



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **First Place® AZ Elects Kathy Hancock, Tom Ortega, Amy Pawlowski and Michael Traylor to Board of Directors**

PHOENIX (September 15, 2020) — [First Place® AZ](#), a local nonprofit working to ensure housing options for people with autism and other special abilities are as bountiful as they are for everyone else, has elected four new members—Kathy Hancock, Tom Ortega, Amy Pawlowski and Michael Traylor—to serve on its board of directors.

First Place AZ's 81,000-square-foot, \$15.4 million property, First Place–Phoenix, is a residential community for individuals with autism and other neurodiversities. Ushering in a new era of housing options for special populations, First Place is combining apartments, the Transition Academy residential life skills program and the Global Leadership Institute to advance more independent and community-integrated living options. In addition to 55 apartments, First Place–Phoenix has a sports pool, culinary teaching kitchen and community center, and offers a suite of supports to residents.

“Our newly elected board members bring storied careers in business, housing, advertising, public policy and developmental disability services,” says Sara Dial, chair of First Place’s board. “Their vision, creativity, problem-solving skills, leadership and relationships are tremendous assets to First Place AZ. We are thrilled they are committed to First Place and our mission.”

**Kathy Hancock** most recently served as the chief operating officer at Fennemore Craig, one of the country’s 250 largest law firms. She joined Fennemore Craig in 2001 and retired in February 2020 to form her own consulting company focused on business strategies and problem solving and link up with Vertex Advisors Group, which advises professional services firms across the country. Prior to joining Fennemore Craig, she was a partner and vice president for a leading Arizona public affairs firm, Jamieson and Gutierrez, where she managed a portfolio of clients from Fortune 50 companies to real estate development firms on a wide range of projects. Hancock has long been active in numerous other civic and charitable organizations, including the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC).

**Tom Ortega** is the chief creative officer and a partner at RIESTER, an independent advertising agency with offices in Phoenix, Los Angeles, Park City, Washington, D.C. and New York City. In his role, he oversees the development of all creative services, including print and broadcast. This included RIESTER’s recent participation in the Arizona Together campaign to raise awareness of the importance of wearing a mask and taking precautions to contain the spread of COVID-19. Over a 35-year career, Ortega’s work has earned a number of creative honors, with inclusion in Communication Arts Advertising and Design Annuals, Graphis International Advertising Annual, Mercury Radio

Awards and numerous local, regional and national ADDYs. He is also a contemporary artist. Over the years, his work has shown in Arizona, Texas, Colorado, France, Guadalajara and Bulgaria, as well as in publications such as Art in America, Shade and Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest.

**Amy Pawlowski** is the executive director of UnitedHealthcare Community Plan's Complex Care Programs, serving more than 70,000 Arizonans across the Developmental Disabilities, Dual Special Needs and Fully Integrated Dual Special Needs programs. She is passionate about empowering individuals to live their healthiest, happiest lives by exploring innovations in care delivery and developing relationships with community stakeholders. Pawlowski began her career as a financial analyst with the Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), where she developed an in-depth understanding of DDD's unique delivery system, Medicaid in Arizona and the delivery systems serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Pawlowski then served as DDD's health care services business administrator, responsible for overseeing all aspects of acute care service delivery for more than 25,000 individuals with I/DD. She joined the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan team in 2013 and oversaw the organization's corporate compliance program for all Medicaid products in Arizona.

**Michael Traylor** is the chief strategy officer of Native American Connections (NAC). He oversees NAC's overall strategic position as a leader in behavioral health, affordable housing and community development. Traylor is a residential construction industry executive with 10 years of state service rehabilitating two distinct and varied state agencies as director of the Arizona Department of Housing and Arizona Department of Economic Security. With more than 20 years of entrepreneurial and executive experience in the development and homebuilding industries, his track record reflects sound business acumen and an uncompromising commitment to quality. Noted for maximizing operational effectiveness while minimizing costs and developing differentiated products in choice locations, Traylor is a principled, decisive leader with quantifiable results maximizing business growth, market share and profitability.

For more information or to get involved, email [info@firstplaceaz.org](mailto:info@firstplaceaz.org) or visit [firstplaceaz.org](http://firstplaceaz.org).

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#### **About First Place® AZ**

First Place AZ is a nonprofit organization advancing innovative residential options for adults with autism and other special abilities. First Place is creating replicable residential and post-secondary education models that promote collaboration among the public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, serving as a catalyst for advancing public policy focused on housing solutions for special populations. First Place celebrates neuro-diversity, independent living and the belief that housing options for people with autism and other special abilities should be as bountiful as they are for everyone else. First Place—Phoenix, the nonprofit's first new property, opened in 2018. Leasing opportunities are available. View PBS NewsHour's two-part series about First Place at ["Giving Adults with Autism the Skills to Build Independent Lives"](#) and ["How Phoenix Became the Most Autism-Friendly City in the World."](#) Learn more at [firstplaceaz.org](http://firstplaceaz.org).