



## TUNING IN TO INVESTOR RELATIONS

**Jane Okun Bomba – a former music major in college – has a vast array of corporate management and board experience. Learn how this newest NIRI Fellow ties it all back to investor relations.** BY AL RICKARD

Jane Okun Bomba, president of Saddle Ridge Consulting, LLC, is one of three professionals honored as new NIRI Fellows at the 2019 NIRI Annual Conference.

She is an accomplished finance and human resources executive with C-suite and board experience, and currently works with management teams and boards on a range of strategic consulting projects, including transaction integration, investor relations, corporate governance, and environmental/social/governance (ESG) issues. She is also an angel investor and works with investment company management teams.

Okun Bomba was previously executive vice president and chief administrative officer at IHS Markit, a global, \$18 billion publicly traded information services company with 14,000 employees in 38 countries. In that role, she led 450 people worldwide, delivering support to the company through many corporate functions including human resources, marketing, communications, sustainability, and investor relations.

Throughout her career she has led large transformational and global initiatives. In her 30-plus years of business leadership, Okun Bomba has developed strong expertise in a wide range of management areas. She had particular success in engaging a diverse, global workforce by focusing on building a strong, consistent culture and through deliberate communications and employee engagement. She has also been highly successful in managing investors' reactions to and perceptions of a wide range of corporate events, including mergers and acquisitions, earnings weakness, and an unexpected CEO departure.

Okun Bomba joined IHS in 2004 to lead the company's

IPO, after which she assumed responsibility for many company challenges: rebranding of the company (including the brand integration of 70-plus acquisitions), developing and implementing a single global enterprise resource plan (ERP) replacing more than 40 separate billing and financial systems around the world, and launching the company's corporate sustainability function.

Following the merger with UK-based Markit, she assumed the newly created chief administrative officer role and led the integration of all human resource policies and practices, including developing a new executive compensation structure that was viewed favorably by the investment community.

Prior to IHS, Okun Bomba was a partner at Genesis, Inc. and headed investor relations at Velocom (living for half a year in Sao Paulo, Brazil), MediaOne Group, and Northwest Airlines (working frequently from Amsterdam and Tokyo). She held management positions in corporate finance at Northwest Airlines and American Airlines and began her career with Price Waterhouse focused in the areas of general audit and litigation support.

Okun Bomba serves on the Board and Audit Committee of Brightview Holdings, Inc. and Kickstart International. She is a member of the University of Michigan Literature, Science and Arts Dean's Advisory Committee, the Ross School of Business Advisory Board, and the International Women's Forum. She is also a former board member of International Relief and Development (a large Washington, DC-based international NGO) where she established and chaired the Governance Committee and served on the Audit and Finance Committee

and CEO Search Committee.

*IR Update* interviewed Okun Bomba to learn more about her career and what led to her success.

### What inspired you to enter the field of investor relations?

I have to admit that I wasn't actually "inspired" to enter IR. Back in the mid-1990s, I was working for an airline and was leading most of the financial planning and analysis – building and analyzing a \$10 billion operating plan, involved in the financing of aircraft, supporting labor analysis for union negotiations, etc.

The person doing IR, who was female, left the company and the CEO told me I needed to step into the position. At the time (at least in my company), the role was seen as appropriate for females and I wasn't the least bit interested, so I said no. The chairman then called to say they really wanted me to move into the role, and I begrudgingly took the position.

Then I began to learn about IR and the immense impact it has on a company. The rest is history. I have to give a lot of credit to NIRI; most of my early learning about the function came from the resources provided by NIRI and the network of professionals there.

### I know you are a strong advocate of IROs understanding and considering the impact of ESG issues on their companies. What have we accomplished in this area and what still needs to be done?

I'm an advocate because ESG is not about a group of soft issues. ESG and corporate sustainability are incredibly strategic and are about transparency and about identifying and mitigating the future risks in your business. What is more relevant to investor relations professionals than thinking about transparency and business and reputation risk?

Since I got involved in this area almost 10 years, we've made incredible progress and it is hard to go through a week without having a discussion with a business leader, board member or investor about ESG. I think IR professionals have been forced to pay more attention to the ESG record and repu-



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tation at their companies because investors are demanding it. We are seeing investment choices being made based upon ESG performance and are seeing ESG issues drive most proxy issues.

One of the biggest challenges is that any type of ESG scoring is very difficult to compare fairly across industries. There does not exist one primary scoring/measurement system or standards that are ready for any company to use (similar to FASB for accounting standards). There are several organizations working to be the "standard" of the future, but who wins remains to be seen.

### You have served in NIRI leadership roles for many years at the chapter and national levels. How did these volunteer leadership experiences help your career and what does it mean to you to be part of the IR professional community?

In general, I believe that you get out of things what you put into them. Being involved in NIRI leadership through the years – both at the local and national levels – got me much more engaged in what was important to the investor relations function in the future. That engagement helped me to be a much more effective IR professional in my corporate organizations.

IR is such a unique function and I think it is hard to understand some of the issues and challenges, unless you've been in the role. The NIRI community has always been a lifeline of knowledge and insight to help navigate some of those challenges.

### You were recently appointed to the Board of Directors of Brightview Holdings, Inc. Tell us about the process you went through to gain that position and what other IROs should consider in pursuing board roles.

Yes, I'm really excited to have joined the Brightview Holdings board and I know that my IR experience is going to allow me to add significant value to board discussions. I've spent a lot of time in board meetings over the last 15-20 years, and frankly, I think it is a huge miss that there aren't more

former IROs sitting on boards.

As I became interested in board service, I did what we all do when we're looking for a new position – I went out to my relevant network and told them I wanted to serve on a board. I also did some board director training offered through a variety of organizations.

To be honest, it wasn't an easy process and it took longer than I would have liked. That said, it's really important to make sure that a potential opportunity is a good fit, both from a cultural and experience perspective.

**You have gained experience in many different areas of corporate management. How important has that been to your career and what advice do you have for IROs who want to expand their experience?**

Let me start by saying that I think investor relations is one of the most strategic and interesting areas within a company. And if you love what you do, investor relations is fantastic single-track career and no one should apologize for having that concentration as their life's profession.

That said, I have worn a lot of different hats, having started in accounting and corporate finance, moving into IR, and eventually leading a multi-year ERP design and implementation, marketing and branding, communications and public relations, corporate sustainability and human resources.

Through it all, I've always kept my fingers in IR. We all know that when you're in the IR position, you are one of the most informed executives in the company and you have to know and understand everything that is going on. That perspective translates really well into being effective in other parts of the organization. If you're interested in broader responsibilities, the first step is always making your aspirations known to others in the company.

**Who have been your mentors and what did you learn from them? Have you mentored people in your career and what do you try to impart to them?**

I hate to be cliché, but I would be lying if I didn't mention my parents. They told me every day that I



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could do anything; and that sort of sentiment gets seared into your brain. My mom's favorite saying when I was a child was, "We do not waste time. We always must be doing something." This certainly had an impact on my work ethic. And keeping with the family theme, I have to recognize my husband for helping me to learn patience. I have some former colleagues who credit him with helping to make a person with whom it's easier to work!

I think many people at NIRI have met the last CEO for whom I worked – Jerre Stead. Jerre is a unique and amazing leader and I learned from him every single day – not only about work, but also about life. One of the most important lessons I learned from Jerre was about optimism and positivity. He constantly demonstrated that if you want to be a great leader, you'd better be positive and give people a reason to want to follow you. No one wants to follow a grump! Also, if you are in a bad (or crisis) situation, being positive often leads you find a way out more quickly and elegantly.

I have done and continue to do a lot of mentoring. One of my primary messages is that each of us is individually responsible for our own lives and careers. You cannot wait for someone to invite you to the party; if you're interested in moving to something new, then you need to take charge and make it happen for yourself. In that same vein, we all need to raise our hands and say "yes" – something at which women in particular are not that good.

**Tell us something most NIRI members don't know about you.**

I originally went to college to study music. I had been playing piano since the age of 6 and played most wind instruments, with oboe being my primary. After having to miss a University of Michigan football game (back in the days when they won most of their games!), I decided that I would never be good enough and wouldn't be happy spending so much time practicing. So I switched to accounting! [📄](#)

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**Al Rickard** is president of Association Vision, the company that produces *IR Update* magazine for NIRI.