

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Go Time: WICT Network Opens Leadership Development Week

A lively crowd of industry leaders and future leaders in media, entertainment and tech packed a fifth floor ballroom at the Marriott Marquis in NYC for the kick off of the 2025 **WICT Leadership Conference**. A musical performance by a group of very talented girls from the nonprofit org Broadway Bound Kids got the crowd singing along to “Girl on Fire” by *Alicia Keys* before WICT Network President/CEO *Maria Brennan* and **TV One** and **CLEO TV** President *Michelle Rice* took the stage for the opening address.

Rice, who serves as WICT Network’s Global Board Chair, spent a moment to reflect on the theme of this year’s conference: “The Power of Us: Elevate. Innovate. Accelerate.” “[It] celebrates the strength of community and the shared leadership needed to thrive in today’s dynamic workplace. It’s a reminder that our greatest impact comes when we work together, when we share knowledge, open doors to one another and champion each other’s growth as professionals in our industry,” Rice said. “We know better than most that the future is not something that we wait for, it’s something that we create, and one of the ways that we create it is by being a part of a leadership conference.”

There was, of course, one major item for Brennan to address in her opening remarks: her stepping down as the head of WICT following the Rising Leaders program next year. “Well, in case you didn’t get the memo, this will be my last Leadership Conference as your CEO,” said Brennan, an announcement that was met by several (playful) boos from the crowd. “The only person not saying ‘boo’ is my husband Mike. He’s like, ‘Yay!’” she quipped. So, what’s next for Brennan after more than 16 years leading the association? “I will be hanging up these high heels, and I’m trading them in for tennis shoes and maybe a pickleball racket.”

In our exclusive [report](#) on Brennan’s exit, she told us stepping down was “a function of making room for the next generation and a new legacy of leadership.” Speaking later at the Touchstones

Luncheon, Brennan said that attending her final WICT awards lunch as President/CEO was “bittersweet.” But she’s also “so excited to pass the baton to new leadership, and I have to tell you, being part of this organization for so long has been the honor of my life.”

Loren Hudson, **Comcast** SVP & Chief Talent Officer for Connectivity & Platforms, led a discussion with actor, writer, producer, and, most recently, former **SAG-AFTRA** President *Fran Drescher*, who went into detail about her time leading the labor union, including the challenges she faced while navigating it through the 2023 strike and negotiating a better contract with the studios. Drescher said that included a campaign by the opposition to discredit her as a leader because of her gender.

“I was advised to say no comment, but I said I’m not going to do that. I’m going on offense,” Drescher said. “Even bigger than the negotiations and the contract that I was bringing into the year 2023 was the significance of how I represent leadership for women and girls, because who we are as leaders matters to that community. Because if you can’t see it, you can’t be it.”

Drescher recalled saying in a [video](#) that went viral during the strikes that “I don’t have to emulate male energy to lead. I can live with wisdom and intellect and empathy and kindness, and I can still rock a red lip.” That bit of wisdom got loud applause Monday. Drescher also looked back on a fiery strike speech she gave that garnered billions of views across platforms. She said that it was important that the speech was “inclusive to all labor that was feeling threatened by AI, that was feeling threatened by being reduced to gig workers, because as our industry has become so corporatized, it’s all about the shareholder and increasing the quarterly.”

Another slice of wisdom Drescher shared was the importance of leading your organization as a united front, even during divisive and turbulent times. “It takes strength and leadership to have the global view to maintain ‘Why do you exist? What is your goal and objective?’” she said. “Anything that’s going to fragment that, you’ve got to take it outside. Otherwise, you lose across all boards.”



Congratulations, Jess Zelaya!

ATX Networks proudly celebrates Jess and all the 2025 Cablefax Voices of Impact honorees for their powerful voices, bold ideas, and leadership that inspires meaningful action — driving industry progress.

Thank you for leading positive change.



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NAMIC TAPS NUNEZ AS NEW CEO

NAMIC (National Association for Multi-ethnicity in Communications) used the first day of **Leadership Development Week** in NYC to announce its new leadership, with *Sandy Nunez* stepping into the President/CEO role. The job has been vacant since *Shuanise Washington* left last fall. NAMIC Strategy and Programs Chief *Anne-Marie Burton* has been managing the association in the interim. Nunez, most recently VP, On-Air for **NFL Network**, is tasked with leading implementation of NAMIC's new strategic plan, focusing on organizational sustainability, expanded partnerships and member engagement. She will also lead the reimagining of NAMIC's flagship events and programs. Nunez is a graduate of NAMIC's Executive Leadership Development Program and a former president of its Southern California Chapter. "I've experienced firsthand the power of this organization to shape careers and open doors. I'm excited to build on that legacy—to reimagine, reinvigorate, and realign our programs to meet the evolving needs of our members, partners, and the next generation of leaders," she said. NAMIC's Annual Conference takes place this week during the industry's Leadership Development Week. **The WICT Network** got the gathering started Monday with its Leadership Conference. The women's organization is also undergoing a leadership transition, with a search underway to replace CEO *Maria Brennan* who is stepping down in April after 16 years as the head of WICT.

FUTURIST WARNS AGAINST REPEATING THE PAST

WICT Network's keynote presentation Monday about the importance of strategic decision-making during times of technological change was led by *Victoria Chaitoff*, Director, Marketing & Communications of consultancy firm **Future Today Strategy Group**. The humor-filled TED Talk-style speech imagined a potential future where advancements in AI, spatial computing and biometrics could converge to shape a new type of entertainment distribution that, frankly, sounded like a sensory overload

nightmare scenario where augmented reality content reacts to your biometric signal to keep you hooked. But Chaitoff used the example to make her larger point: that it's crucial that leaders plan for multiple futures and not allow themselves to be held back by fear of new technologies. To paint a picture of how the industry has made that mistake in the past, Chaitoff looked back to the '60s and broadcasters' reactions to the rise of cable. "[Broadcasters] were quick to lobby the **FCC**. They said that cable would fragment audiences and make advertising less valuable under pressure," Chaitoff said. "In 1962, the FCC passed very strict regulations against cable channels, ostensibly to protect broadcasters. In reality, these regulations just stifled innovation and creativity, and cable happened anyway. The next 20 years saw the advent of **HBO**, **ESPN** and **CNN**. Eventually, broadcasters realized that they have to buy or launch their own cable networks just to keep up." Chaitoff said "if you're too scared, you'll repeat history. You'll fight against technologies that you shouldn't fight against or spend resources on technologies that you shouldn't be spending resources on."

JUST RELEASED: VOICES OF IMPACT & WORK CULTURE

It's release day for **Cablefax: The Magazine's** **Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture** issue, celebrating the executives, teams, and organizations driving meaningful change across media and connectivity. Our individual Voice of Impact honorees cover a wide swath of the industry and include outgoing **T. Howard Foundation** President *Jo Pamphile*, **CableLabs'** *Larry Foland*, **Cox Communications'** *Kia Painter* and a roster of forward-thinking changemakers. Also celebrated are Mentor of the Year *Glenn Goldsmith* of **Media.com** and Inclusivity Champion *Tina Perry* of **OWN**. **Blue Stream Fiber**, **Charter Communications** and **AMC Networks** are among those receiving Work Culture awards. Cablefax: The Magazine also takes a look at the evolution of **Leadership Development Week**. Check out all the honorees and view the digital issue [here](#).



VIEW HONOREES

Congratulations 2025 Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Honorees!

The Cablefax team is thrilled to announce this year's honorees for the Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Awards, celebrating the individuals and organizations driving meaningful change, fostering inclusivity, and shaping a more dynamic and equitable workplace across the media and broadband industries.

Visit our site to explore the full honoree list and read their inspiring Q&As.

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LEADERSHIP WEEK NOTEBOOK

The **WICT Network** opened its annual Touchstones Luncheon with an energetic performance by a dance troupe before welcoming each 2025 PAR Award winner to the stage. These awards honor the top distribution and content companies for women to work, but this year's ceremony also featured the first tech company to be recognized for the award: **CSG Systems International**. "As WICT becomes more diversified in its member companies, we're seeing a lot of technology companies join our ranks," **TV One & CLEO TV** President *Michelle Rice* said as she welcomed CSG Head of Sustainability & ESG *Cindy Parsons* to the stage. "We feel really honored that we are able to create a work environment where women thrive, lead and shape the future of our industry," said Parsons in her acceptance speech. The cable operators who took home awards were **Charter, Comcast, Cox, Midco** and **Cable One**. SVP of Community Impact & Engagement *Rhonda Crichlow* accepted Charter's award. "We're using this opportunity and this recognition as a chance to not only be viewed as a top employer for women, but we want to make sure that we are a top employer of choice for everyone," Crichlow said. Content companies recognized at the luncheon included **AMC Networks, NBCUniversal, REVOLT Media & TV, Warner Bros. Discovery** and **TV One**. REVOLT CEO *Detavio Samuels* gave a particularly impassioned speech that got attendees cheering. "Collectively, we will not find our way in a time when progress is being questioned and equity is being recast, unless we build companies where women do not just participate, but instead they lead, design, and decide, not out of charity, but out of strategy," Samuels said. "Because what we all know in this room is that when women rise, our business rises, but also civilization evolves." – Bidding has begun for the [Kaitz Silent Auction](#). There are several experiences up for grabs—including two tix to the 2026 U.S. Open Tennis Finals, a Harlem Globetrotters Ultimate Fan Package and two tix to the 2025 Super Bowl. And don't forget, there's a live auction planned for Wednesday night's Kaitz Event. Tickets are still [available](#). Funds raised from the Kaitz Event go toward leadership development, recruitment and retention across the media ecosystem.

MOODY'S VERSANT TAKE

With **Versant** getting ready to officially embark on a journey away from **Comcast NBCUniversal**, **Moody's** assigned a Ba2 rating on its proposed \$1 billion senior secured notes due 2031. It's not changing Versant's Ba2 corporate family rating and stable outlook, and Moody's thinks the company's scale, competitive stance in live news and sports, cash flow generation and modest starting debt leverage are some of its strongpoints as a public company. However, there are sustained pressures impacting Versant's main linear distribution business, which is expected to worsen as video consumption habits change. "The company will face significant execution risks over an approximately two-year period as it works to operate on a standalone basis independent of its former parent. Versant will also need to partially offset the secular pressures contributing to sizable subscriber losses with

inflation or inflation-plus price increases, as well as through steady cost reductions and operating efficiencies given increasingly competitive end markets," Moody's wrote. "While such actions will help offset some of Versant's margin pressures, we expect continued steady declines in overall revenue and EBITDA over at least the next two-to-three years." Cost-cutting measures and reductions in entertainment programming and expenses might be difficult to achieve in the early stages of the spinoff. Moody's also points to the rate of EBITDA decline expected to exceed the rate of revenue decline "as continued subscriber attrition negatively impacts operating leverage given the company's fixed costs."

FANDUEL, EUROLEAGUE EXTEND

The FAST channel space got a win in the live sports department. FanDuel announced a multiyear extension of its broadcasting agreement with **EuroLeague Basketball**, keeping the competition on **FanDuel TV's** FAST channel **FanDuel TV Extra** and the OTT platform **FanDuel TV+** in the U.S. The renewal will last through 2028 and brings over 100 games per season, including live coverage of select regular-season contests, the Play-In Showdown, playoffs and Final Four. Additionally, select EuroLeague games will air across **FanDuel Sports Network**.

RATINGS

"Smiling Friends" had its Season 3 premiere earlier this month, garnering an average of 433,000 viewers P18-49 and 391,000 P18-34 in L+3 viewing on **Adult Swim** and **HBO Max**. Those are 133% and 252% increases, respectively, helping the Season 3 debut rank as the best new episode for an Adult Swim original series among P18-34 since 2021.

DOING GOOD

Nebraska's **ALLO Fiber** is joining forces with Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) to keep students connected beyond classrooms. The two introduced the "Smart Schools" solution, which uses nearly 100,000 business and residential access points to let students connect school-issued Chromebooks to high-speed WiFi "from virtually anywhere in Lincoln." Using **Calix's** Smart-Town WiFi infrastructure, approximately 2,000 LPS students already have access to Smart Schools, and students in grades 6-12 will have the ability to opt in (23,000 total).

PEOPLE

A+E Global Media named *Lauri McGarrigan* its new SVP, Content Distribution Strategy and promoted *Emory Walton* to SVP, Content Distribution. McGarrigan, who's previously held distribution roles at **Disney, Hallmark Media, Common Sense Networks** and **Fuse**, joined after working with A+E's media distribution team in a consultancy role. Walton will oversee content distribution in the U.S., Canada and Caribbean.