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Founder and CEO of  
Leapley Construction



EVERY ISSUE IS  
A GREEN ISSUE

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**Publisher**

Paul Chen

**Editorial**

Sarah Buehrle, Managing Editor

Theresa Archer, Calendar Editor

Lucretia Robison, Writer

**Design & Production**

Lisa Castro

**Distribution**

Donna Abbott

DistribuTech

**Advertising**

404-474-2423 or ads@naAtlanta.com

**Natural Awakenings Atlanta**

1402 Dancing Fox Road

Decatur, GA 30032

**Phone:** 404-474-2423

**Fax:** 404-602-0004

**Website:** naAtlanta.com

**Email:** info@naAtlanta.com

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Atlanta-based editorial staff, Lucretia Robison (left) Sarah Buehrle (right)

**W**omen rising. That's all the editorial calendar from the corporate office of *Natural Awakenings* said about an upcoming article, yet I knew I wanted to jump on the opportunity to highlight Atlanta women for the very simple reason that 80 percent of our readers are women. This is a chance to make a statement.

The article, which starts on page 22, is about "the emerging paradigm of heart-based feminine leadership." In an instant, I knew Sue Schroeder, co-founder and artistic director of Decatur-based contemporary dance company Core Dance, had to be one of the women we featured.

"People never get that, and I didn't get it either, until being submersed in it all," says a former dancer for Core.

The "it" he was referring to is the culture of collaboration that is at the heart of Schroeder's work. In an era when founding choreographers were all-powerful masters and dancers were mere chattel, Schroeder launched her company on the basis of true collaboration.

The dance artist elaborated: "In dance, 'collaborate' doesn't mean collaborate." He explains that dancers understand the term to mean that other artists help the choreographer fulfill his or her vision. As a result, Core newbies don't believe they actually have a voice in developing choreography. "Really? I have a voice? How strong can it be?"

But Schroeder walks the talk – constantly, consistently and with knowing confidence. Over the years, she has melded five sets of principles and processes and formally codified collaboration. The Core Cultural Practice began as the way artists interact with each other in the studio, but spread to the business side of the house, and is now used whenever Core partners with other organizations. In Schroeder's world, every person is valued and every voice is heard.

Fortunately for Atlanta and the world, Schroeder is not alone in infusing our work culture with heart. Meredith Leapley, founder and president of Leapley Construction, is bringing trust, connection and empathy to the most masculine of industries, and Bridgette Massey Peterson injects compassion for all creatures into a profession that seems predicated upon eating animal meat – bodybuilding. Read

about all three of these ATL treasures on page 23.

## newsbriefs

Speaking of women rising, allow me to introduce our Atlanta-based editorial staff. I am fortunate beyond reason to have Sarah Buehrle as managing editor. Sarah has nearly two decades of journalism experience, most recently having served in multiple assignments as a reporter and editor for Cox Ohio Publishing, now Cox Media Group Ohio. She has authored several articles for this publication and earned a certificate in aromatherapy from the Heal Center.

I met Lucretia Robison, our staff writer, at Jeff Primack's Qi Revolution last year, and she immediately struck me as a possibility – a resilient woman who has overcome monumental life challenges, is in the midst of her own awakening and devoted to the healing arts – she's a licensed massage therapist who is working on a health coach certification – and the healthy lifestyle that our magazine advocates. She also happens to be an emerging writer and blogs in her spare time.

Together, Sarah, Lucretia and I strategize our editorial perspective, policy and scope, plan our coverage months in advance and respond to last-minute opportunities. I simply could not be happier with our Atlanta team, and I believe you, dear reader, will notice how we're kicking local coverage into high gear.

Rounding out the editorial staff is calendar editor Theresa Archer, of Lexington, KY. She provides her services to other *Natural Awakenings* franchises, as well.



Paul Chen, Publisher

## Art Over Dinner with VOX Teen Communications



VOX Teen Communications, Atlanta's home for uncensored teen publishing and self-expression, will be the focus of Art Farm at Serenbe's Art Over Dinner event from 6 to 9 p.m., May 21. The dinner is a collaboration between the chefs at Home-spunATL and local farmers to create a seasonal meal that showcases winemakers and brewers, with guest artists to spark the conversation at one long farm table on the outdoor deck of The Art Farm. Over dinner, they will explore what it means for teens to have a voice and how to use it to effectively build community.

Since 1993, VOX has been the place for teens throughout Atlanta to express their unique perspectives and prepare for life

after high school. VOX leads the way as a teen-driven youth development organization committed to amplifying the voices of Atlanta's young people.

Sponsored by Lexus, Art Over Dinner is a series of intimate gatherings with artists and nonprofits organizations that support The Art Farm's work as a vibrant artist complex that provides a place for engagement, inspiration and a central location for artists, the arts and culture.

*Location: 10455 Atlanta Newnan Rd., Chatt Hills, GA. For more information, email [Kirstin@serenbe.com](mailto:Kirstin@serenbe.com) or visit [Tinyurl.com/ArtFarmTickets](http://Tinyurl.com/ArtFarmTickets).*

## Learn About Healer Bruno Groening

Dr. Christian Jacob, from the Medical Scientific Group of the Bruno Groening Circle of Friends, will speak at 7 p.m., May 12, on the medically verified case histories of healing for which no medical explanation exists, based on the teachings of the late German mystic Bruno Groening. These include examples of recovery from nearly every imaginable health challenge known to human kind.

"There is no incurable!" said Groening, a teacher in postwar Germany, claimed by some to have facilitated the healing of thousands of people. Followers believe the same healing force continues today and remains available for everyone.

*Admission is free and donations are accepted. Location: Smyrna Community Center, Room 5, 200 Village Green Circle, Smyrna, GA. For more information, call 404-217-4432, email [SarahThorsen11@gmail.com](mailto:SarahThorsen11@gmail.com) or visit [Bruno-Groening.org/english](http://Bruno-Groening.org/english).*

Spring is independent of our compulsion to manage and direct. It's beyond our reach.

~Roger Fransecky



# HEART-BASED LEADERSHIP

## Women Mobilize to Heal the World

by Linda Sechrist

**T**he *Heart to Lead: Women as Allies for the Greater Good*, a documentary film directed and produced by Cheryl Gould, of Naples, Florida, explores the emerging paradigm of heart-based feminine leadership and how it is attuning women to their inner strengths, beliefs, each other and our Earth. “Women’s deeper unity of being is empowering them to take action and lead. Women who once longed for a culture that would reflect their highest priorities are now creating one in which they support each other and make a difference,” says Gould.

She notes that for centuries, a vast number of women have led and served as change agents. “Unfortunately, the majority of them never made it into the headlines or history books. A prime example—few individuals knew that 12 women ran for president before Hillary Clinton.”

In a recent *Yes!* magazine article, Rucha Chitnis reports that women are rising up to push back against growing corporate power, land grabs, economic injustice, climate change and more. Women’s groups and networks offer a paradigm shift, she concludes, exposing links between unbridled capitalism, violence, the erosion of human rights and destruction of the Earth.

A woman’s style of leadership in America’s corporate boardrooms, activist-led movements or state and federal government may not be plainly evident. Feminine wisdom’s emerging solutions are compassionate, collaborative and consensus-building, and pursue universal outcomes and group cooperation. They contrast with conventional competitive strategies and solutions, according to *The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress* study at Vanderbilt University’s Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, in Nashville.

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a medical doctor, Jungian analyst in Mill Valley, California, and author of *Artemis: The Indomitable Spirit in Everywoman*, has been advocating since 2002 for a United Nations Fifth World Conference on Women (5WCW). “Empowered and equal women are the key to peace and sustainability. We need to rise up together and fulfill the Dalai Lama’s words at the Vancouver Peace Summit: ‘It will be up to Western women to bring about peace.’”

Bolen’s 5WCW vision joins millennial women worldwide now en-

tering their era of activism with the feminist movement spearheaded by a boomer generation of women that’s forwarded the equality and empowerment of women this far. To this end, she marched in Washington, D.C., on January 21 in the Million Women’s March that globally attracted 5 million participants. “To make human rights women’s rights, we need a united global women’s movement,” she states.

Sande Hart, from Orange County, California, director of the Charter for Compassion International-Women and Girls sector and president of the women’s global interfaith organization Spiritual and Religious Alliance for Hope (SARAH), participated in the Los Angeles Women’s March with 750,000 others. “There’s a sense that we’ve had enough. We’re not angry. We are morally outraged and seeking peaceful solutions wrapped in compassion and based in justice for all. In nearly 15 years of women’s community building, I’m convinced that healing our communities with resilience and a regenerative spirit is our biological and innate imperative. I see women emerging in unprecedented ways to make this happen,” says Hart.

The Rising Women Rising World organization provides tools and training to help women and men develop feminine wisdom and the qualities of potent compassion, deep listening, intuition and inclusivity. Hazel Henderson, an evolutionary economist in St. Augustine, Florida, host of the *Ethical Markets* online TV show and researcher of *The Love Economy* shared in her book *The Politics of the Solar Age: Alternatives to Economics*, has mentored staff members of Rising Women Rising World. Henderson contends that to shape a future for the good of all, we must bring into balance the masculine and feminine energies and learn to value the long-mar-

ginalized qualities of feminine wisdom. Henderson’s Love Economy paradigm reflects the sharing and caring sector not presently reflected in the

[Women Rising Resources](#)

[Tinyurl.com/  
WomensHeartToLeadFilm](http://Tinyurl.com/WomensHeartToLeadFilm)

[Vimeo.com/ondemand/  
AsShels](http://Vimeo.com/ondemand/AsShels)

nation's gross domestic product. "Women's unpaid work—raising children, taking care of households, serving on school boards, volunteering, caring for aging parents, etc.—constitutes 50 percent of all production in the U.S. and 70 percent of that in developing countries. This unvalued economic sector underlies and supports the public and private parts of the entire economy," advises Henderson, who observes that competition cannot be the sole basis for an economy with any expectation of high quality of life on a small planet.

In her film, *As She Is*, producer and director Megan McFeely, of Marin County, California, captures her own journey to understand the collective potential of the feminine and how to live true to its innate knowing. She queries: "Can you imagine what might happen if women here and around the world rose up together and used our power of longing to heal the Earth?"

Linda Sechrist is a senior staff writer for Natural Awakenings. Connect at [ItsAllAboutWe.com](http://ItsAllAboutWe.com).

# ATLANTA WOMEN RISING



Cameron Adams

**A** woman is like a tea bag—you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.

~Eleanor Roosevelt



**L**ocal women are reaching new heights by rejecting the stereotypical success paradigm of self-interest, and using more traditionally feminine characteristics such as connection, empathy and humility to lead with heart.

*Natural Awakenings* asked three of these women to share their own stories through a series of essay questions. Their stories, struggles and achievements, are below.

## Softer approach works in hard hat industry

Meredith Leapley is the founder and CEO of the multi-million-dollar company Leapley Construction. Her clients have big name recognition and her own recognitions are numerous, including ranking in The Top 5 Women-Owned Businesses in Atlanta 2016 by In-

vestopedia, in the YWCA Women of Achievement 2016, and earning Kenesaw State University's 2016 Phenomenal Woman Award. The 43-year-old started Leapley Construction 18 years ago, steadily achieving by employing characteristics not typically seen in her field. In her own words ...

"I moved to Atlanta in 1998 and was thrust into opening my own business in 1999. My industry is an exceedingly male-dominated industry. Most of my competition had been in the industry prior to starting their own businesses and had connections to help them get started. For me, it was a new town and I was definitely the new kid on the block, not to mention a woman in construction. I knew I needed to make a name

*Photo Above - Meredith Leapley founded Leapley construction in 1999.*

for myself pretty quickly and I had to do it in an authentic way. Connection, persistence, and empathy were the keys to my success. I knew I needed to connect with the industry and I did so by getting involved in certain industry associations and give-back initiatives that I was passionate about. I connected with my clients and knew that their trust in me and my team was vital, as it is in any relationship. Understanding and anticipating their needs helped the trust and connection build.

“No matter what industry we are in, we need to have strong relationships and connection to succeed. And that doesn’t mean just with our clients. It includes team members, vendors, and partners that you work with, as well as clients and anyone you come into contact with.

“How you operate on a daily basis

as an individual will extend out and builds a brand for who you are and how you exist. It matters and will create a path for your future. Be clear about your intentions and how you operate and exist with others.

“Women succeeding together is shifting the traditional paradigms of success, but even more than that I believe it is all people, men and women, working together towards success. I have been so fortunate to have male and female mentors and sponsors throughout my career. I do believe it is important to connect and have empathy with all people and that will help us transcend obstacles when we encounter them.

“I do believe these shifts can change the world. The ability to see each other, have compassion and patience for another perspective that is not your own,

and getting curious about it, makes it safe to exist with difference.”

## Building strength on compassion

At age 53, Bridgette Massey Peterson is an award-winning bodybuilder who came from a small town, a father who held traditional ideas about female roles, and a mother who embodied strength.

Stepping on stage only two years ago, Peterson came in second in the 2015 Drug Free Athletes Coalition Georgia National Championship, then in June 2016, went on to win the DFAC GA National Championship, and earned her pro card from the American Natural Bodybuilding Federation. In October, she intends to compete in the DFAC World Finals.

But Peterson won’t be swigging raw eggs or eating lean animal protein to bulk up – she’s a vegan. She believes everyone, animals, people and fellow competitors, are all worthy of respect. In her own words ...

“I was born when women were to follow certain predetermined paths but my mother was strong and independent and to this day supported and believed in me.

“She was really instrumental in making me strong. She’s always been ‘go do it, you look magnificent.’ She had to be a single mom with four kids for a long time. And it’s a little different now than it was back then. Society wasn’t as supportive. She made ends meet, she graduated from Rider [University] in New Jersey. She showed me there is a way, despite the way our society is towards women. She’s not that sweet natured June Cleaver mom – she’s really strong. She really makes you feel like you can do ... whatever it is.

“My veganism began as a health journey that developed into both health and compassion. I hate to see torture of another being for any reason but especially greed or presumed superiority.

“Once someone finds out I am a vegan and my age, I get a lot of questions regarding what types of protein do I use and where do I find it and how do I feel about supplements.

“I really don’t think it is any harder, you may have to be a bit more creative

*Bridgette Massey Peterson competes in the Drug-Free Athletes Coalition Diva Classic.*



Liquid Spectrum

with your meals but protein is only one component of getting and keeping muscle, you really have to be consistent and pay attention to how your body processes the foods you eat.

“People, when you say ‘I’m a body builder,’ they don’t feel like you can still be a woman and feminine. I always tell people I’m 200 percent woman: I’m feminine.

“Everything I do is a lifestyle, not temporary. Quality of life is important to me, it helps to show children there is an alternative to the standard.

“I think that if more people were [open minded] they’d also be more tolerant of differences. We have people who walk around with hijabs on, and we form an opinion, not even about their personality or the people that they are.

“We are all just people, and together we make great positive things happen.”

## Creating a new dance

Sue Schroeder, co-founder and artistic director of Atlanta’s Core Dance company, has made empowering others her life’s work.

Winner of the Goethe Institut’s Hal-deman Award for Merit and the Cultural Multipliers from Foreign Countries, numerous local arts grants and fellowships and the 2006 Lexus Leader of the Arts, Schroeder began dance at a time when mentors withheld their knowledge, and when abuse of dancers was prevalent.

Most recently earning the 2017 Emory University Center for Creativity & Arts Community Impact Arts Administrator award, Schroeder lists communication, cooperation, collaboration and shared power as the core of her dance company. In her own words ...

“This is who I am, how I live my life and raise my children. It was and is important to me that my work life culture shares my personal culture and beliefs. It was and is important to create a micro aspect in our Core community of what we envision on the macro level for our world community outside of Core.

“When I came up in the dance world the field itself was very abusive. It was predominantly run by white men, there was just a dynamic of abuse,



Paige McFall

*Sue Schroeder founded Core Dance in the 1980s*

physical abuse, emotional abuse that was embedded in dancers as tools for the choreographer. When I came into a position where I was leading something, that’s where I could make a difference.

“I think the challenges to my line of work, the challenges really are connected to our American culture which is that art is not a valued profession, sometimes almost not considered a profession at all as it is in other places. So there’s been a lot of having to stand for that, speak up about that, a lot of proving.

“One of our values is to really sustain the field, I think on top of that I was often the only artist, the only woman at so many meetings ‘Let’s just include the arts, let’s just include the woman.’ At least I was included, but not listened to. It’s pretty constant to be diligent in speaking up about being an artist that

has professional value.

“Instead of setting up a political agenda to come in with, and manipulating and maneuvering in these meetings, I would just really try to support my claims, back them up with information. It really just took time. Year two, year three, ‘Oh she’s really not going anywhere.’ ‘Oh, what she said was really interesting.’

“I have been the solo woman and artist in many decision-making meetings. We need each other as women to influence a different point of view, a different process. It is inherent in who we are in the feminine.

“Our current world situation is reflective of an intense grasp/reach for the opposite of the feminine which is creating so much strife and damage for and with each other, and so many aspects of our planet – environment, financial, democracy, truth.”