

## **VT Saves Advisory Board**

### **Member Bios**

#### **LouAnn Beninati**

Throughout her career, LouAnn has focused on advocacy, consulting, and teaching with a goal toward child care business sustainability and workforce development for the child care profession. Before joining LGK, LouAnn coordinated VT's Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS). Prior to that she was the director of Robin's Nest Children's Center in Burlington for 25 years and an instructor of early education courses at local colleges. In her current role, she supports projects that strengthen the sustainability of child care businesses, that address compensating a professional early childhood workforce, and that work toward developing future early childhood advocates and leaders.

#### **Kasey Franzoni**

Kasey W. Franzoni is an IRA Officer and Trust Administrator with Trust Company of Vermont. Prior to joining Trust Company in 2019, Kasey completed her 25<sup>th</sup> year of working at People's United Bank (formerly Chittenden Bank). She has a background in IRA Administration, Trust and Estate Administration, Risk Management, Retail Banking and Lending. Kasey and her husband Peter reside in their native city of Rutland. In her free time, Kasey enjoys spending time with her family and friends, as well as performing in community theater groups as an actor, singer and dancer and she volunteers as a music advisor with Rutland Youth Theater.

#### **Melvin Hall**

Mel Hall, co-founder of Global Village Foods, has lived in the Upper Valley of VT/NH since 1987. Originally from Memphis, Tn., and a Vermont resident for decades, he currently focuses on strategies to expand Global Village Foods from a regional specialty foods brand, to one with national reach and high-volume distribution in both College & University Food Service and Retail Grocery CPG (Consumer Packaged Goods). A key goal is to source Vermont and regionally grown agricultural produce for raw ingredients to the greatest degree possible, in order to create revenue streams that support local sustainable food systems.

In addition, Mel drives efforts and research into sustainability in materials and practices, and together with wife and co-found Damaris Hall, seeks to create career path & living wage employment and support sustainable food systems and community based action in the good-food-space, both locally, nationally and abroad.

#### **Michele Karode**

Michele Karode is an Outreach Professional with UVM's Office of Engagement and new Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships. Her work focuses on building partnerships between UVM and the non-profit, municipal and state government, and education sectors in Vermont. She also oversees the Green Mountain Job and Retention Program, which uses student loan forgiveness

to incentivize young college graduates to stay in Vermont. Michele earned a Bachelor of Science in 2012 from UVM's Education and Social Services. Prior to her arrival at UVM, Michele was the executive director of a Heartworks Preschool. While there, she was the recipient of the Patriot Award in 2020 which recognizes supervisors for their exceptional support to their employees, specifically those working in the National Guard. Michele is passionate about leadership, workforce development, collaboration, and supporting the local communities she considers herself a part of

### **Joie Lehouillier**

Joie Lehouillier is the owner and operator of Foote Brook Farm with husband Tony Lehouillier in Johnson VT. Foote Brook Farm has been in business for 28 years. Specializing in certified organic vegetables and fruit. Before helping to run a farm, Joie graduated from Kingswood Regional High School, Wolfeboro NH. She joined the United States Army Reserves from 1992-2000 and attended Hesser College, Manchester NH. She also held administrative positions at IKON Office Solutions, Imagistics and Smugglers Notch Resort for a total of 18 years. Joie currently volunteers as the president of Johnson Works. Joie and Tony have 2 children, Lidia 16 and Armand 13. Likes to travel, watching Armand play basketball, exploring colleges with Lidia and walking Red the dog around the farm.

### **Colleen McQuade**

Colleen McQuade is the owner of Juniper Lane, Bennington's first retail cannabis dispensary, and currently serves as the President of the Cannabis Retail Association of Vermont. Her love of cannabis and her dedication to community building comes after receiving her master's degree in International Peace and Conflict Resolution led her to work with diverse populations both internationally and locally. A decade ago, she shifted gears working in medical cannabis industry using cannabis as a tool to help others heal, managing multiple dispensaries, organizing national community service projects for cannabis industry employees, and educational classes for veterans, doctors, patients, and cannabis industry employees. Since opening Juniper Lane, Colleen has become even more involved in her industry helping to form the Cannabis Retail Association of Vermont and serving as President. She also serves on the board of the Better Bennington Corporation, working to promote and enhance downtown Bennington.

### **Sena Meilleur**

Sena Meilleur is a Principal at OneDigital, a national team of experienced, local employee benefits advisors who create greater value for employers and inspire individuals to become more engaged health care consumers. Sena entered the benefits consulting business in Vermont in 1997, and worked in client account management for over fifteen years. She became a Certified Wellness Program Coordinator in 2008, and earned her Registered Employee Benefits Consultant designation in 2009. In 2015 Sena became a Chartered Healthcare Consultant with a focus on the Affordable Care Act as it applies to employer groups.

She earned an MBA from New England College of Business and Finance in 2018. Sena's passion is working with her client partners to develop and enhance their benefits platforms to meet the employer's strategic goals.

### **Pam Nemlich**

Pam Nemlich is the Vice President-Human Resources for The Orvis Company, Inc where she is responsible for US Human Resources operations. Pam's career in Vermont business spans over 30 years, having held similar HR positions with The Vermont Country Store and United Counseling Services of Bennington County. Pam currently serves as a member of the board of The Bank of Bennington and is the moderator of The First Congregational Church of Manchester. Pam lives in Manchester Center.

### **Ongyel Sherpa**

Ongyel Sherpa is the Founder/CEO of US Sherpa. He was born and raised in Nepal as a Sherpa ethnicity where his entire family worked in the trekking and mountaineering profession. The mountaineering connection led him to get a once in a lifetime opportunity to come to the USA when he met Dr. Geoff Tabin (world renowned mountaineer and humanitarian). Ongyel came to his dream country in 1998 and lived with Dr. Tabin's family for four and half years while the family helped him go to high school and college. Determined to use his education well and to bring his Nepal and Vermont families together, Ongyel founded US Sherpa in 2006. The company produces functional, natural fiber products, handcrafted in Nepal for the active, caring and outdoor lifestyle. Ongyel lives happily in South Burlington, Vermont with his wife whom he met at college, his eight year old daughter and 5 year old son. Ongyel continues to travel every year for sourcing products, guiding trips, meeting his family members and friends while also exploring new regions of Nepal and climbing mountains. By now, Ongyel has made twenty one different trips back home in his native country. When he is not adventuring in Nepal, he loves to hang out with his family and friends in Vermont. Ongyel loves the beautiful state of Vermont where he loves anything outdoors whether it is winter ascent of Mount Mansfield, camping in the long trails shelter, paddle boarding on Lake Champlain, skiing in Bolton or enjoying a bonfire on a cool autumn night.

### **Kim Souza**

Kim Souza has operated Revolution, an independent retail shop, in downtown White River Junction for almost 22 years. As a Hartford, VT resident, Kim has served on her town's Selectboard since 2018, advocating for efforts to promote more equitable policies and practices in the municipal landscape. In addition to public service, Kim has served on a number of non-profit boards, coordinated hundreds of mutual aid services during the pandemic, volunteered on several committees and organized and produced dozens of community benefit events.

As a small business owner with a working-class background, Kim has direct experience with the challenges of saving for retirement while working in a service industry at a time when the

wealth gap is so significant. In seeking professional financial guidance, Kim has found that without first establishing relative substantial savings, there are few avenues toward accumulating wealth through investments.

### **Sara Teachout**

Sara Teachout is the delegate of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility and is representing them as a business member. She is the Corporate Director of Government and Media Relations at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont and is responsible for state and federal government policy and regulatory affairs, collaborating with stakeholders, and working on state health care solutions. She manages proactive and responsive media efforts for the company and coordinates with the Blue Association on federal government relations initiatives. Prior to joining Blue Cross in 2017, she spent 16 years at the Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office developing nonpartisan tax and revenue analysis. Sara is the Vice Chair of the Stowe Electric Commission Board and serves on the Clarina Howard Nichols Center Board. She graduated from the University of Vermont and received her graduate degree from New York University.

### **Holly Testut**

Holly Testut is the Human Resources Benefit Specialist at Jay Peak. I started here in this role mid-2022 with little to no experience in HR or with insurances. I quickly learned the ins and outs of all things benefits, including insurances, FMLA, disabilities, PTO, workers comp, and 401ks. After the switch in ownership in November of 2022, we then had to switch everything from insurance providers, to payroll systems, to 401k providers – coming with it a whole wealth of new plans and plan details. From 400 employees in the summer, to almost 900 employees in our busy winter season, we have a lot of employees to work with and manage the benefits each one is eligible for, and a pride I take in being able to help our employees get the benefits they deserve. When I am not working, I am spending time with my family of five and our two dogs. In the winter we hit the slopes as much as we can, and in the summer we climb them, trying to take advantage of as much as Vermont has to offer all year round.

### **Paul Trahan**

Paul Trahan is a Vice President at Asure Software. A national Payroll & HR service provider for small to medium employers with offices located in Burlington Vermont, Texas, Florida, Tennessee and California. Prior to joining Asure, Paul was President of PayData Workforce Solutions based in Colchester, Vermont. His 30+ year career has been devoted to working with Vermont employers and helping them navigate and manage payroll, payroll taxes, benefits and the growing HR challenges. Paul and his wife reside in beautiful St Albans Bay, Vermont.

### **Karen Wisehart**

Karen Wisehart is a distinguished hospitality professional with over 35 years in the industry, 29 of which have been dedicated to the Windjammer Hospitality Group. Her passion for

hospitality extends beyond the workplace, as she has been a mentor to countless General Managers through her leadership role with Best Western Hotels and Resorts, a member of numerous board seats and community involvement. Her journey within the Windjammer Hospitality Group has not only defined her expertise but also highlights her loyalty and dedication to the industry. Beyond her role at the Windjammer, Karen shares a business venture with her husband, Chris Line – owning the Vermont Cider Lab in Essex, Vermont. This entrepreneurial endeavor reflects her enthusiasm and love for the service industry. Karen's journey is more than effectively managing businesses; it's rooted in providing meaningful experiences, fostering relationships, and providing opportunities for growth and connection. Outside of work, Karen enjoys being with family & friends, traveling and hanging out with her dog, Kurri.