Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania
2026 Incoming Class PRESS RELEASE

Governor Josh Shapiro and First Lady Lori Shapiro Recognize Ten Women as 2026 Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania

Velma A. Redmond, of Carlisle, the 26th President of the Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania, announced the new Inductees for the Class of 2026. Governor Josh Shapiro and First Lady Lori Shapiro will recognize ten women at this year's Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania annual luncheon at the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg on Wednesday, October 7, 2026.

"Since its inception, the Distinguished Daughters has been honoring extraordinary women for their outstanding service and contributions to our Commonwealth," said Governor Josh Shapiro. "The women we recognize bring an incredible wealth of experience and knowledge, are leaders in their respective fields, and have showcased extraordinary professionalism in all aspects of their careers. The Commonwealth is proud to claim each of the Distinguished Daughters as our own, as each of their stories reflect Pennsylvania's rich past and herald the promise of a bright future through collaborative service."

The members of the 2026 Class of Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania are:

Heather M. Acker

Heather M. Acker, MBA, brings decades of executive finance leadership and civic engagement to her community. She spent her professional career as a financial and operations executive, serving in the defense and aerospace sector as Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Gentex Corporation and in the optical industry as Vice President of Finance and Administration at Essilor of America's North American Operations.

Her passion for health care, education, and women's advancement is reflected throughout her community service. She chairs the Board of Directors of Geisinger Health System, the first woman elected to that role, where she has been committed to expanding accessible healthcare and mental and behavioral health services in urban and rural communities. She serves on the Boards of Risant Health, Geisinger Health Plan, and the United Way of Lackawanna, Wayne, and Pike Counties.

Sister Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.

Sister Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D., has served since 2016 as Provincial of the Sisters of Divine Providence in Allison Park, Pennsylvania, where she entered religious life in 1967.

Her achievements and impact span from the hands-on care of foster ministry to international platforms where she speaks for compassion, social justice and service to the underserved. Over nearly a decade she has guided her congregation through profound change with a spirituality rooted in trust in God's Providence — building new homes for aging sisters, welcoming refugee families, and stewarding the community's legacy without debt. With Sister Elena Almendarez, she shares a foster-care ministry that has welcomed many children into their home.

A professor emerita of religious studies at La Roche University, she now serves as Vice Chair of its Board of Trustees, helping carry forward the sisters' founding educational mission.

Diana Bucco

Diana Angela Bucco is a nationally recognized civic leader, social entrepreneur, and philanthropic executive whose career has shaped the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors through visionary leadership and cross-sector collaboration.

As President of The Buhl Foundation, she has championed transformative investments in public health, workforce development, education, affordable housing, and early childhood learning, leveraging millions in partnerships to advance lasting systems change across the Pittsburgh region.

Previously, she served as President of The Forbes Funds and built the Coro Center for Civic Leadership into a nationally respected institution. Throughout her career and as a volunteer, Diana has launched pioneering initiatives that have strengthened communities, advanced civic leadership, and expanded opportunities for generations of leaders and organizations.

Christina Cassotis

Christina Cassotis is CEO of the Allegheny County Airport Authority, operating Pittsburgh International Airport (PIT) and Allegheny County Airport (AGC). Under Christina's leadership over the past decade, PIT has transformed from a hub into a world-leading origin-and-destination airport.

Christina has consistently shown that airports are more than transportation hubs – they are strategic regional assets driving economic opportunity and social mobility. Most recently, Christina successfully led an ambitious terminal modernization at PIT, which opened in November 2025, providing a fitting front door for the world-class Western Pennsylvania region.

Christina holds an MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management and a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts.

Susan M. Domchek, M.D.

Dr. Domchek is the Basser Professor in Oncology at the University of Pennsylvania, executive director of the Basser Center for BRCA at the Abramson Cancer Center, and director of the Mariann and Robert MacDonald Cancer Risk Evaluation Program. A medical oncologist, her research focuses on improving the genetic evaluation and medical management of individuals with inherited cancer risk, with particular emphasis on cancer interception and immune-based strategies.

In seminal work, Dr. Domchek demonstrated that risk-reducing salpingo-oophorectomy is associated with improved survival among BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers. She has been critical to the development of PARP inhibitors in BRCA-associated cancers and in advancing the clinical application of germline genetic testing. An elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and several leading medical societies, she has authored or co-authored more than 500 scientific publications.

Valerie V. Gay

Valerie V. Gay is Philadelphia's Chief Cultural Officer and Executive Director of Creative Philadelphia, where she leads the City's cultural strategy, public art programs, grantmaking, and first Cultural Master Plan.

A nationally respected arts administrator, artist, educator, and civic leader, she previously served as deputy director and chief experience officer at the Barnes Foundation and executive director of Art Sanctuary. A classically trained soprano, Gay has devoted her career to expanding access to the arts, strengthening cultural organizations, and advancing opportunities for artists and communities.

She holds degrees from the University of the Arts and Temple University and serves on numerous civic, cultural, and philanthropic boards.

Dusty Elias Kirk, J.D.

Dusty Elias Kirk is a partner in the law firm of Reed Smith in Pittsburgh, where she is a trusted advisor in the practice of real estate law. She has served as Global Head of the firm's international real estate practice, Council Chair of the Real Property Section of the Allegheny County Bar Association, and Chair of the Allegheny Regional Asset District.

Dusty is a transformative civic leader whose volunteer service and professional expertise have benefited communities across Pennsylvania and beyond.

Throughout her distinguished career, she has worked at the intersection of law, government, and community development, contributing her knowledge to private-sector and municipal initiatives that have advanced economic growth, strengthened communities, and enhanced the quality of life in communities throughout the Commonwealth.

Marsha Levick, J.D.

Marsha Levick is co-founder and Chief Legal Officer Emeritus of Juvenile Law Center, America's first public interest law firm for children. Throughout her career, she has advocated for youth involved in the justice and child welfare systems, participating in landmark litigation nationwide to advance children's legal rights and well-being, including several U.S. Supreme Court cases addressing the extreme sentencing of children. Marsha also led Juvenile Law Center's litigation arising from Pennsylvania's infamous "Kids for Cash" scandal.

In Spring 2026, Marsha served as the Phyllis W. Beck Chair at Temple University Beasley School of Law. She is currently the Stoneleigh Foundation's inaugural Robert G. Schwartz Visiting Fellow, where her two-year fellowship focuses on developing alternatives to the nation's highly punitive youth justice system.

She is also an adjunct professor at Penn Carey Law School, Temple University Beasley School of Law, and Columbia Law School.

Jami McKeon, J.D.

Jami McKeon is the former Chair of Morgan Lewis and a recognized leader who redefined what it means to lead a global law firm. Under her guidance, the firm achieved sustained growth, expanded into strategic markets worldwide, and earned recognition for its exceptional client service and innovation.

She championed transformative initiatives that advanced technology, developed talent, and strengthened the firm's culture while creating lasting impact in the profession and the community.

Morgan Lewis's first woman chair, Jami combined strategic vision with an unwavering commitment to excellence, making her one of the legal industry's most respected and influential leaders.

Susan Trolier-McKinstry, Ph.D.

Susan Trolier-McKinstry, is an Evan Pugh University Professor and Steward S. Flaschen Professor of Ceramic Science and Engineering, and Professor of Electrical Engineering at Penn State.

A world leader in piezoelectric microelectromechanical systems, her pioneering research has advanced the materials that enable innovation in medical ultrasound, sensors, communications, and advanced electronics.

At Penn State, she has taught thousands of students the foundations of structure-property relationships in materials and mentored more than 75 graduate students.

A member of the National Academy of Engineering, she is a fellow of the American Ceramic Society, IEEE, and the Materials Research Society, and an academician of the World Academy of Ceramics. She also served as President of the Materials Research Society in 2017.

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Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania was organized in 1949 to honor women who have given distinguished service to their communities, the Commonwealth, and the nation. Since its founding, a total of 584 extraordinary women of Pennsylvania have been recognized for their professional and volunteer accomplishments.

Questions? Please contact Executive Assistant, Meg Ream: m.ream@comcast.net or (717) 579-5677.

www.distinguisheddaughtersofpa.org

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