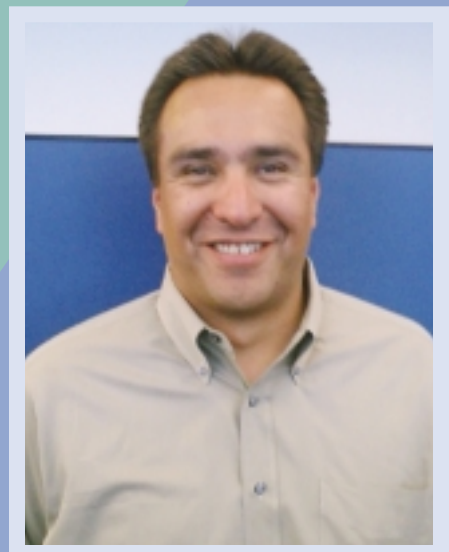


# THE YOUNG AND THE LEADERS

*Meet the winners of Minority MBA's seventh annual Next Generation of Minority Business Leaders competition: Five exceptional men and women, all under 40, who are already emerging as leading contenders for seats in the boardrooms of tomorrow*



by Pam Chwedyk and  
Nancy J. Mellem



## THE ENTREPRENEUR

**Diego Cardenas**  
**Co-founder and CTO**  
**Stomp, Inc.**  
**Irvine, Calif.**

**Age:** 33

**Education:**

M.S. in Technology Management, Pepperdine University, 2001

**Length of Employment at Company:** 8 years

**Job Responsibilities:**

As a member of the senior management team, oversees technological aspects of the company, including IT, R&D product development and support systems.

**Key Leadership Qualities:**

- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Ability to successfully launch and grow a start-up company into a profitable enterprise
- Honesty and integrity
- Outstanding ability to teach, motivate, mentor and inspire employees

**Awards and Recognition:**

- 2nd Best Small Business Award—Instituto Colombiano de Estudios Superiores e Incolda (ICESI)
- Nominee, Entrepreneur of the Year—National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA) Brillante Awards

**Civic Activities and Community Service:**

- Past President, NSHMBA Orange County Chapter
- Member of the Latino Business Association (LBA), the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) and the Latino Coalition
- Co-founder, Southern California Chapter of Hispanic-Net, an association of Hispanic entrepreneurs and executives in the high-tech industry

**Additional Accomplishments:**

- At age 16, created and co-founded his first business venture, ComSoft Ltd. (an innovative computer consulting firm) in his hometown of Cali, Colombia.
- Formed a partnership to start Stomp, Inc., a manufacturer of computer software and accessories, in 1996. Co-invented its first product, the CD Stomper CD/DVD labeling system, which has become the most recognized labeling applicator on the market. Today Stomp is a multimillion-dollar business with more than 50 employees and products sold worldwide.
- Recently created a new start-up, Portus Technologies, Inc., which focuses on DIR (Dynamic Image Repurposing) technologies.



“Diego is a great leader and a great teacher. He has shown a strong willingness to teach others the skills needed to succeed in our field. I have personally learned a lot from him.”

—Carlos Amaya, Support Representative, Stomp, Inc.

### LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

Two years ago, Stomp’s main office building was destroyed. Diego initiated the company’s disaster recovery plan, which he authored. As a result, the firm was set up in a new location and engaging in commerce within two days.



## THE STAR PERFORMER

**Veronica Lee**  
**Senior Planning Analyst**  
**Consolidated Edison Company of New York**  
**New York, N.Y.**

**Age:** 30

**Education:**

Dual MBA/Computer Science degree, Long Island University, 2001

**Length of Employment at Company:** 3.5 years

**Job Responsibilities:**

Handles financial projections for gas and steam for Con Edison's Energy Management division. Responsible for:

- Composition of testimony to be used in company regulatory filings
- Gas send-out and peak day forecasts for use in portfolio supply planning
- Forecasts of gas sales and revenues for use in annual budget and regulatory filings
- Analyzing and maintaining area weather statistics
- Analysis of customer sales, including new business and retail access

**Key Leadership Qualities:**

- Uses her expertise in finance, technology and management to increase productivity and improve business results
- Consistently achieves high standards of excellence and inspires others to do likewise
- Serves as an outstanding role model who leads by example
- Possesses the courage to be a trailblazer, initiator and catalyst for change

**Awards and Recognition:**

- Star Performer Award 1996—Brooklyn Union/Keyspan Energy
- Alchemist Award 1997—Brooklyn Union/Keyspan Energy
- CEO Award 1999—Brooklyn Union/Keyspan Energy
- Energizer Award 2003— American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE), New York Metropolitan Chapter

**Civic Activities and Community Service:**

- Actively involved in the AABE New York Chapter, serving as Executive Board member, Webmaster and co-chair of the Community Outreach Committee
- Various committee memberships, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority
- Member of the New York Urban League Young Professionals, the NAACP and the Order of the Eastern Star

**Additional Accomplishments:**

- As an undergraduate student at historically black Morgan State University, she successfully lobbied for the creation of a finance major at the school. In 1995, she both founded the university's finance club and became the first person to earn a finance degree from Morgan State—graduating Magna cum Laude.

“Ms. Lee is a bright, articulate and accomplished young woman. Her personal standard for work that she is associated with is nothing short of excellence. She carries herself in a confident, professional manner and has been an asset to each organization she has worked in.”

—Gerard J. Dunbar,  
Consolidated Edison  
Company of  
New York

### LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

Veronica is a strong advocate for careers in the utility industry and for educational advancement. “I believe people should seek the balance of work and education, because the rewards are endless,” she says. “My main objective has always been to give back. I grew up in Bedford Stuyvesant where I didn't have a lot of role models. I always wanted to inspire children to know that even though things may seem bleak, there's always hope.”

## THE COMMUNICATOR

**Stacy Sharpe**  
**Director, Corporate Relations**  
**Allstate Insurance Company**  
**Northbrook, Ill.**

**Age:** 30

**Education:**

Graduated with honors from Allstate's onsite Executive MBA Program, 2003

**Length of Employment at Company:** 8 years

**Job Responsibilities:**

Coordinates, creates and supports public relations and corporate communications efforts for one of the largest business units in the company. She oversees a team responsible for agency and field sales leaders communication and she also works directly with the president of Allstate Protection on strategic communications and positioning.

**Key Leadership Qualities:**

- A great team leader, motivator, communicator, strategist and a superb listener
- Manages people and processes with exceptional results
- A tireless advocate for her clients, her company and her profession

**Awards and Recognition:**

- Telly Award 2003 (team award for sales video)
- Selected by key company leaders to participate in the invitation-only internal Executive MBA program for high-performing Allstate employees

**Civic Activities and Community Service:**

- Member of The Links, Incorporated, an international organization of professional women of color who serve actively in their communities as role models, mentors, activists and volunteers

**Additional Accomplishments:**

- Was a key architect in helping to design and implement Allstate's National Advisory Board (NAB), which was developed with agents to give producers a voice and to improve planning and implementation of business decisions.



"At only 30 years of age, Stacy has accomplished in a short time what has taken others a lifetime to do in corporate America."

—Marissa Quiles, Spokesperson,  
Allstate Insurance  
Company

### LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

Stacy led her team in a major initiative to improve the relationship between Allstate and its many field agencies nationwide. This was not an easy thing to do, considering the negative publicity on contractual issues that Allstate was receiving at the time and the sheer size of the agency workforce—more than 12,300 independent contractor agents and personal financial representatives, plus more than 20,000 agency support staff members. As a result of Stacy's leadership, agents' satisfaction with the company improved from 56% to 72% in one year.

## THE STRATEGIST



**Jannet M. Thoms**  
**Director, Information Technology Management and Planning**  
**Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)**  
**Atlanta, Ga.**

**Age:** 37

**Education:**

M.S. in Business, Central Michigan University. Currently a Ph.D. candidate with a major in Information Systems at Nova Southeastern University.

**Length of Employment at Company:** 1.5 years

**Job Responsibilities:**

A key member of MARTA's executive leadership team, she is responsible for directing the application development, delivery and maintenance of IT projects, including Internet, Intranet, client server and enterprise applications. In this

capacity, she provides leadership for technical managers, developers and consultants in the support of MARTA's technology programs.

**Key Leadership Qualities:**

- A proven business strategist who consistently provides sound, logical decision-making capabilities
- Delivers common-sense organizational skills to solve time-sensitive technical problems and improve productivity
- Exceptional interpersonal and team-building skills
- Dedication, integrity, honesty and credibility
- Fair and objective leadership style

**Awards and Recognition:**

- Who's Who in Black Atlanta 2004

**Civic Activities and Community Service:**

- President, National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA), Atlanta Chapter
- Leadership Committee Co-Chair, National Coalition of 100 Black Women of America
- Serves on Atlanta Technical College advisory board
- Member of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) and the American Association of Public Transportation Officials (APTA)
- Active in her local church

**Additional Accomplishments:**

- As president of the largest NBMBAA chapter (750+ members), she has increased the membership base by 30% and average monthly meeting attendance by 35%. She also secured a bid for Atlanta to host the association's 2006 and 2011 National Conferences.

"She is truly an emerging leader in metro Atlanta as well as nationally as her presence in the transit industry, government and the National Black MBA Association continues to grow."

—Nathaniel P. Ford, Sr.,  
General Manager/  
CEO, MARTA

### LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

MARTA's CEO appointed Jannet to the highly visible Executive Steering Committee for the new Smarta Card automated fare collection program, a \$182 million project. She quickly and effectively created the support team structure for launching the program, along with the program's charter and operating procedures. She prepared an executive presentation for MARTA's Board of Directors on the project's status, budget, timelines, resource requirements, risks and demonstration of the final product, all while continuing with her full-time responsibilities as Director of IT.

## THE INTERNATIONAL LEADER

**Jorge Torres**  
**Global Field Logistics Manager**  
**Silicon Graphics, Inc. (SGI)**  
**Mountain View, Calif.**

**Age:** 37

**Length of Employment at Company:** 5 years

**Job Responsibilities:**

Manages Global Field Logistics operations in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, the U.S., Canada and Asia. Key responsibilities include:

- Material planning, forecasting, inventory management at regional stocking locations and maintaining inventory fill rates to ensure that customers' contractual commitments are met
- Acting as primary liaison between the Field Service organization and Global Logistics
- Managing import/export processes and assuring that the company is in compliance with international regulations

**Key Leadership Qualities:**

- Sets clear objectives for his team and consistently meets or exceeds them
- Has a well-developed sense of cultural diversity that allows him to excel in the international business community
- Outstanding ability to motivate, build effective teams, communicate and lead by example
- Encourages creativity and believes in empowering employees
- Strongly committed to optimizing business results and putting the customer first
- Knows when and how to delegate

**Awards and Recognition:**

- SGI Spirit Award
- Convex Star Award

**Civic Activities and Community Service:**

- Member, Council of Logistics Management
- Coaches local community youth sports



"Jorge's qualities are those that every great and successful leader should have. He is highly regarded and respected by his international management teams, peers and employees. Jorge is a natural leader and as his skills are refined, he will continue to grow in his leadership responsibilities no matter what he does."

—Robert Ferrando, Director,  
Global Logistics, SGI

### LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

When the manager of the company's EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) Logistics operation gave sudden notice that he was leaving SGI, Jorge was asked to take on his responsibilities. During the previous manager's tenure, relations with the EMEA Field Service organization were tense, there were problems with inventory management, the Logistics employees operated more independently than as a team and they had no clear direction or objectives. Under Jorge's leadership, the EMEA Field Logistics operation has turned around in performance, teamwork and employee morale.

*Pam Chwedyk is the senior editor and editorial manager of Minority MBA. Nancy J. Mellem is a contributing editor for MMBA.*