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AWARDS  
2022**

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**TOP TECH  
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## Letter from **COX Business**



**T**he 15th annual Top Tech Awards was a special night as the community gathered in a new venue — Snapdragon Stadium was an incredible backdrop — for the first in-person Top Tech since 2019. The atmosphere was electric as more than 600 of us celebrated the latest group of IT leaders named Top Tech Award Honorees.

During the pandemic, IT teams were among the most tested divisions within a company. We all trusted them to make remote work seamless, migrate critical applications to the cloud, prioritize security from an influx of threats and help us navigate the new world

of Zoom and Teams! When you combine those responsibilities with the added pressure of delivering on strategic projects to propel their businesses forward, we all owe a debt of gratitude and thanks to the IT heroes of San Diego.

Often, industry awards burst into existence with a groundswell of support and energy. However, it's not often that 15 years later, the awards program has continued growth and maintained value to the professionals receiving the recognition. I felt a profound sense of community when I looked around Snapdragon Stadium this year. Previous Top Tech Honorees congratulated new Top Tech Honorees. Hundreds of familiar faces engaged with hundreds of new attendees. And we were all together again to celebrate!

Congratulations to all of our Top Tech Honorees and Nominees. See you all again for Top Tech Awards 2023.

**Duane Cameron**  
Vice President  
Cox Business

## Letter from the **San Diego Business Journal**



**T**he San Diego Business Journal is proud to be media sponsor for the Top Tech Awards presented by Cox Business.

This 15th annual event at Snapdragon Stadium did not disappoint! A crowd of more than 600 people had a great time at the brand new venue, mingling in the open air and honoring the region's outstanding information technology executives.

In San Diego, a Top Tech Award is regarded as a mark of superlative creativity, planning and execution in technology. In 2022, there were almost 200 nominees whose names were

put forward by their peers and their clients.

The past few years have offered a vivid reminder of how much we rely on information technology to complete our work and to stay connected to one another. The honorees and nominees are truly the San Diego region's unsung heroes. We hope you enjoy reading about this year's honorees on the following pages.

I would like to thank Duane Cameron, Vice President of Cox Business, and his incredible team for hosting this special event that showcases the region's best technology talent and most innovative technology leaders.

Congratulations to all who participated. You make San Diego's Community of Business very proud!

**Barb Chodos**  
President & Publisher  
San Diego Business Journal

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TOP TECH  
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## FOUNDERS AWARD

# SIGNATURE EVENT SPOTLIGHTS TECH TALENT, SHOWS IT CAN DANCE

**EVENTS:** Larry Coval of Cox Business Takes Inspiration From the Bar Association and Sports

■ By BRAD GRAVES

When it came time to plan the 15th Top Tech Awards, event producers decided it was time to give a special Founders Award.

The prize went to Larry Coval, division vice president for sales and economic growth at Cox Business. Coval was the individual who put the Top Tech effort in motion, beginning with an event in 2008.

It was from those roots that the event grew. The 2022 event, held Sept. 22 at the new Snapdragon Stadium in Mission Valley, hosted 600 guests.

“There is a long list of people who deserve credit for the success of the event,” Coval said, speaking not only of Top Tech 2022 but for the events that came before it. “I’m going to reach out to them to say thank you.”

Top Tech “is truly a fantastic institution in the San Diego community. And it is becoming a great institution in the Las Vegas community,” where Cox has been producing it for several years.

### ‘More of a Party’

The idea for the event, Coval said, came far earlier than 2008.

“When I arrived in San Diego back in 2004, I began to go out on the event circuit to network with key business leaders and other members of the business community,” he said. “Over the next couple of years, I noticed that there were events for CEOs, CFOs and other C-suite members, but nothing inclusive of the CIO [or] IT leader role.”

“So, I thought about what a ‘different’ kind of event might look like for that group ... and



Larry Coval of Cox Business participates in several Top Tech Awards programs in recent years. At left, Coval displays a proclamation from the City of San Diego in 2017. At top, awards emcees Nick Hardwick and Heather Myers flank Coval in 2018. At center, Coval meets the press in 2015. At bottom, he poses with a Maserati during the 2018 event. Photos courtesy of Top Tech Awards

my vision was to have it be more of a party to celebrate innovation and the role of the IT leader itself. At that point, I floated the idea with the San Diego Business Journal.”

But there were doubters. “The commonly held belief was that the IT leader community was not very social and would not show up and ‘show out’ for an event like that,” Coval said. “But my personal experience with those IT professionals contradicted that thinking and people who know me will tell you, I’m not easily dissuaded. “So, eventually, the SDBJ agreed to give it a try. I engaged my sales team at Cox Business to help us identify IT leaders in San Diego who were doing unique and unconventional things to help

### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

Thank you, again, for this recognition. Because of the hard work and contributions of so many people over the years, I’m very proud of what Top Tech has become and can’t wait to see how it continues to evolve.

➔ Signature page 21







TOP TECH  
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## TOP TECH OF THE YEAR

# LEARNING MOTIVATES RESMED'S TOP IT EXECUTIVE

**TECH:** Pandemic Brought Long Hours and Hard Puzzles; Will Moses Buckled Down, Appealed to Crew's Curiosity

■ By BRAD GRAVES

Corporations pivoted quickly during the early and uncertain days of COVID-19.

Will Moses was at the center of his company's response. His firm, ResMed Inc., sent its employees home to work while increasing the number of ventilators and face masks coming off of its factory lines. That effort was as much of a feat of IT management as anything else.

Will Moses is vice president of corporate infrastructure and services at ResMed (NYSE: RMD), a \$3.6 billion business with its main office in Kearny Mesa. ResMed specializes in medical devices and medical software. In addition to supporting its new production priorities, Moses dealt with other emergencies, such as the crash of the company's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform as the business was trying to wrap up its 2021 fiscal year. He also effectively led his IT department in day-to-day matters.

That performance earned Will Moses the Top Tech of the Year Award.

"His leadership was a true demonstration of how calm, composed, committed and confident a leader should be in times of crisis," wrote the person who nominated Moses for the honor, speaking of the ERP incident.

She compared the executive to a wise mentor character from the "Star Wars" movie series.

"Along with being a technologist, he is an avid reader and motivates the team to read more, discuss different perspectives on books and provide food for thought," she wrote. "There is so much to learn from him. He is the Yoda of IT."

Will Moses is completing his 10th year at ResMed. He previously worked for defense contractor SAIC and prior to that, Titan Corporation. Moses received his master of arts degree in linguistics from UC San Diego after earning his bachelor's degree from Harvard University.

### Seeing Potential in New Work Arrangements

With the arrival of COVID-19, the world went into quarantine. Moses prepared more than 8,000 employees in locations around the globe to work from home, and did it in record time.

He assembled a team of people from each area in IT to quickly put together the resources that let employees succeed in working remotely. This was no small feat as it took resources from ResMed's Networking, Information Security, Service Desk and Endpoint Engineering teams as well as support from the numerous application teams to ensure that employees could provide the same level of support to customers and patients.

After a few days of working through the logistics, the IT team tested having a large group of employees work remotely on a Friday. By Monday everyone with a laptop was working from home. Within a few days, the remaining number of employees in the San Diego office was provided with the equipment and access to

work from home.

Technically, ResMed was equipped to support fewer than 1,000 employees when management announced its decision that employees should work from home. Moses led the team and helped overcome challenges implicit in the WFH solution, from licensing to user education.

After the shift, Moses saw the efficiency and speed with which IT could deliver without sacrificing quality or security. He took what he learned from this exercise and transformed the ResMed organization, forming new teams and processes that allow for better collaboration with greatly reduced overhead. Not only did this create greater efficiency; it helped ResMed employees broaden their skills and gave them new opportunities to grow their careers.

### Meeting Demand, Facing Challenges

With the arrival of COVID, ResMed changed the pace of production to meet the rising global demand for ventilators and face masks. At one point the corporation planned to triple the production of ventilators and lift the production of face masks by more than 10x. With aggressive production goals, the company had to pivot.

ResMed had to mobilize its workforce to support this large production scale, yet members of that workforce had scattered to their individual homes. Again, ResMed had to lean on information technology. The corporation had to go from digitizing the relationship between firm and customer to digitizing the relationship between employer and employee. Will Moses was instrumental in supporting this switch, working from a technical and people management perspective, creating a



Will Moses, Top Tech of the Year for 2022, is flanked by Dave Henderson (2021 Top Tech of the Year) and Heather Myers. Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

culture of agility, resilience and innovation.

Another big event — the loss of an ERP platform — had the potential to severely impact ResMed's manufacturing and distribution operations. Moses invoked disaster recovery measures to restore and recover functionality. He successfully led the recovery effort, communicating transparently with business stakeholders and leadership, alleviating concerns while approaching ResMed's crucial fiscal year end. Moses approached the company's globally dispersed teams — Infrastructure, DBA (database administrator), Security, Finance, Manufacturing and Distribution — and inspired and empowered them to perform impact analysis, work through obstacles and successfully restore full ERP functionality in the DR (disaster recovery) site for ResMed. He was on every call, whether at 11 p.m. or 3 a.m., patiently answering queries from business partners and inspiring trust in the teams to restore functionality.

When the teams hit obstacles, Moses encouraged them to learn from those obstacles and think outside of the box to overcome and create contingency plans for risk avoidance. That education and preparation led to a seamless and successful DR fallback to a more resilient ERP platform in ResMed's primary site a few months later.

On top of these issues, Moses and his team supported the launch of a new

product, the AirSense 11, into the market. The AirSense 11 is an entirely cloud native medical device. There was also a cloud migration project, where Moses and his team moved a Tier 1 application suite, along with the database of close to 400 terabytes, from an on-premises computer system to the AWS cloud. Moses' leadership led to a smooth transition with no significant issues or outages.

### Attitude Is All

Moses' approach to his job and his team might be described best in four words: Learn and Be Curious.

As indicated earlier, the executive encourages teams to discover and learn from their failures; one employee describes Moses as "incredibly supportive" of mistakes made as a part of learning. He takes time to mentor his teams on synthesizing problems and not rushing to conclusions. His demeanor puts everyone who works with him at ease, and though his position is very senior, those who work with him don't feel any added pressure. He is very approachable, takes time to listen and always provides feedback.

In short, Moses leads with empathy and positivity. His optimism and growth mindset, coupled with his support and endorsement of various innovation and learning initiatives, has fostered a culture of innovation that mobilizes people, ideas and resources to catalyze impactful change.

### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

I am honored to receive this recognition. I'm proud of my team and the critical role they play in empowering our global workforce to deliver on ResMed's mission to improve the health of millions of people around the world.



Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography





TOP TECH  
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## COX BUSINESS EXEMPLARY

# SAN DIEGO PADRES' IT CHIEF IS MVP

**TECH:** Ray Chan's Work Has Benefited Wider Community

■ By BRAD GRAVES

Baseball fans have been doing the math and watching the stats, puzzling out whether the San Diego Padres will reach the Wild Card stage of the playoffs, maybe go even farther.

Stakes are high, but not nearly as high as the situation the community faced in early 2021.

It was then that Ray Chan, the Padres' vice president of information technology, and the baseball club's front office worked to help a community that was largely shut indoors.

Chan and his staff provided an internet connection that linked the Padres' headquarters at Petco Park to a station a few blocks away in East Village, in the parking lot known as the tailgate area. The connection supported San Diego's first vaccine "Super Station," where professionals from UC San Diego Health administered some of the first COVID-19 vaccines of the pandemic — some 5,000 per day.

It was here that front-line medical workers got their first COVID shots. That put those medical workers in a position to help others.

By the time it was all over, UC San Diego had given out 100,000 vaccines, and the Padres had become a model for the rest of the state.

### Helping a City Adapt

Ray Chan, a product of Mesa College, provided the IT support for that particular effort, but he has done far more than that. Chan's admirable record helped him win this year's Top Tech Award in the Exemplary Category.

Chan has been with the Padres organization for a dozen years. The past few years have offered a memorable change of emphasis.

When health regulations called for people to work from home, Chan activated remote work-force technology, allowing employees to continue their day-to-day activities while out of the office. He and his team also saw an opportunity while Petco Park was closed to upgrade the venue's security and camera systems.

In anticipation of re-opening the ballpark, Chan created a cashless payments system

for concession stand orders, a system that used mobile phones. This eased the fears of patrons who were not quite comfortable to pass cash back and forth.

Chan leveraged cloud technology to connect Padres facilities in both San Diego and Peoria, Arizona. This enabled redundancy and added layers of resiliency and security to the overall Padres network with centralized control.

In addition, Chan has worked to ensure that Petco Park can serve as a venue for events other than baseball games. Petco Park stages more concerts than any other ballpark in the United States (Puerto Rican rapper and singer Bad Bunny appeared for two consecutive nights on Sept. 17 and 18).

The Padres organization has been working to double the number of concerts presented at the ballpark.

### Serving Internal Customers, Mentoring Staff

Those who know Chan say he builds strong client relationships across the Padres organization while delivering high quality customer service.

He is responsible for the organization's technology strategy and budget, and manages the day-to-day operations of the IT department. He also maintains and administers all aspects of the network/server infrastructure within Petco Park, the Padres Spring Training facility in Peoria, Arizona and the ball club's facility in the Dominican Republic.

His job description includes providing leadership, direction and mentoring to an information technology staff of 10, including training and career path planning. Chan works with all departments in the Padres front office to identify technical needs and provide cost-saving solutions.

### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

I am humbled and honored to receive the 2022 Top Tech Exemplary Award. It is a reflection of our innovative and forward-thinking IT staff with the Padres who worked tirelessly to reopen Petco Park safely during the pandemic and remain focused on improving our fan experience at the ballpark in future seasons.



Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography



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## STARTUP HONOREE

### JOEL ABITAN

Vice President of Engineering  
Verse.io

Joel Abitan, vice president of engineering at Verse.io, is the Top Tech Awards startup honoree. He has been a leader at Verse since the company's inception and has spent the last decade building its next-generation Lead Conversion Platform that blends specialized technologies and skilled human concierges.

Verse's focus is on engaging, qualifying and converting inbound leads for marketing and sales teams. In today's world there is no way for a consumer to have a synchronous conversation with businesses through their phone. After seeing how businesses were trying to engage and communicate with this growing stream of online leads and prospects, Verse was developed. By merging AI's speed and productivity with people's smarts and empathy, Verse helps companies create authentic and effective communications with their prospects and customers. The



company's mission is to close the lead conversion gap by driving significantly higher revenue for customers while giving their prospects a better experience along the way.

In 2021, Abitan furthered Verse's mission by rolling out improvements to the internal concierge platform, increasing productivity by 40%. He pivoted to a SaaS platform, improved scripting capabilities and was able to expand the company's client base from five to 13 verticals. He also released a "trust contact" that allows callers to be verified and added the ability to book appointments through text. Verse hit a milestone in 2021 of 4.5 million text messages sent.

Abitan's passion for humanizing technology is most visible in his work leading Verse's engineering department. He encourages the team to be creative and effective leaders by fostering an atmosphere of psychological safety and a culture of unwavering values.

#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

In 2016, I attended my first Top Tech Awards as a nominee. And now six years later being the Startup Honoree, I feel elated and validated for all the hard work put into the growth of Verse.io.

Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

## PRIVATE SMB HONOREE

### NATHAN CHAVEZ

General Manager  
Alarms Unlimited Professional Security Solutions

Alarms Unlimited bills itself as "more than a number to call; we're your neighbor, looking out for you."

Nathan Chavez personifies this approach. Though technically minded, the company's general manager approaches his work with empathy for the customer.

"One of the many ways Nathan has found success in his position is by always remembering the human element behind the solutions that he proposes," wrote the person nominating him for the award. "It's easy in IT to get stuck in the operations mode of building a solution, but Nathan strongly believes in the importance of support throughout the implementation and lifecycle of the solution. By keeping the human element at the forefront, Alarms Unlimited has stood apart in the industry and the solutions they provide."

"Nathan leads by example, demonstrating the importance of understanding the client's mind and way of thinking regarding the problem at hand. This empathy combined with Nathan's personable approach to IT sets the standard for customer service at Alarms Unlimited."

Recent internal projects for Chavez have included converting Alarms Unlimited to a paperless company, successfully moving the company's alarm monitoring central station to the Los Angeles area, and allowing customers to access their video server onsite without opening holes in their firewall.

#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

Throughout my career I have struggled with which is more challenging: managing IT, managing the human factor, or managing myself. This award appears to recognize perseverance in each of these challenges. I really appreciate it.



Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography



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## Congratulations to the Top Tech Awards Nominees and Winners!

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**TOP TECH  
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## PRIVATE LARGE HONOREE

### MATT PUTMAN

Director of Technology  
H.G. Fenton Company

Matt Putman is director of technology at H.G. Fenton Company, a family-owned business working in both multifamily and commercial real estate. An innovative thinker who leverages technology to deliver sensible business solutions, Putman is this year's honoree in the Private Large category.

For the past six years, Putman has been responsible for the full scope of IT and technology functions, including infrastructure and security, application/system implementation and support, project management and execution, strategic planning, budget management and planning, vendor management, contract negotiation, and compliance auditing. Putman has worked tirelessly to future-proof the organization's infrastructure through digital transformation and designing technology to be used as an amenity.

In 2021, Putman set an in-flight digital transformation initiative, which leveraged new and existing cloud

applications and services (including VoIP) to support a multi-geography company. It put H.G. Fenton Company in an excellent position at the onset of state-issued COVID policies: it allowed for daily livestreamed updates from CEO Mike Neal to the entire company, organizational collaboration, remote meetings, and remote learning through Microsoft Teams. All helped to maintain the corporate work community and culture while employees were apart.

One of the more impactful components of the digital transformation was moving to Sharepoint from network drives for content and file storage. This allowed the H.G. Fenton organization to not only work remotely but hire and onboard remotely.

#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

It was a total surprise to hear my name called and look up to see myself on the big screen! I'm continuously proud of the results my team produces. I couldn't have won this without them!



Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

## PUBLIC HONOREE

### JULIE WESTCOTT

Director of IT Global Commercial Systems  
NuVasive Inc.

Julie Westcott, NuVasive Inc.'s director of IT global commercial systems, is an exceptional leader who seeks to drive open communication and connection among her teams, and find solutions that benefit both the end user and the business. She also cares about seeing her teammates develop.

Westcott manages a global team in charge of projects with more than 100 technical applications in the U.S. and international regions. Last year, she was instrumental in improving the efficiency of NuVasive's global commercial and operations teams through the development and implementation of digital solutions.

Westcott's global commercial technology strategy included implementing a launch of Salesforce CRM's Health Cloud to more than 600 users. This gave NuVasive's U.S. commercial organization a way to forecast sales plans, track customers and prospects while allowing cross-collaboration, and drive efficiency in customer lifecycle

management, which was not possible previously.

In 2020 and 2021, Westcott led the full digitization of the NuVasive Japan sales processes. To build on this success, NuVasive Asia Pacific commercial leadership requested the digital sales solution be implemented in additional Asia Pacific regions, providing greater value to its surgeons, providers and patients around the world. To date, the digitization of the NuVasive sales process has driven more than 50% improvement in order efficiency for the Asia Pacific sales and customer service teams, with an average of 70% of orders completed in less than five minutes.

An e-invoicing solution that saved postage costs was singled out for honors in 2021.

#### IN HER OWN WORDS:

It's an incredible moment in my professional life, but the recognition reflects our talented team. I'm excited as a leader to win an award for innovative projects that showcase how positivity, culture and teamwork can influence positive change in an organization.



Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography



**TOP TECH  
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NOMINEE**

## Congratulations to our COO, Corrie McCoy

*Thank you for all you do for our community  
and our organization!*



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## FUTURE OF TECH AWARD

**SANJIV PRABHAKARAN**CEO and Owner  
Bytes Inc.

Sanjiv Prabhakaran, CEO and owner of Bytes Inc., received the Future of Tech Award.

Bytes develops creative, custom software solutions for web and mobile business applications. It also provides clients with specialized technology consultants to augment their internal resources.

The business, founded in 2002 and based in Carmel Valley, helps small to mid-size companies improve their operations and realize a better return on investment. It has helped many startup entrepreneurs achieve their dreams of bringing products to life in the web and mobile space.

Prabhakaran pivoted his company during the tough COVID-19 times by showing other companies how to leverage remote operations using software technology. Bytes launched new web/mobile app systems for several companies that were struggling with the COVID-19 lockdowns. These new tools helped them run their businesses virtually. The years 2020 and 2021



also saw Prabhakaran personally acquire multiple new small to mid-size clients, upgrade systems for two existing clients and establish two offshore partners for website and mobile app development.

One notable achievement was delivering a complete redesign for a unique, tablet-based workflow application used at the military base on Point Loma. This saves the client an average of 20-30 hours of manual labor each week in tallying data-entries in Excel sheets, eliminating duplicate entries, and improving efficiencies across all phases of its operations.

Prabhakaran — the author of nine U.S. patents in the field of fleet management and mapping systems — has helped many of his clients develop IP for products.

## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

It was an amazing honor. Winning the Top Tech Award validates our mission of providing organizations with the custom software applications and turnkey solutions they need to increase their productivity and ROI.

Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

## NONPROFIT BUSINESS HONOREE

**JOE MCNERTNEY**Information Technology Manager  
The Arc of San Diego

For 13 years, Joe McNertney has met the challenging technical needs of The Arc of San Diego's staff as well as its clientele of children and adults with physical and intellectual disabilities. He is the Top Tech Awards honoree in the nonprofit business category. Founded in 1951, The Arc of San Diego has a rich tradition of developing programs for children and adults with special needs. One such program provides five adaptive technology computer labs throughout the county. Each lab consists of at least 10 to 20 Dell computers and Apple iPads — all connected by Cox High Speed Internet. This "joint-use" concept allows The Arc's participants access to advanced adaptive technology and The Arc's staff the necessary tools for electronic case management. McNertney is responsible for ensuring the labs — which utilize special touch screen, voice recognition, tactile peripherals and other interface

methods — are serviced and ready for use by the over 2,000 participants in the program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, McNertney was pivotal in The Arc's ability to pivot away from face-to-face client services to a virtual environment. This allowed The Arc to maintain contact with its client base and provide valuable day to day contact and encouragement to its clients and families. McNertney is a seasoned expert in supporting distributed environments utilizing various local and SaaS applications, as well as implementing and supporting various local and virtual server environments. He has strong communication skills with the ability to interact with personnel at all organizational levels.

McNertney has used his IT expertise to make an immense contribution to The Arc's growth.



## IN HIS OWN WORDS:

It was an honor to be among so many dedicated IT professionals. I've never been prouder of what I do or the company I work for. Many thanks to everyone involved.

Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

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## TOP TECH AWARDS 2022

### GOVERNMENT HONOREE

## SARA DIAZ

Director of Information Technology  
City of El Cajon

Faced with a need to update its software, the city of El Cajon found itself looking at bigger issues with the coming of COVID-19. Sara Diaz, the city's director of IT and this year's Government Honoree, aptly leveraged both technology and a strong organizational culture to help the city meet its challenges.

Because El Cajon city hall emphasizes teamwork across all departments, it does not have the burdensome silos common in other city governments. This cross-pollination created the connectivity and strength that let the technology department meet the disruption brought by COVID while still getting work done and even improving the customer experience.

On the technology front, the IT department invested in a new civic services software solution by Tyler Technologies. The new system integrated and automated all aspects of land management, planning, permitting and code inspections. To keep costs down, Diaz and her IT team handled project management and configuration work in-house. That helped the city to remain nimble for customization.

The city's team approach led to a community development solution that would be easy for end users but also detailed enough to facilitate solid inspections and reviews. The project's second phase featured electronic plan reviews

and a citizen self-service portal. This arrived just two weeks before the pandemic interrupted business as usual.

The new technology immediately improved the customer experience. Citizen self-service allowed residents and contractors to check the progress of an application at their convenience. High-volume customers like solar companies saw significant efficiencies, as they could create and follow large numbers of applications without ever entering city hall.

Diaz effectively harnesses technology to solve problems and improve lives. She exhibits commitment, creativity and enthusiasm. In addition to her city work, she is a mentor to others in technology and is a community volunteer.



#### IN HER OWN WORDS:

I am passionate about what I do, and inspired by service to our citizenry here in El Cajon. So, to be honored for doing what you love ... it doesn't get any better than that.

Photo courtesy of Sara Diaz

### EDUCATION HONOREE

## KEN WALL

Director of Information Technology  
Poway Unified School District

Technology leaders in education need to be not only strong technically, but able to think like a teacher and anticipate stakeholder needs in the herculean task of supporting and teaching the next generation of learners. Poway Unified School District Director of Information Technology Ken Wall has that unique combination of technical prowess and empathy to understand the needs of the education community of teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents.

Wall has worked at PUSD since 2013 and was promoted to Director of IT in 2020 – the most challenging year the district has ever seen. He tackled all of the new challenges of the pandemic to open schools virtually. PUSD was one of the first districts in the county to reopen campuses for in-person learning in 2020. Wall played a critical role in making that a reality through his leadership and

vision of technology providing unique and simple solutions to complicated issues.

Last year, Wall overhauled the district's aging tech systems and was also pivotal in spearheading several software service initiatives, both in-house developed and SaaS, that provide a strong base to make data-informed decisions.

Additionally, Wall designed and implemented a program to provide a device for every one of the 35,000 students in PUSD. Despite the multitude of supply chain challenges in the market, Wall's vision, forward thinking and planning led to the successful and on-time delivery of this new one-to-one program.



#### IN HIS OWN WORDS:

I was surprised and honored to be recognized amongst such dedicated technologists in the K-12 education space.

Photo courtesy of Brant Bender Photography

## Signature

➔ from page 15

move their businesses forward and we had just over 50 nominees for our first event."

Attendance was light, Coval recalled, but the event was very well received by nominees and attendees alike. The next day, Coval recalled, publisher emeritus Armon Mills asked him about doing it the following year.

"From that moment, we were off and running and I am so grateful to the Business Journal and all of the people associated with this event that have not only kept it going, but have relentlessly worked to make it better every year."

Mills, he said, "was as much a visionary about what Top Tech could become as anyone."

#### A Lesson From Lawyers

Coval received his degree in political science from UCLA in the late 1980s, at a time when the Cold War's end was the prime topic of discussion. Talk of it was everywhere, he recalled.

"What's interesting is that the '80s was also the decade where cable TV and personal computers became standards for middle-class American households," he said. "Many people believe that PCs are what started the uptick in demand for better, faster data networks. The coaxial cable infrastructure which delivered things like MTV and ESPN into homes is what helped power a lot of those connections."

After college, Coval spent time in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, honing his business and sales skills. He got involved with the local bar association.

"One thing that helped shape my view of

how we can leverage communities of interest was the close relationship I developed with the San Francisco Bar Association," he said. "They really helped their members understand the options available to them, but also celebrated the great work being done within the legal field in San Francisco."

There are parallels to the tech community. The attorneys he knew put forth their efforts individually and in small groups. Even so, "there was a fabric of connectedness" to the community. Coval recalled how the legal community came together to celebrate each other's achievements.

"Why couldn't we apply that same kind of thinking to the tech community," Coval recalled asking himself. The bar association offered a model of what the Top Tech Awards could eventually become.



Larry Coval speaks at the 2013 Top Tech event.  
Photo courtesy of Top Tech Awards

#### Fifteen Years of Evolution

Information technology has evolved greatly since the days of the first Top Tech event.

Fifteen years ago, "most companies associated IT and infrastructure efforts as a means to power their websites and create private networks for their hub and satellite locations, as well as some companies which were dabbling in VoIP," Coval said. "Now in 2022, businesses are really leveraging the power of the cloud to help them improve operational efficiency, upgrade customer experience, and get access to information, services and applications that help them do what they do...only better."

The industry's sales approach has changed, too.

"Many companies have moved away from consultative, or needs-based selling and really left it to businesses to navigate the myriad of options out there and make decisions about what was best for them," Coval said. "That's why I'm so proud of the work we do at Cox Business, because we know the value that we bring in helping our customers make the best possible buying decisions. For those customers who desire it, we continue to provide that human interaction, whether in person, over video or on the phone, so that our customers get the benefit of our expertise."

What lies ahead as the 2020s give way to the 2030s? Coval is optimistic.

"The fun part about my industry is that the possibilities are endless," he said. "At Cox, what has me excited are some of our new platforms that harness the power of the cloud. In addition, we have launched a new solution that allows organizations to track important assets (think mobile healthcare assets like IV pumps or wheelchairs) or even staff to assist in duress situations, and we see the ability to expand on what that kind

of technology can do. And that's just the beginning."

#### Playing to Win

It's fitting that Top Tech events have been held at sports venues, such as Snapdragon Stadium and, earlier, the Del Mar Racetrack. Coval is a sports enthusiast.

"You name it, I watch it," he said. "Football, basketball, baseball, hockey, tennis, golf, Olympic sports and college sports. I love competition because I believe it helps us to find a level of performance in ourselves that we couldn't access without it."

He said he still plays a little basketball, and his son wants him to get back in the pool to play masters water polo.

"Along with a lot of other people, I took up pickleball during the pandemic and I absolutely love it," he added. "Now that it's on TV, I watch it whenever I get the chance."

In a previous interview, Coval discussed how sports offers insights on dealing with work and life. He took up that topic again.

"There are countless lessons," he said. "Individual sports allow you to really introspect and think about what you can do differently to improve your own performance. On the flip side, I've played and coached team sports as far back as I can remember. Somebody asked me recently, 'what makes a team?' And I didn't need to think about it. The one unique characteristic about a team is that individual members will make sacrifices, even those that might rob them of the ability to hit their individual goals, in order to reach that one big common goal. After over 35 years in the business world, I can tell you that the same applies to my work."





## 2022 TOP TECH NOMINEES

### A

**Joel Abitan**  
Verse.io

**Derek Adams**  
RG Alliance Group LLC

**Angel Alarcon**  
US Specialty Lab

**Mark Albright**  
Tri-City Medical Center

**Shirin Alipanah**  
Avasant

**Toren Allen**  
San Diego Unified School District

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Cleantech San Diego

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Downtown San Diego Partnership

**Omid Arjomand**  
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**Jun Ataka**  
Nitro Denko Technical Corporation

**Floyd Auten**  
Technet Partners Inc.

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Zucarmex – California Sugar Refiners

**Josh Blazer**  
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**Philip Bohrer**  
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**Kyle Bruin**  
LumiraDx

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Digital Fire Prevention

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Veyo

**Ray Chan**  
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**Victor Chavez**  
Viejas Casino & Resort

**Nathan Chavez**  
Alarms Unlimited Professional Security Solutions

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**Ilya Chorny**  
PetDx

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AppStar Financial

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DC Labs, Ovation Hair

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Huddl3 Group

**Doug Cyphers**  
WD-40 Company

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Lemon Grove School District

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AP Wireless Infrastructure Partners LLC

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ITJuana

**Sara Diaz**  
City of El Cajon

**Nate Distel**  
Singular Genomics Systems Inc.

**Dave Driggers**  
Cirrascale Cloud Services

**Frankie Duenas**  
Cabrillo Credit Union

### E

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San Diego Humane Society

**Gerald Ellison Jr.**  
San Diego County Credit Union

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**Shervin Erfani**  
Rankipedia

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**Joseph Escobio**  
Klinedinst PC

### F

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Chula Vista Elite Athlete Training Center

**Ryan Fisher**  
Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch LLP

**Ian Foley**  
Pacific Triangle

**Ginger Fraser**  
Parker Hannifin

### G

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gap intelligence

**Jeromy Giacosa**  
Exagen Inc.

**Richard Golden**  
Marv Golden Pilot Supplies

**Adrian Gonzalez**  
Coastal Kids Dentistry & Orthodontics

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**Jigyasa Grover**  
Twitter

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Mad Engine

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South Bay Community Services

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