

Janet Leath

Janet Leath is a summa cum laude graduate of the University of Delaware with a degree in plant science. She owned and operated her own State Farm Insurance Agency in Garner, North Carolina, for 21 years before becoming the first lady of Iowa State University and then Auburn University. At Iowa State and Auburn, she became engaged in a variety of campus beautification projects and was actively involved in building relationships with university stakeholders. At Iowa State she served on the board of directors of the Youth and Shelter Services Foundation, the Reiman Gardens Master Plan Committee, the Iowa Art in State Buildings Committee, the Jack Trice Stadium Greenspace Committee, and the Iowa Nursery & Landscape Research Corporation. At Auburn she assumed a major role in a total remodel and addition of the president's mansion and grounds. Leath served on the Association of American Universities Partners membership and executive committees. She also has considerable philanthropic experience and served on the Women and Philanthropy Committee at Iowa State and the Performing Arts Center fundraising committee at Auburn University. Prior to her time serving as a first lady she worked as both a pharmaceutical and agricultural chemicals representative for DuPont and then started and grew a very successful State Farm agency. During that time she developed a multiacre botanic garden at her home south of Raleigh and at the request of David Murdock designed the landscapes for the core of the North Carolina research campus in Kannapolis and oversaw the installation. She served as an active member and president of the Triangle Bonsai Society and chairperson of the Triangle Chapter of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Karen LeVert

Karen LeVert is managing partner for LeVert Ventures and a venture partner at Pappas Capital. Karen LeVert Ventures is an early-stage agtech venture capital firm and a specialized fund of Pappas Capital. She has a proven track record of progressing early-stage technologies from university research labs to commercialization as co-founder and CEO of two innovation labs, Southeast TechInventures Inc. (STI) and Ag TechInventures LLC (AgTI). Her business experience encompasses both corporate and entrepreneurial worlds with over 30 years of successful leadership experience in executive management, startups, and technology commercialization. LeVert started her career at Nationwide Insurance, holding positions of increasing responsibility from programmer to controller to general manager of a 500-person property and casualty service center. Before founding the innovation labs, her first entrepreneurial venture was launching a franchise bioremediation company that she later sold. Her next entrepreneurial venture was co-founding a Silicon Valley-based software company. LeVert is the recipient of multiple awards including the Council for Entrepreneurial Development's Outstanding Service Award, induction into the WRAL TechWire Hall of Fame, and the 2022 Women in Agribusiness (WIA) Demeter Award of Excellence. Along with her professional duties, she serves as a board member for the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, the North Carolina Arboretum, North Carolina State University Agriculture and Life Science Foundation, and LCBA Life Insurance Company. She has an MBA from the University of Dayton and a BBA in information technology from Eastern Michigan University.

Leah McGrath

Leah McGrath began her career in nutrition, serving as an officer and dietitian in the U.S Army. She also worked briefly in public health as a WIC (Women, Infants and Children) dietitian and supervisor for the Low Country Health District in South Carolina. Since 2000, McGrath has been the corporate dietitian for Ingles Market and has implemented various programs for the retailer, including their social media presence, a local food and vendor initiative, and various events for the gluten-free and celiac customers. McGrath appears regularly on regional television with nutrition and food-related messages, hosts a weekly radio program, writes for several regional publications, and speaks to groups regularly on food, social media, and nutrition-related topics. In 2014 she started Buildup Dietitians to provide encouragement to registered dietitians and nutrition students. The initial Facebook page has become a global social media presence with the involvement of dietitians around the world.

Rodney Swink

Rodney Swink is a licensed landscape architect and professor of the practice in the landscape architecture program at North Carolina State University. In private practice, Swink is senior associate for planning and development with PlaceEconomics. He directed the North Carolina Main Street program for 24 years. He currently serves as chair of the City of Raleigh Board of Adjustment, having recently completed terms as chair of the City of Raleigh Planning Commission and the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board. Swink was also chairman of the board for Preservation North Carolina and chair of the JC Raulston Arboretum board of advisors. He served on the Marion Stedman Covington Foundation board for three terms. Swink has won numerous state and national awards for his leadership and public service, including the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) President's Medal and the ASLA LaGasse Medal in recognition of management and conservation of natural resources and public landscapes. An adjunct faculty member of the College of Design since 1997, Swink is a 2004 recipient of the college's "Wings on Wings" award and was recognized as its 2004 Distinguished Alumnus. He also sits on the College of Design Leaders' Council. Active in the Urban Land Institute, he is also a member of the American Planning Association, National Trust Preservation Forum, and North Carolina Partners of the Americas. He holds Bachelor of Arts in economics and Master of Landscape Architecture degrees from North Carolina State University.