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From the Houston Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2021/08/19/5-ceos-shonbeck-stagg-voss-white-zelenka.html>

## Meet 5 of HBJ's 2021 Most Admired CEOs: Michelle Shonbeck, Helen Stagg, Wayne Voss, Beth White, Lynda Zelenka

Aug 19, 2021, 5:00pm CDT

*The Houston Business Journal named 50 leaders around the Houston area as 2021 Most Admired CEOs.*

*In selecting our honorees, a panel of judges looked for characteristics such as contribution to company success, civic involvement, career achievement and more.*



HBJ

*The judges selected 30 for-profit leaders and 20 nonprofit leaders for this year's award. The 50 honorees were recognized in a special section of HBJ's Aug. 20 weekly edition and at an online awards ceremony on Aug. 19.*

*Below are five of the honorees. [You can find the other CEO profiles here.](#) Click through the slideshow above to see all 50 honorees.*

## **Michelle Shonbeck**

Executive director, Christian Community Service Center

**Company employees:** 26

**Education:** Bachelor's, Texas A&M University

**What was the biggest lesson you learned about yourself during the pandemic and how did that affect your leadership style?** This is my team's ninth disaster during my tenure at CCSC. In some ways the pandemic was different from other disasters, but in many ways it was the same. Essentially, our response to Covid was similar to what it would be for any disaster: listening to our clients and volunteers; keeping client needs primary; maintaining flexibility; and making nimble adjustments to our programming. What I learned this past year is how strong our team is, and how committed our community, staff, and volunteers are to serving others.

**What changes made during the pandemic do you intend to keep?**

Like most organizations, our reliance on virtual technology during the pandemic was magnified, and we will maintain that usage level across the organization. Specifically, we saw how the use of technology to deliver services in our employment programs allowed us to reach people who couldn't come onsite due to the pandemic. While the employment programs have eased back into normal operations, many folks in Houston have transportation barriers so continuing this use of technology will allow us to help those clients virtually with coaching, skills training, and job searches.

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## **Helen Stagg**

CEO, Change Happens

**Company employees:** 65

**Education:** Bachelor's, Texas A&M University; Master's, University of Houston;

**What was the biggest lesson you learned about yourself during the pandemic and how did that affect your leadership style?** That the work that our organization does – working to help marginalized and vulnerable children, families, and communities is important, life changing work. By truly realizing that, I learned that I could be free to trust in the process to create, innovate, and open opportunities for others to take bold action.

**What changes made during the pandemic do you intend to keep?** We have been working remotely for the last 16 months. I was surprised by how quickly we were able to adapt. How we were able to change our delivery system and find really creative ways to do our work. We have a group of team members working on reopening plans and one of the things that we are looking at is devising a flexible schedule with alternate work days. I also think virtual events and virtual meetings will continue, even after a return to the office. I believe we will see more hybrid events and people will elect to attend in person or virtually.

**What has surprised you the most since becoming a top executive?** The weight of the responsibility. I am consumed with the knowledge that there are whole groups of people — employees and the clients we serve that depend on me to make the right decisions. But I am also surprised that the feeling of being consumed does not show up as worry, but as more of a kind of energy that I have difficulty turning off.

**What is your leadership philosophy?** I think it is strategic – planning for growth and the future. I hope that it is also transformative and inspirational – a belief in the power of working together.

**What advice would you give to emerging leaders?** When I came to this position, I wanted to lead from a place of honor, compassion, and collaboration. I wanted to create an environment where people could imagine the possibilities and feel free and to be bold and to take risks. I wanted to prove that you do not have to be in competition, aggressive, and singularly focused to accomplish great things. So, my advice would be to create an environment where people have the autonomy to dream big.

**How do you relax/unwind?** I like to sit in my garden, especially in the early morning and just be in stillness and silence. I also like to read in the garden. I enjoy being with my two daughters and my granddaughter traveling and exploring.

**Who would play you in a movie?** Why? I don't know who would play me, but I know they would be smart, strong, and compassionate.

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## **Wayne M. Voss**

CEO, Houston Methodist West

**Company employees:** 1,780

**Education:** Bachelor's, West Virginia Wesleyan College; Master's, Washington University

**What was the biggest lesson you learned about yourself during the pandemic and how did that affect your leadership style?** My level of confidence in our leadership team and our system leadership was revealed as it has taken all hands-on deck to manage through this uncharted territory. It did not change my leadership style but reinforced my approach. We took the overall direction the system provided us including certain resources needed and used our hospital's intensely collaborative approach to solve the problems locally. Our team worked closely together to make sure our patients were taken care of with the latest evidence-based medicine and that our employees and physicians were provided everything they needed to protect themselves.

**What changes made during the pandemic do you intend to keep?** The use of virtual technology to enhance patient/family communication and treatment. Also, the use of virtual meetings when appropriate to carry out business in a more effective way. Some in person meetings will come back when we safely can, but some virtual meetings are here to stay.

**What has surprised you the most since becoming a top executive?** Don't make decisions because you think you have to. Make decisions because you should. What I mean is, let people decide for themselves. If they are following our strategy and it follows our ICARE values, go for it. It is better not to micromanage.

**What is your leadership philosophy?** Hire the right people with the right fit. Set my expectations as clearly as possible. We have our ICARE values as our guideposts. Give them adequate resources and make sure they stay connected to their teams. Stay as calm as possible and avoid knee jerk reactions. And finally, have those tough conversations sooner rather than later. We call them crucial conversations.

**What advice would you give to emerging leaders?** Be open to learning and receiving feedback. Don't rush for a job you think you want. Do a good job and people will notice you. Find the right organization with the right values and you will succeed. Don't think the grass is always greener somewhere else.

**How do you relax/unwind?** Spending time with my growing family. I have four adult children and now four beautiful grandchildren. I also have found getting up very early spending quiet time praying and thinking about the day ahead has provided me with great peace. I know I am better prepared when I get to work. Also, I love working in our garden and enjoying it during the year.

**Who would play you in a movie? Why?** Tom Hanks would be an excellent candidate to play me in a movie. I've been told that he and I have similar looks and personality.

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## **Beth White**

President and CEO, Houston Parks Board

**Company employees:** 32

**Education:** Bachelor's, Northwestern University; Master's, Loyola University

**What was the biggest lesson you learned about yourself during the pandemic and how did that affect your leadership style?** Pre-pandemic, I knew I had good reserves of patience, empathy and perseverance but they were put to the test. I had to dig deep and learn new ways to replenish those reserves while supporting our HPB team who worked brilliantly every day to provide access to parks and greenspace when people needed it most. As a leader, it was imperative to focus on taking care of HPB's greatest asset —

our people — and create a safe and flexible work environment whether team members worked in the field or from their homes while caring for their families.

**What changes made during the pandemic do you intend to keep?**

We had to pivot quickly to overhaul our IT system and upgrade equipment so that our employees could work remotely. The staff adjusted quickly and mastered the various platforms and tools that have allowed the remote work model to actually work. We have tailored these virtual tools for our public outreach meetings which in many ways has made the meetings more accessible for many people. Going forward we will continue to use and improve these systems as we create a hybrid work model going. Additionally, I intend to keep my commitment to spend time outside in nature every day, rain or shine and continue to work hard to create opportunities for other folks to do the same.

**What has surprised you the most since becoming a top executive?**

How welcoming and supportive the Houston business, civic and philanthropic community has been from the moment I arrived 5 years ago.

**What is your leadership philosophy?** Lead by example with a clear vision, good humor, empathy and respect. Provide opportunities for growth and development by helping others find and play to their own strengths. Create an atmosphere that welcomes experimentation, lessens the fear of failure and builds trust. Invest the time and energy in true collaboration with your team and partners for lasting impact.

**What advice would you give to emerging leaders?** Find a leader or leaders you admire and ask yourself why you admire them. Observe how they achieve their results and ask yourself what impact you want to have on others. Most importantly, you need to decide what you care about, get involved, show up with enthusiasm, and listen more than you talk. There is such a strong need for authentic leaders in our world and I am inspired by the talented participants of HPB's Rising Leaders initiative who care deeply about their community and are making a difference.

**How do you relax/unwind?** Puttering in the garden, reading a good book, long walks and cooking for family and friends.

**Who would play you in a movie? Why?** Julia Louis Dreyfus -As a fellow Northwestern graduate, I have long admired Julia's versatility, work ethic, devotion to family, a willingness to try new things and not take herself too seriously. I also appreciate her longstanding commitment to protecting our environment.

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## **Lynda Zelenka**

Executive director, Cy-Hope

**Company employees:** 54

**Education:** Bachelor, Colorado Mesa University; Fuller Seminary and Perkins School of Theology

**How have you impacted the organization's standing in the Houston community?** Under my leadership, Cy-Hope is seen as a community leader and has received many awards — most notably the Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit of the Year in 2014 and 2021. Our ability to facilitate partnerships for meeting community needs remains one of our greatest strengths.

**What challenges did you or your company face as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?** When schools shut down due to Covid, Cy-Hope quickly pivoted to coordinating mega and mini food distribution events for the Houston Food Bank, and expanded our summer feeding program, feeding more than 109,000 families. The Gulf Coast Regional Blood Bank recognized us as their Top Emergency Site for collecting 281 units and saving 843 lives in 2020. We continue to host blood drives in 2021, which will prove vital with the loss of blood units during the Texas winter storms. As demand for outdoor events increases, we have started renovations to serve as a showcase venue for both indoor and outdoor weddings and other celebrations.

**What do you expect from your employees?** I expect our employees to have a passion for our mission, to bring new and innovative ideas to our programs, to not be afraid to take a risk on trying something new, and to be a team player and collaborate with each other as well as other organizations.

**What are you most proud of regarding your company?** I am proud that as a nonprofit organization — started only 10 years ago with a budget of \$100,000 — our budget has grown to \$3.9 million with 88% of our funding going to programs in 2021.

But I am most proud of the countless lives that have been positively impacted by the passion and commitment our organization continues to give back to our community.

*These profiles have been edited for length and clarity.*