

SEE JANE RUN THE FIRM

3 local companies are among the top 50 women-led businesses in the state

By CHRIS LAUDERMAN
The Times-Union

The Center for Leadership at Florida International University and the Commonwealth Institute South Florida listed three Jacksonville companies among the top 50 women-led businesses in Florida in its first look at firms with women at the helm.

Julie Klapstein, CEO of Availity LLC, a health care information services company, tops the ranking for Jacksonville at No. 16 with \$20 million in revenue and 62 employees. The list ranked the companies by revenue.

Klapstein was recruited to be the first CEO of Availity, a joint venture between Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida and Humana Inc. The company, which launched in 2001, has won nine national innovation awards for its Web product which connects physicians with multiple health plans through an online Web portal that sends insurance claims, referrals and authorizations instantly.

The other two women representing Jacksonville on the list are Lisa Bucher, president of R.D. Masonry, ranked No. 26 with \$11 million in revenue and 278 employees; and Charlene Sullivan, president and CEO of DataSavers of Jacksonville, ranking No. 46 with \$3.6 million in revenue and 31 employees.

The study authors say the research is the first of its kind in Florida. It is expected to set the foundation for development of a database of women-led businesses in Florida,

to be created by the Center for Leadership at FIU in Miami. The Center and FIU's College of Business Administration along with the Commonwealth Institute South Florida teamed-up to conduct the survey, which was designed to identify women leading Florida companies, discover the nature of those companies

WOMEN continues on D-6



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Women: Knew they wanted to be CEOs

Continued from D-1

and find out about the lives of the women leaders.

The results gave a unique insight into a swath of executives that have not been well-tracked in the state.

"It's really an incredible list of women," said Joyce Elam, executive dean of FIU's business school and one of the survey's founders.

The results showed the average woman CEO in Florida is 51-years-old, has a bachelor's degree, is married and has two children.

The study also revealed that the 121 women-led Florida businesses that responded fully to the group's survey employ more than 30,000 people and have a combined state economic impact of more than \$12 billion. The survey tar-

geted about 1,600 businesses with women as owners or in high level management for its research.

While the businesses the women run are diverse — from engineering firms, to pharmaceutical companies, to construction outfits — their ethnic backgrounds were not: 85 percent of females surveyed were white. Another 11 percent were Hispanic.

While most of the women — 83 percent — have children, just 41 percent were out of the workforce beyond the time they took for maternity leave. Four out of five of the women leaders had a husband with a full-time job — 60 percent of their husbands had flexible work schedules.

What's more, the women had their sites set on the corner office early on. The majority, 59

percent, said they knew early in their life that they wanted to be CEOs.

Because this was the first time the survey was conducted, the data doesn't offer any clear trends yet.

Mayra Beers, executive director at the Center for Leadership, said the center will begin to look at trends among Florida's women business leaders when its database expands as new surveys and studies are completed.

Each year, the study is expected to grow and examine additional issues. Beers said in future years the study will also look at non-profit companies led by women and attempt to make comparisons between the women and men in similar leadership positions.

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