



2026 ANNUAL LUNCHEON SEPTEMBER 24

Hilton Chicago Continental Room | 720 S. Michigan Ave. | Chicago, IL 60605

STATE OF Growth

Our Speakers



Ken Wegner, President, The Jel Sert Company

Ken Wegner is President and an owner of The Jel Sert Company, where he oversees the company's operations, growth strategy, and manufacturing leadership from its headquarters in West Chicago, Illinois. He joined Jel Sert in 1985 as Director of Purchasing and was named President in 1997. Since then, Wegner has helped scale the business across its core categories, including powdered drink mixes, freezer bars, and dessert mixes, while expanding the company's capabilities as a leading contract manufacturer for major nutrition and food companies. Today, the Jel Sert Company's family of beloved brands includes Otter Pops, Fla-Vor-Ice, Pop-Ice, Kool Pops, Wyler's Italian Ices, Wyler's Light, Flavor-Aid, Super C, Royal, All Sport, and Pure Kick. Under Wegner's guidance, The Jel Sert Company has emerged as the top producer of powdered drink sticks in North America and one of the world's leading producers of freezer bars.

A third-generation member of the founding family, Wegner continues to build on the company's 100-year legacy by delivering high-quality, high-value products.

In addition to his role at Jel Sert, Wegner is active in several civic and nonprofit organizations. He serves as Chair of the Elmhurst Memorial Hospital Foundation, Vice Chair of the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, and Chair of the American Childhood Cancer Organization.

Wegner earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Spanish from Denison University.



Meena Beyer, Vice President of Business & Community Development, Nicor Gas

Meena Beyers is vice president of Business and Community Development for Nicor Gas, Illinois' and Southern Company's largest natural gas distribution utility serving 2.3 million customers across northern Illinois. In this role, Meena leads growth, customer solutions, energy efficiency, community and economic development, community affairs and charitable giving. She also leads external stakeholder engagement strategy and has championed transformative partnerships and innovation for the business.

Meena serves on the board of directors executive committees for Metropolitan Planning Council, Chicagoland Habitat for Humanity, and the Illinois Chamber of Commerce. Meena also serves on the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry's President's Council and the Executive Advisory Council for Intersect Illinois, the state's economic development organization. Meena was recognized as a 2023 Crain's Chicago Business Notable Leader in Sustainability and 2024 Woman of Power by the Quad County Urban League.

She earned a bachelor's degree in urban planning and development from Ball State University and a master's degree in public service management from DePaul University. Meena lives with her husband and twin boys in Westmont, Illinois.



Kevin Donahue, State & Local Affairs Manager, Canadian National

Kevin Donahue serves as CN's State & Local Affairs Manager. In this role, he is responsible for managing a range of government relation initiatives to promote business and policy objectives of CN across Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. Prior to joining CN, he was the Government Affairs Manager for the Illinois Tollway and served two terms on the Blue Island City Council. Kevin and his wife Maryl reside in New Lenox, and he is a graduate of Vincennes University with a bachelor's degree in public safety.



Helen Fitzpatrick, Vice President of State Government Affairs, AbbVie

Helen Fitzpatrick is Vice President of State Government Affairs and leads the legislative and political strategy and engagement for AbbVie across the U.S. State and Local Legislatures.

Helen joined AbbVie from Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) where she served as Senior Director, State Government Affairs, leading the company's state and local legislative and political engagement across the Northeast and Central Regions.

Before joining Celgene, Helen worked for Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC), which operates Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans in Illinois, Montana, New Mexico,

Oklahoma and Texas, where her responsibilities included supporting the federal government relations team and overseeing the company's employee political programs.

Prior to working in the health care industry, Helen led the political and grassroots advocacy programs for a national trade association in the energy sector and has worked on both federal and state political campaigns. Her first political campaign experience was overseeing major donor engagement and fundraising for a gubernatorial campaign in her home state of Virginia.

She received her master's degree in political management from George Washington University and a bachelor's in economics from Washington and Lee University. Helen is based at AbbVie's headquarters in Lake County.



Michael Telesky, Vice President, Sales, Small Business & Key Accounts, UnitedHealthcare, Chicago, IL/NW Indiana

Michael joined UnitedHealthcare in 2006. He also worked for Superior Vision Services as the Midwest representative selling in seven Midwest States. Before that, Michael was with CIGNA as a New Business Manager for sales and in a variety of service roles. As an account executive, Michael has sold vision, dental, life, disability, critical illness and stop loss products in all size segments. In 2009 Michael became the Specialty Regional Sales Director for the Indiana and Illinois markets managing a

team of Senior Sales Executives in addition to personal production goals. In 2011, Michael moved into the Specialty Regional Vice President role for the Central Region, comprised of 15 States, managing a team of Sales Directors and Account Executives. In 2013, Michael moved into the Vice President of Sales and Account Management, Key Accounts role for UnitedHealthcare of Illinois. In 2019, Michael moved into the Vice President, Sales Small Business & Key Accounts role, managing a team of 10 Sales Executives. Michael serves on the Local Leadership Board of the American Lung Association in Greater Chicago and the Illinois Restaurant Association. Michael has been active with the National Association of Health Underwriters in his local Chapter, NIAHU having served as the President of the Chapter and Awards Chair. Michael is a member of the Executives Club of Chicago. Michael is an avid supporter of his local Y and is active in his Homeowners Association. Michael is a veteran of the U.S. Army, having served in South Carolina, Panama and Arizona. Michael is an avid cyclist and has completed century rides of 100 miles to support local non-profits. Michael currently lives in Valparaiso, Indiana with his wife, Eileen and enjoys spending as much time as possible with their children Sam (27, Naperville, IL), Brooke (23, Boston, MA) and Ally (18, Muncie, IN).



Lourdes Duarte, Co-anchor and Lead Investigative Reporter, WGN

Lourdes Duarte is a four-time EMMY Award winner. She co-anchors the *WGN Evening News at 4pm* and is one of the station's lead investigative reporters. Prior to her role on the evening news, Lourdes co-anchored the top-rated WGN Morning News. She also hosts WGN's public affairs program *Adelante Chicago*.

She started her journalism career as a reporter for Telemundo Chicago. She then went on to work in news markets throughout the country including Miami, Indianapolis and Detroit. While in Indianapolis she launched, produced and hosted the public affairs show "Hoy en Dia"

which won an EMMY for its impact on the Latino community.

Lourdes has been recognized for her volunteer work and engagement with Chicago's minority communities. Her alma mater, De Paul University recognized her as one of DePaul's 14 Under 40. Most recently, the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence awarded her the Distinguished Alumna Award along with *New York Times* Executive Editor Dean Baquet.

When she's not at WGN-TV, Lourdes is checking off locations from her travel bucket list with trips to Europe and South America. In 2017, *Modern Brown Girl* and *Chicago Woman Magazine* published her travel essay on her one-week stay in Argentina.

She's also been a featured speaker and panelist for events and organizations throughout Chicago including the annual *Dare to Dream* Conference, *Negocios Now*, *The Miracle Center* and the *National Latino Education Institute*.

Lourdes received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from DePaul University. She lives in Chicago with her husband and daughter, Madeline.