

Women at the Top: The top 50 women in world business

39: Debra Cafaro

Company:

Ventas

Last year's position:

New

Age:

53

Nationality:

American

Sector:

Financial services

Location:

US

It was billed as a "mission impossible", but that did not dissuade Debra Cafaro from taking on the turnaround of Ventas, a healthcare real estate investment trust. She is among a number of women honoured in this ranking who have been responsible for turning round struggling companies. She has been chief executive since 1999 and board chairwoman since 2003.

Before joining Ventas, Cafaro worked as an attorney and specialised in property law and corporate finance. She was a founding partner of Barack Ferrazzano Kirschbaum Perlman & Nagelberg, a Chicago law firm. In 1997,



she joined Ambassador Apartments, a property investment trust, as president and director, and negotiated its merger with the Apartment Investment and Management Company a year later.

Cafaro grew up in Pittsburgh, and was educated at a Catholic school before reading

government and economics at the University of Notre Dame. She went on to the University of Chicago's law school.

Cafaro serves on the board of Weyerhaeuser, an integrated forest products company, as well as the board of the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trust.

Methodology: the rules of the game

The top 50 was selected by an expert jury, whose choices were based on information on the executives' performance and durability, much of it supplied by Egon Zehnder International, the executive recruitment group.

A range of factors was used to assess the candidates: biographical data; size, scope and complexity of the company (including turnover and number of employees, number of sectors and countries of operation); and competitive landscape.

The judges ranked only executives managing a group's controlling company. Only women who have served at least 12 months in the main executive role were eligible. The panel also took into account each company's performance over the three years to June 30, 2011, using total shareholder return figures in US dollar terms, where applicable.