



# TXCPA'S 2020 RISING STARS

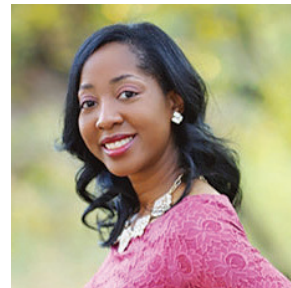
By DeLynn Deakins, *Today's CPA* Managing Editor

**T**hrough the Rising Stars Program, TXCPA recognizes CPA members 40 years old and younger who have demonstrated impressive and significant leadership qualities and active involvement in TXCPA, the accounting profession and/or their communities. A TXCPA selection committee named the following 14 up and comers based on their contributions to the accounting profession and their communities. We now introduce you to the members, in alphabetical order, who are the Rising Stars honorees for 2020.



**Jessica Banitt, CPA, CFP®**  
Wealth Advisor  
Linscomb & Williams  
Houston Chapter

As a wealth advisor at Linscomb & Williams, Jessica Banitt develops and maintains client relationships by providing holistic advice and assisting with the implementation of financial planning strategies to help clients stay on track to achieve their long-term goals. She is an active member in TXCPA Houston, where she has spent considerable time planning and coordinating events and volunteer activities, as well as working with student auxiliary members and CPA candidates on a bridge to connect them to CPA licensing. Her committee work also includes outreach to new licensees. She is regarded as a member who is on a fast-track to grow within TXCPA and chapter leadership.



**Angela Banks, CPA, CFE**  
Founder  
The Annex  
Dallas Chapter

Angela Banks created The Annex, an innovative solution for companies to retain top performers by supporting career driven women as they transition back to work following maternity leave. This approach allows companies to retain talent by providing an opportunity for new moms to return to work at a healthy pace. In her volunteer roles at TXCPA Dallas, she has chaired the Membership Committee, spearheaded the development of the chapter's LinkedIn group, participated on the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force and been very instrumental in planning several membership involvement and retention projects. She also serves with several other community and professional organizations. She is an up-and-coming leader with a passion for having a significant positive impact on the lives of others.



UP AND COMERS BASED ON THEIR  
ACCOUNTING PROFESSION AND



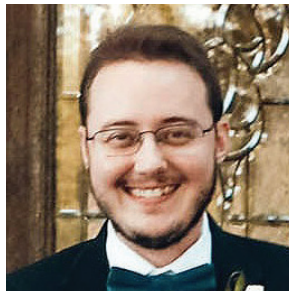
**Morgan Birdwell, CPA**  
Controller  
Iron Horse Terminals  
Southeast Texas Chapter

Morgan Birdwell has worked for Iron Horse Terminals since its formation in 2018. She oversees all accounting functions for its operations and heavy industrial real estate development. The company's fast-growing operations include a full-service railroad maintenance, transload, switching and storage terminal capable of handling more than 1400 cars on-site. She has served for TXCPA Southeast Texas as the chapter's Career Awareness Committee chair. Her responsibilities included heading up the volunteers in the chapter's booths at career expos and teaching educators and students about the accounting profession. She is also a graduate of the 2019 Leadership Beaumont class and an active member of the Junior League of Beaumont. She is known as an instrumental leader who will dive into community involvement projects with enthusiasm.



**Shehan Chandrasekera, CPA**  
Partner and Head of Tax Strategy  
JAG CPAs & Co and CoinTracker  
Houston Chapter

Shehan Chandrasekera is nationally recognized in the cryptocurrency/blockchain taxation space. At the age of 27, he co-founded JAGArgueta CPAs, a growing firm in Houston. As a partner, he leads the technology and startup advisory practice. He is also the head of tax strategy at CoinTracker, a software company based in Silicon Valley that helps users calculate cryptocurrency gains and losses for tax purposes. Through this position, he's able to educate policymakers on tax issues related to cryptocurrencies. One of his most significant personal achievements was becoming a *Forbes* tax contributor. In his *Forbes* column, he writes about the ramifications of blockchain and cryptocurrency-related transactions. His goal is to shed light on complicated subjects to help practitioners and the public understand the tax consequences.



**Kelly Higginbotham, CPA**  
Experienced Audit Manager  
Grant Thornton  
Houston Chapter

Kelly Higginbotham is an experienced audit manager at Grant Thornton. In addition to the responsibilities of an audit manager, he oversees 11 additional teams around the country, assists with client proposals and participates in audit practice reviews. He is an active and successful member in TXCPA Houston, where he served as chairman of the Young Professionals Committee. His goal was to make the committee more active and a good pipeline for later Society participation, so he created three subcommittees that focused on events, volunteering, and member recruitment and retention. His efforts resulted in increased membership and member engagement, as well as increasing the visibility of the committee members within TXCPA Houston. In 2020-2021, he continues to serve TXCPA Houston as chairman of the Membership Development Committee.



**William Holisky III, CPA**  
Audit Manager  
Ridout, Barrett & Co., P.C.  
San Antonio Chapter

In his role as audit manager, William Holisky is one of the construction specialists for Ridout, Barrett & Co., P.C. He directs the workflow process for the audit department, schedules fieldwork for audits, serves as acting billing manager for client accounts and completes various other managerial duties. He is known in the community as a go-to guy for all things construction accounting related. He devotes his personal time volunteering with TXCPA San Antonio and the construction associations American Subcontractors Association and Associated Builders and Contractors. His charitable activities include working with Texas Ramp Projects (TRP), an organization that builds wooden handicap ramps for veterans and others who may need wheelchair access to their homes and are unable to afford the cost. He believes that assisting others in his profession and community is extremely important and highly rewarding.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE  
THEIR COMMUNITIES



**Kim Knox-Lewis, CPA**  
Audit Partner  
BMY  
Fort Worth Chapter

Kim Knox-Lewis is an audit partner at BMY. In this position, she manages all aspects of audits of financial statements, primarily for the public sector. She also creates, grows and maintains client relationships. She serves with TXCPA Fort Worth on the Executive Committee, as a Leadership Development Program instructor and as a speaker at local universities. She also previously served as chair of the chapter's Accounting Career Education Committee. With perseverance and hard work, she overcame obstacles to accomplish her personal and professional goals, and she became passionate about encouraging people in difficult or non-traditional situations to strive to succeed. Through her connection with TXCPA, she spreads the message to students about the importance of obtaining their CPA license and the career opportunities they can have in accounting.



**Emily Landry, CPA**  
Tax Manager  
Whitley Penn, LLP  
Fort Worth Chapter

As a tax manager at Whitley Penn, Emily Landry reviews compliance projects, primarily related to real estate and exempt organizations, and provides consultation for taxable entities and exempt organizations. She has also trained colleagues for the exempt organization team in the firm's Fort Worth office and led the internal training program for all six Whitley Penn offices. In her work with TXCPA Fort Worth, she has led the chapter's Nonprofit Interest Group and works to empower members to assist the nonprofit community through technical training and peer information sharing. She has become a go-to resource in Fort Worth for nonprofit tax advice and has found that teaching is one way she's able to give back to her profession and community.



**Christopher Lanier, CPA**  
Accountant  
OCI Beaumont, LLC  
Southeast Texas Chapter

Christopher Lanier is an accountant at OCI Beaumont. In this position, he prepares balance sheets, profit and loss statements, and other financial reports. He is also responsible for analyzing trends, costs, revenues and financial commitments. In the community, he has worked tirelessly with the Rotary Club of Spindletop (Beaumont), Southeast Texas Young Professionals Organization and Beaumont Chamber Foundation. He began his service with TXCPA Southeast Texas by volunteering for the 2019-2020 School Supply Drive Committee, which collected and delivered three SUVs filled with donated items to help a school that was still in recovery from Hurricane Harvey. In his personal life and career, he stresses the importance of never giving up despite the challenges.



**Kelley Lau, CPA**  
Tax Manager  
Briggs & Veselka Co.  
Houston Chapter

In her position as tax manager, Kelley Lau's duties include tax compliance work for individuals, trusts, partnerships, S corporations, private foundations and nonprofit organizations. In addition, she trains interns, staff and seniors on tax return preparation, and co-presents the annual tax workshop to international students at Rice University and the University of St. Thomas. On the personal side, she and her husband recently celebrated the birth of their son, the first child for them. She is a dedicated volunteer for TXCPA Houston, where she has served on the CPAs Helping Schools Committee. Emphasizing the importance of family, hard work and a positive attitude, she's always eager to share her experience with parents and students on how to finance a college education and what a career in public accounting looks like.



## Nominate a Rising Star!

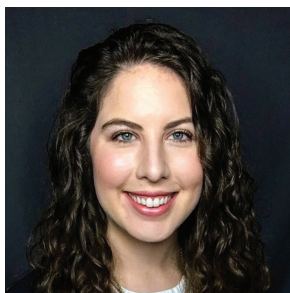
If you have a friend or colleague who has shown innovative leadership qualities within the accounting profession, their local community or TXCPA, we want to hear from you! Anyone can nominate a rising star, but the nominees must be TXCPA members. Nominations must be completed by December 16, 2020.





**Anne-Marie Lelkes, Ph.D., CPA**  
 Tenured Associate Professor of Accounting  
 Texas A&M University-Kingsville  
 Corpus Christi Chapter

Anne-Marie Lelkes is a tenured associate professor of accounting at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, where her responsibilities include teaching accounting courses, research in accounting, and service to the university, profession and community. She has a passion for teaching and mentoring students, encouraging them to be involved in professional organizations. As a TXCPA faculty representative, she encourages students to be involved in TXCPA Corpus Christi, the Student Accounting Society and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA). She received the TXCPA Outstanding Accounting Educator Award in 2017, and is a member of the TXCPA Corpus Christi Board and TXCPA's Editorial Board. In addition, her research has been published in a number of accounting journals. Through her hard work, she has made a far-reaching impact on accounting education and the CPA profession.



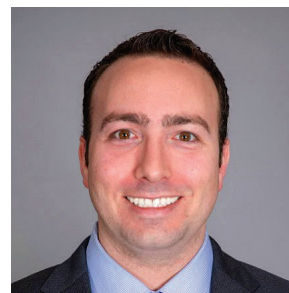
**Shawnee Miller, CPA**  
 Senior Accountant  
 Dora Jean Dyson, CPA, P.C.  
 Central Texas Chapter

Shawnee Miller began her career at Dora Jean Dyson, CPA, P.C. in Gatesville as an intern and is now a senior accountant. In this position, she handles tax, audit, bookkeeping, peer review, consultation and management duties. To accomplish her goal of becoming a CPA, she worked full time while attending college classes, earned her bachelor's degree in accounting within three and a half years, and then dedicated nights and weekends to studying for the CPA Exam. She has been an active member of TXCPA since she was a student and attended TXCPA's Leadership Academy in 2018. She has also served several years as an officer of the Gatesville Lion's Club. In her career and personal life, she finds it very rewarding to give back to her community. She married to Zack Miller in 2014 and they had their son in 2019. She credits their wonderful families who have helped them along the way and feels extremely lucky to work for Dora Dyson, CPA, as she has been a wonderful friend and mentor.



**Manu Sadiev, CPA**  
 Senior Audit Manager  
 Briggs & Veselka Co.  
 Houston Chapter

Manu Sadiev moved to the United States from Tajikistan in 2012. He is a senior audit manager at Briggs & Veselka, where his duties include public and private entity audits and reviews, presenting audited financials to clients' boards, and participating in the firm's business activities. As part of his firm's training committee, he instructs staff and seniors on a regular basis. In addition to regular training sessions, he set a goal to work closely with one staff person every year so that they develop strong technical skills that are so important for the firm. He is a devoted volunteer in TXCPA Houston. His efforts for the chapter have included initiating and coordinating events for charitable organizations. During his years in the CPA profession, he has created a broad network of individuals and looks forward to working with them to have beneficial outcomes in the community.



**Sean Shepard, CPA**  
 Division CFO  
 The Kroger Co.  
 Dallas Chapter

In his role as division CFO at The Kroger Co., Sean Shepard is responsible for financials, including forecasts, capital storing programs, driving merchandising profit and sales execution. In 2019, he received D CEO magazine's Outstanding Controller of the Year Award. He is actively involved with TXCPA committees and charitable activities. He is also an adjunct professor at Dallas College, teaching accounting to Retail Management Certificate candidates. He contributes his time to MedWish International, a nonprofit organization that saves lives and the environment by re-purposing discarded medical supplies and equipment to provide humanitarian aid to countries around the world. He and his family have been on trips with them to countries such as Kenya and Honduras, and when his sister passed away unexpectedly a few years back, they started a special fund to raise money for supplies to be brought on these aid trips. He is a CPA who has committed himself to make a real difference in today's world.