

# 850

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST FLORIDA

GOOD NEWS FOR  
SHOPPING LOCAL

THE PRESIDENTS OF  
HIGHER LEARNING

2015 BAY COUNTY  
BUSINESS JOURNAL

SAVING HISTORY,  
BOOSTING TOURISM

## Pinnacle Awards

These Northwest Florida leaders have  
made outstanding contributions to the  
business world and their communities

**From Left:**  
Cecilia Homison  
Carmen Danielle Smith  
Simona Faroni  
Rebecca Plerson  
Amy Geiger  
Carol Carlan  
Dorothy "Dot" Trotman-Ealy  
Robbie Ropella  
Lisa Walters  
**Not Pictured:**  
Augusta West





# 2015 PINNACLE AWARD WINNERS

These 10 women have earned their stripes in business and life

BY LINDA KLEINDIENST

**850 MAGAZINE IS PROUD TO PRESENT** the 2015 winners of the Pinnacle Award, an honor designed to shine the spotlight on women in our region who have set high standards for themselves and exceeded them, who are a moving force in private business and nonprofit organizations that help the needy in our society, and who promote their communities.

From a leader of one of the largest credit unions in Florida to a CEO who helps build houses for those in need, they're moving forces in business and the community, A-listers with A-plus personalities who face challenges head on and are determined to make their world a better place.

As a group, our honorees are optimistic, energetic and goal oriented, filled with a can-do attitude. Their professions cover a wide range of fields, from banking to health care to economic development. They well represent the urban, suburban and rural areas found within 850's 18-county footprint. We asked our readers to nominate women they felt deserved the honor. From the names submitted, please meet the Pinnacle Award winners for 2015. ↓

2015  
PINNACLE  
AWARD  
WINNERS

I-10 Corridor

## ← ROBBIE ROPELLA

Working three jobs to put herself through college, Robbie Ropella had no idea she would never practice nursing. But when she went into surgery and saw a hammer brought out to break a bone, she passed out.

"I expected a technological tool, but it was an old-fashioned mallet," she recalls. "Still, the education served me well. I have great knowledge that I've used in emergencies."

The lesson she learned from the experience is one she urges others to follow: When you choose an occupation, choose your passion and don't look at the money.

"That was my mistake," she says now. "My passion is people, money and sales. I love sales."

Today Ropella, 51, is president of The Ropella Group in Milton, which is an executive search firm that finds the perfect candidates for jobs that are so specialized, only a handful of people in the world could do them well. She takes care of marketing and sales for the business she runs with her husband.

Describing herself as very competitive ("Put me in a sport and I will win"), Ropella said she learned early on from her father that "Can't never did anything."

"He gave me the ability to attack my problems and come up with creative solutions by providing old-fashioned motivation," she says, adding that her dad was never afraid to take a stand for something that was right, even if it wasn't popular. "In my youth, I found this slightly embarrassing, but it impacted me greatly. As I grew, I developed a boldness to do the same."



JENNIFER G. PHOTOGRAPHY