly with the Pittsburg Pirates and Bradenton Downtown Development Authority. They have two children Micah and Lucy who attend Center Montessori School and live in a 103-year old house in Bradenton.

Her volunteer work includes the Board of Governors of Leadership Manatee, Harvest United Methodist Church, and Board member of Manatee Healthcare Alliance and United Way of Manatee County. She values time with her family at the beach or parks, sporting events, the Farmers Market and museum, and cooking. Her guilty pleasure—salted dark chocolate. She hopes to one day pick up the cello and resume playing as she did in high school.

Jacki says she had a wonderful childhood in Manatee County and is grateful to work in Manatee County. She nurtured her 20-year Chamber career with passion and vision without losing sight of the mission, members, and staff. 🍷

STORY: Carol Darling

IMAGES: Evelyn England