



ILLINOIS' ECONOMIC FUTURE GROWING TOGETHER

2025 Annual Luncheon
September 18, 2025

Hilton Chicago Continental Room
720 S. Michigan Ave. | Chicago IL 60605 | 10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Our Speakers



Don Thompson, CEO, Cleveland Avenue

Don Thompson brings his signature blend of savvy business acumen and warm personal touch to his role as CEO and Founder of Cleveland Avenue (CA), LLC. Founded in 2015, with his life partner and wife, Liz Thompson, CA is a prominent Chicago-based investment firm specializing in lifestyle consumer brands and companies that positively disrupt large and growing markets.

The Thompsons concurrently formed The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education which is committed to supporting and mentoring students and professionals as they progress from the classroom to the boardroom through philanthropy and education support services.

Mr. Thompson launched his own recipe for success at CA following over 25 years of climbing the ranks at McDonald's, where he departed after successfully running the company as President & CEO.

Thompson not only invests in but also mentors entrepreneurs by combining his electrical engineering background, global leadership, and business expertise with his passion for customer innovation to create a powerful environment of analytical thinking and creativity.

He presides over a global portfolio as rich in humanity as it is in strong investment returns.

Thompson stands at the intersection of insight and opportunity by merging CA's talented diverse teams and resources with his global business leadership experience and connections.

As a distinguished global speaker, coveted thought influencer, and friend to many, Thompson brings people together through a shared vision of nurturing and advancing innovative brands worldwide.

Thompson is also at the intersection of potential and purpose by cultivating a culture that stays true to his foundations of faith, family, service, philanthropy, diversity, and inclusion. Thompson is a member of the Commercial and Economic Clubs of Chicago, World Business Chicago, the Arthur M.

Brazier Foundation, and serves on the National Football League (NFL) Diversity Advisory Committee as well as is a Trustee of The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education.

In addition to Footprint, Thompson lends his expertise to high-profile boards as a Director at Royal Caribbean Cruises Limited, The Northern Trust Corporation, Northwestern Memorial HealthCare, and BIA (a Latin American food company). He formerly served on the boards as a Director at Beyond Meat, Exelon, McDonald's Corporation, as an Advisory Board Member with DocuSign, and as a Purdue University Board Trustee. Thompson received a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Purdue University and an Honorary Doctorate in Science from Excelsior College. In 2021, Thompson received the Dreamer Award from his alma mater, Purdue University, for his service and impact on the lives of millions of Boilermakers across the country throughout his career.

Cleveland Avenue and the Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education have received numerous awards and recognition for their social impact, including the Baumhart Center at Loyola University Chicago Social Impact Award. Additionally, Mr. Thompson has been honored with the National Black MBA Association's Outstanding Leadership Award, been inducted into the Chicago Innovation Hall of Fame, and received 1871's Momentum Chicagoneess Award.

Previously, Mr. Foulkes had spent 18 years with Ford Motor Company in a series of assignments of progressing responsibilities. He previously also worked with Shell Exploration and the Ministry of Defense, both in the United Kingdom. He has a bachelor's degree in aeronautics and a master's degree in structural and fluid mechanics from Imperial College in London. Mr. Foulkes serves as a trustee for Shedd Aquarium and is a Director on the Board of Vontier.



Lourdes Duarte, Co-anchor and Lead Investigative Reporter, WGN

Lourdes Duarte is a four-time EMMY Award winner. She co-anchors the *WGN Evening News at 4pm* and is one of the station's lead investigative reporters. Prior to her role on the evening news, Lourdes co-anchored the top-rated WGN Morning News. She also hosts WGN's public affairs program *Adelante Chicago*.

She started her journalism career as a reporter for Telemundo Chicago. She then went on to work in news markets throughout the country including Miami, Indianapolis and Detroit. While in Indianapolis she

launched, produced and hosted the public affairs show "Hoy en Dia" which won an EMMY for its impact on the Latino community.

Lourdes has been recognized for her volunteer work and engagement with Chicago's minority communities. Her alma mater, De Paul University recognized her as one of DePaul's 14 Under 40. Most recently, the Center for Journalism Integrity and Excellence awarded her the Distinguished Alumna Award along with *New York Times* Executive Editor Dean Baquet.

When she's not at WGN-TV, Lourdes is checking off locations from her travel bucket list with trips to Europe and South America. In 2017, *Modern Brown Girl* and *Chicago Woman Magazine* published her travel essay on her one-week stay in Argentina.

She's also been a featured speaker and panelist for events and organizations throughout Chicago including the annual *Dare to Dream* Conference, *Negocios Now*, *The Miracle Center* and the *National Latino Education Institute*.

Lourdes received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from DePaul University.

She lives in Chicago with her husband and daughter, Madeline.



Meena Beyers, Vice President of Business & Community Development, Nicor Gas

Meena Beyers is vice president of Business and Community Development for Nicor Gas, Illinois' and Southern Company's largest natural gas distribution utility serving 2.3 million customers across northern Illinois. In this role, Meena leads growth, customer solutions, energy efficiency, economic development, external community affairs and community impact, as well as innovation and partnership strategies for customer technologies. Meena brings more than twenty years of public and private sector experience to her role.

Meena was recognized as a 2023 Crain's Chicago Business Notable Leader in Sustainability and 2024 Woman of Power by the Quad County Urban League. She serves on the boards for Metropolitan Planning Council, Chicagoland Habitat for Humanity and the Women's Energy Summit, and the Executive Advisory Council for Intersect Illinois, the state's economic development organization. She earned a bachelor's degree in urban planning and development from Ball State University and a master's degree in public service management from DePaul University. Meena lives with her husband and two children in Westmont, Illinois.



Maria Bocanegra, President, Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas

Maria Bocanegra has primary responsibility for managing the daily operations, strategy and administrative activities for the two Illinois utilities, which together provide safe, reliable natural gas service to nearly 1 million customers in Chicago and 54 communities in its northern suburbs.

Most recently, she was chief legal and government relations officer for the Port of Cleveland — the first in its 55-year history. She previously served as a commissioner on the Illinois Commerce Commission,

regulating investor-owned electric, gas and water utilities in highly complex and technical matters. There, she gained national recognition in both the transportation electrification and water spaces, and served as chair of the EV Working Group and standing Committee on Water.

Her prior board service includes the University of Missouri Financial Resource Institute's Advisory Council, New Mexico State University's Public Utilities Advisory Council, the National EV Charging Initiative's Advisory Council, World Resources Institute's Electric School Bus Advisory Council as co-chair, Citizen's Utility Board (CUB) Ohio, Council of the Great Lakes Region and the Cleveland Water Alliance.

Maria currently serves on the boards of Intersect Illinois, World Business Chicago, Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Committee and the Illinois Utilities Business Diversity Council. Maria's prior public service includes work as an administrative law judge at the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission and as the public member of the Labor Advisory Board for the Illinois Department of Labor. Before entering public service, Maria practiced law focused on workers' compensation, wage and hour issues, and personal injury claims.

She has been recognized by *Fortnightly's* Under 40, *Negocios Now's* 40 Under 40, *Negocios Now's* Who's Who In Hispanic Chicago, *Negocios Now's* Rising Star and by *Latino Leaders Magazine*. Her work has been featured in *Utility Dive*, *T&D World* and *Bloomberg Law News*, and by the *American*

Association of Port Authorities. She has presented/spoken before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Energy, among others.



Leonard “Lenny” Singh, Chairman and President, Ameren Illinois

Leonard "Lenny" Singh is chairman and president of Ameren Illinois, where he is responsible for energy delivery to more than 1.2 million electric and more than 800,000 natural gas customers in 1,200 communities across 43,700 square miles of service territory. Prior to joining Ameren Illinois in July of 2022, Lenny held a variety of senior leadership roles across electric, natural gas and steam operations, and customer solutions in a 30-year career with Consolidated Edison Company of New York. Lenny is leading Ameren Illinois through the clean energy transition, spearheading initiatives to facilitate the adoption and development of local, renewable energy generation and promoting the long-term growth of cleaner energy. He is leading the effort to build a resilient and reliable grid capable of supporting the increased electrification of the downstate Illinois economy with a focus on equitable justice and economic development. At the same time, he is championing policies that will fortify the state's natural gas infrastructure while preparing for the sector's transition to renewable natural gas and emerging clean hydrogen technologies, critical enablers of the energy transformation process. He holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a master's degree in electrical engineering from Polytechnic University, and a Master of Business Administration degree from Columbia University. He completed professional certificate programs on electric and natural gas distribution at the Siemens Power Technologies International Distribution Engineering and Gas Technology Institute, and on nuclear reactor technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has also completed executive education programs at Harvard, Georgetown, Cornell University ILR School, Dale Carnegie, American Management Association, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.