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Goldberg Kohn congratulates

Emily Englert Edsenga and Sarah Griggs

and all Women in Secured Finance honored
in 2021 by The Secured Lender Magazine

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# Sky Business Credit: Offering High-Touch Customer Service with Transparency

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**BY EILEEN WUBBE** 



An association of professionals putting capital to work

The Secured Finance Network is the trade group for the asset-based lending arms of domestic and foreign commercial banks, small and large independent finance companies, floor plan financing organizations, factoring organizations and financing subsidiaries of major industrial corporations.

The objectives of the Association are to provide, through discussion and publication, a forum for the consideration of inter- and intra-industry ideas and opportunities; to make available current information on legislation and court decisions relating to asset-based financial services; to improve legal and operational procedures employed by the industry; to furnish to the general public information on the function and significance of the industry in the credit structure of the country; to encourage the Association's members, and their personnel, in the performance of their social and community responsibilities; and to promote, through education, the sound development of asset-based financial services.

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### **Roger Allen Joins Alterna Capital Solutions**

Alterna Capital Solutions (Alterna) announced the addition of Roger Allen, a veteran of specialty and alternative financing in the SME market. Alterna founder and president, Stan Carpenter, welcomes Allen as chief operating officer as they reunite following assignments together successfully building and growing trusted long-term relationships with bank partners and small-business owners.

### Axiom Bank N.A. Expands Factoring, Asset-Based Lending Division

Mark J. Simshauser has joined as SVP in Axiom Bank's factoring and asset-based lending division. Based on Long Island, NY, Simshauser will be responsible for expanding Allied and Axiom's existing commercial portfolio by working with business owners and centers of influence throughout the Northeast to find solutions that meet their individual financial needs.

# Axiom Bank, N.A. Hires Jordan Wilson as Vice President, Commercial and Industrial Loan Relationship Manager

In this role, **Jordan Wilson** will be responsible for generating new leads, loans and deposits by developing relationships with small and midsize businesses across the state.

# Berkshire Bank Mid-Atlantic Asset-Based Lending Bolsters Team with Industry Veteran

Berkshire Bank, a purpose-driven community bank, announced an addition to its Asset-Based Lending (ABL) team in the Mid-Atlantic Region, Ben Garcia, senior vice president (SVP), ABL relationship manager. Garcia joined Berkshire Bank in March 2021 and previously worked for Wells Fargo Capital Finance as a business development officer.

# Berkshire Hills Bancorp, Inc. Appoints Subhadeep Basu Chief Financial Officer

Berkshire Hills Bancorp, Inc., the parent company of Berkshire Bank, announced that **Subhadeep Basu** was appointed senior executive vice president, chief financial officer of the company and the bank.

## Cambridge Savings Bank Announces Successful Transition of Melrose Bank Acquisition

Cambridge Savings Bank (CSB) announced it has successfully transitioned Melrose Bank customers and added CSB's 17th physical location. Following the acquisition of Melrose Bank into Cambridge Savings Bank on June 1, 2020, CSB has made it a priority to connect with the Melrose community, focusing on its relationship-centric and service-oriented approach to helping individuals, families and small businesses.

# Capstone Headwaters Expands Restructuring Team with the Acquisition of Amherst Consulting

Capstone Headwaters announced it has completed the acquisition of Amherst Consulting LLC as part of a continued plan to grow the company's Financial Advisory Services group. The newly acquired Amherst team will be led by **Sheldon Stone** and **Scott Eisenberg** who are joining Capstone's FAS Group as managing directors and will continue to be based in Michigan.

# CIT Northbridge Names Business Development Leader for Western U.S.

CIT Group Inc. announced that CIT Northbridge Credit, as advised by CIT Asset Management LLC, has named **Sandy Thomson** as a managing director for business development activities across the western United States. Thomson, based in Los Angeles, will be responsible for sourcing new asset-based loan opportunities ranging from \$15 million to \$150 million.

# Encina Business Credit Adds Barry Vecker to its Business Development Team as a Managing Director

Barry Vecker is an asset-based lending finance professional with over 25 years' experience in new deal originations, underwriting and portfolio management. Vecker is located near Fort Lauderdale, FL, and will join Steve Janson in covering the Southeast.

# Encina Business Credit Promotes Tron Allen to Chief Commercial Officer

Encina Business Credit, LLC (EBC) announced that it has promoted **Tron Allen** to chief

commercial officer. Allen most recently served as EBC's executive managing director and Central region leader. He joined the company in connection with its March 2016 launch as a senior managing director focused on business development efforts in the Southwest region.

# FSW Funding Promotes Bennett to Director of Operations

FSW Funding, a Phoenix-based company that specializes in financing solutions for small and mid-size businesses, recently promoted **Ashton Bennett** to the position of director of Operations. Bennett will oversee the management of the factoring and asset-based lending portfolio.

### Gordon Brothers Welcomes Joe Massaroni as Conrad Lauten Retires

Gordon Brothers, the global advisory, restructuring and investment firm, has named **Joe Massaroni** as director, business development, as Conrad Lauten retires. Based in Atlanta, Massaroni will lead efforts to develop and maintain strong client relationships across the Southeast. Massaroni joins Gordon Brothers with decades of experience in secured finance.

### Great Lakes Business Credit Names Rich Booms New Senior Underwriter

Rich Booms offers Great Lakes Business Credit clients more than 10 years of underwriting and relationship management experience, including asset-based lending, leveraged finance, purchase invoice finance, small business banking, and private client lending.

## IDS and White Clarke Group Join Forces to Create a Secured Finance Technology Powerhouse

IDS, a leader in enterprise mission-critical solutions for secured finance, has agreed to acquire White Clarke Group, a leading provider of retail, fleet, wholesale and asset finance solutions for the automotive and equipment finance markets. The two companies combine to create a multi-asset class secured finance technology powerhouse supporting banks, independents, OEM captives and specialty finance firms globally.

# InterNex Capital Announces Working Capital Funding Program for Minority and Women-Owned Businesses

InterNex Capital is pleased to formally share their new program focused on providing working capital to small and medium Minority & Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs). Diversity and inclusion are shared priorities and values among InterNex Capital's founders, employees, investors, and partners. While InterNex is proud to say that today one third of its clients are Minority & Woman-Owned Businesses Enterprises (M/WBEs), they chose to launch a dedicated M/WBE program with the vision and belief that further representation within their client base is not only possible but something for which they are responsible.

# Moritt Hock & Hamroff Welcomes Scott K. Levine As Counsel

Scott K. Levine has joined the firm as Counsel. He will continue his practice in the firm's Creditors' Rights, Restructuring & Bankruptcy and Secured Lending, Equipment & Transportation Finance practice groups.

# MUFG Bolsters Leveraged Finance Platform with Hiring of Trading and Syndicate Heads

Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG) announced the hiring of two managing directors for its leveraged finance platform:

Todd Bondy will serve as head of High-Yield Trading, and Ryan Munro will serve as head of Leveraged Syndicate. Both will be based in New York.

# Otterbourg P.C. Names James M. Cretella Chair of Alternative and Specialty Finance Practice Group

James M. Cretella has been named Chair of the firm's Alternative and Specialty Finance Practice Group. A member of the firm's Finance Department, Cretella represents lenders, factoring companies and prominent financial institutions, as well as borrowers, in a variety of lending, factoring and corporate transactions.

# Janice Ibey Joins Pacific Western Bank as SVP, Business Development Officer for Asset-Based Lending in Southern California

Janice Ibey has joined as a senior vice

president, business development officer on its asset-based lending team. She will be located in Orange County, CA. Ibey will expand the bank's efforts to deliver asset-based lending solutions to middle-market businesses from the Central Valley to San Diego and beyond.

# Regions Bank Adds Caroline Taylor to its Corporate Banking Team as Head of SBA Lending

Caroline Taylor brings extensive banking experience focused on meeting the financial needs of small businesses. Reporting to Timothy Monte, executive vice president and head of Credit Products for Regions, Taylor will be based in North Carolina while guiding services for Regions' small-business clients across the South, Midwest and Texas.

# Santander Names Scott Baldinelli as Head of New England Middle Market Banking

Santander Bank, N.A. announced the appointment of Scott Baldinelli as head of New England Middle Market Banking.

# Private Equity Partners Anthony Norris and Christopher Rile Join Sidley Austin in New York

Sidley Austin LLP is pleased to announce that **Anthony Norris** and **Christopher Rile** are joining the firm in New York as partners in its global M&A and Private Equity practice. They join from Ropes & Gray LLP, where they have been longtime partners in the firm's private equity transaction group.

# SLR Credit Solutions Promotes Smith, Vartanov, Dunn

SLR Credit Solutions announced Kenny
Smith was promoted to senior managing
director. Smith is responsible for sourcing and
structuring new transactions from a nationwide
network of private equity firms, commercial
banks, and other intermediaries. George
Vartanov was promoted to vice president. He
works on new deal underwriting and portfolio
management. Matthew Dunn was appointed
to assistant vice president. He works on new
deal underwriting and portfolio management.

# SLR Capital Partners Names Phil Guerin Chief Marketing Officer

SLR Capital Partners, LLC (SLR), a leading commercial finance platform with expertise

across cash flow and specialty finance senior secured financing solutions for U.S. middle-market companies, announces that **Phill Guerin**, senior partner and head of Originations, has been named chief marketing officer.

# Tradewind Finance Welcomes Greg Champion as Vice President of Sales based in Chattanooga, TN

Greg Champion will be focused on driving growth for the company and increasing its client base. Champion joins Tradewind from Atradius Trade Credit Insurance, where he was regional manager.

# UMB Bank Welcomes Jeff Dunbar to Capital Finance Business Development Team

Jeff Dunbar has joined UMB Bank's Capital Finance Business Development team as senior vice president, business development officer under their accounts receivable finance business channel.

# U.S. Bank Names Derek Martin St. Louis Market President

Derek Martin succeeds Larry Otto, who retired on March 19, 2021. For 20 years, Martin has successfully managed a deep and diverse portfolio of middle-market companies, ranging from manufacturing and retail to distribution and transportation.

# Robert Mocerino Joins White Oak to Lead Staffing and Government Contracting Finance Originations

Robert Mocerino joined White Oak
Commercial Finance, an affiliate of White
Oak Global Advisors, as senior vice president,
managing director of Staffing and Government
Originations. He will be based in New York with
national coverage responsibilities reporting
to Bob Grbic, president & CEO of White Oak
Commercial Finance.

# Winston & Strawn Expands Its Global Leveraged Finance Team with Addition of Andrew Hutchinson in Chicago

Andrew Hutchinson has joined as a partner in the firm's Chicago office, and as a member of its Global Leveraged Finance team.

# Rising Together: Women in Secured Finance Profiles

On the following pages, you will meet nearly 70 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have distinguished themselves within the secured finance industry.





### INTRODUCTION

# Welcome to The Secured Lender's Sixth Women in Secured Finance issue.

Rising Together. This concept serves as both the theme for this month's issue and SFNet's upcoming online conference Women in Secured Finance: Where Women Rise.

During this challenging time, it's more important than ever to highlight and celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of women in our industry. Statistics show that the pandemic has had serious effects on women in the workplace, as we struggle with added pressures on the job, increased unemployment and increasingly challenging caregiving responsibilities.

In the following pages of our biggest issue yet, you will meet over 70 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have distinguished themselves within the secured finance industry. They represent the various sectors of SFNet's member organizations including banks, law firms, appraisal and consulting firms, fintech companies and institutional capital providers. I found their profiles to be inspirational and thought provoking, as each woman featured is "rising" in her own way. I hope you take the time to read about them and the perspectives and advice they offer. I'm sure many of their stories will resonate with you.

This issue also includes interviews and articles featuring other fascinating women, some of whom you certainly will recognize. The cover features Nneoma Maduike and Valerie Mason, recently named co-chairs of Otterbourg's newly established lender finance practice group, with an article that follows on page 116. You'll find Nneoma's interview with several women in the industry who discuss how the pandemic has affected them as working mothers on page 132.

Other highlights include a check-in with 12 women who were featured in past WISF issues. The changes in their careers are a testament to how being profiled in this issue of *The Secured Lender* can elevate your profile in the industry. Don't miss an

interview on page 120 with Bobbi Acord Noland of Parker Hudson Rainer & Dobbs, who was named SFNet's first female cogeneral counsel in October.

SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Conference, as referenced above, will be held live online on consecutive Wednesdays, June 16 and June 23. This year's format will be reimagined in response to the feedback we received about past conferences. We are partnering with Corporate Class, Inc. to offer attendees a high-quality,



PAULA CURRIE
Senior Vice President
PNC Business Credit

interactive, customized workshop using the SFNet Connect platform. We'll focus on the importance of developing an executive presence, a career progression and leadership skills. This workshop will cover:

- Understanding of how our actions can diminish our confidence and how we show up
- Addressing self-doubt and the imposter syndrome
- Gaining strategies for greater confidence and self-advocacy
- Making your work visible
- Mentorship, sponsorship and allyship
- Developing a roadmap for individual success

I look forward to connecting with you during the conference. Be sure to visit www.sfnet.com for details and registration, or reach out to Michele Ocejo at mocejo@sfnet.com.



JOANNE EVANS
Accord Financial

oAnne Evans, vice president and operations manager, Canada Asset Based Finance & Factoring, Accord Financial, has more than 20 years of experience in the commercial finance industry. Since joining Accord 13 years ago, her considerable experience in factoring and asset-based lending has moved her from her initial supervisory role in collections to her current vice president & operations management role. JoAnne's skills in problem solving, combined with her client-oriented focus, benefit both her and Accord as she oversees most aspects of Accord's daily operational activity, while providing excellent support as part of the Canada asset-based finance management team. JoAnne is business-driven and can go from enhancing operations with new technology, to meeting prospective clients, to offering current clients the service and support needed. She has also developed new and improved financial products and performs due diligence for the existing client portfolio as well as for prospective clients.

JoAnne resides in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with her husband and family. After many years volunteering in minor sports, she now spends her spare time golfing, travelling and training with her dog Cooper. JoAnne is a graduate of the Desautels Faculty of Management MMBA program at McGill University.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I was extremely fortunate to have two women mentors, Marjorie Cooke and Mary Serio, early in my career in factoring. Marjorie taught me the A-Zs of factoring, how important it is to ask questions and be curious and what to watch out for. She also showed me that being firm and sticking by your decisions was the way forward. Mary Serio recommended pursuing my studies with the Canadian Credit Institute, taught me about risk and managing it and was the optimal teacher when it came to managing clients. She also recommended my move to Accord 13 years ago which turned out to be a great decision.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Working in the alternative lending space is an extremely interesting career. Each day has its own challenges, as does each new deal. Finding solutions by being creative and flexible can create opportunities that did not seem possible. It's exciting and demanding, sometimes forcing you outside of your comfort zone, and ultimately very rewarding. The fast-paced environment makes time fly by and supporting companies in a multitude of industries provides a unique learning experience. Add the bonus of seeing clients prosper and thrive creates a high level of satisfaction. The negative side to the industry is that not everything is in your control and, regardless of how creative you are in financing and supporting clients, you cannot help them all and not all survive.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career/industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I am extremely proud of our team and how they have transitioned from the traditional office environment to working from home full

time. The first few weeks felt overwhelming while working out the logistics, but we did not miss a beat. The realization that having face-to-face client meetings does not require travel is an added bonus and has certainly improved our interactions with clients. We have also increased our reliance on technology with positive effects that I am sure we will keep even after restrictions are lifted and we return to working from the office. The biggest challenge has been in ensuring that our group culture remained, and continues to remain, intact; communication is key, and we implemented Teams early to bridge this gap. We have found that encouraging staff to take time to catch up with each other at the beginning of meetings, prior to beginning any work-related discussion, helps our group stay focused, positive and cohesive.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Post-pandemic our work environment will be different. Although we will continue to have some employees working remotely, I believe that, like many other companies, we will move towards a reduction in our overall office footprint and transition to a hybrid workplace. Providing staff the opportunity to work remotely encourages a better work/life balance, reduces stress, and can actually increase productivity and performance, which benefits everyone.

# Registration is open for SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Conference, June 16 & 23

# REGISTER AT SFNET.COM TODAY.

# Don't miss our reimagined live online event.

We are partnering with Corporate Class, Inc. to offer attendees an interactive, customized workshop focused on developing executive presence along with career progression and leadership skills. This workshop will cover:



- Gaining a greater understanding of how our actions can diminish our confidence and how we "show up"
- Addressing self-doubt and the imposter syndrome
- Employing strategies for greater confidence and self-advocacy
- Making your work visible
- Developing a Roadmap for Individual Success
- Mentorship, sponsorship and allyship

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LISA GIBSON
Accord Financial

isa Gibson is a senior client service manager at Accord Financial's US
Asset Based Finance unit. Lisa joined Accord in 1998, starting out in an
accounting role. After 10 years, Lisa moved to Client Services where, in
addition to attending to the daily cash needs of her clients, she dedicates
her time to developing relationships and providing financial solutions to clients.
Lisa is responsible for monitoring Accord Financial client's daily needs, which
includes ensuring their experience with Accord runs smoothly and effectively.
She reviews processes and oversees the client's funding transactions and
collections.

In addition to these core duties, Lisa is a key team member working on continual system updates, testing and implementation to modernize and streamline Accord's operations. Before working for Accord, Lisa became fascinated with customer service while working as a supervisor in retail, gaining valuable experience.

"Lisa brings daily dedication to excellence, lighthearted humor and epitomizes Accord's core values of Challenging the Status Quo and Being Straight Up," said Accord US ABL president, Terry Keating.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Do not be afraid to offer an opinion or ask a question. Lots of great ideas come from just brainstorming based on your question.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Many would disagree now...but in the earlier part of my career I was much quieter. I should have been more vocal with my ideas. I also should have opened to learning different aspects of the job earlier.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I like the first few months of a new account. I like learning how they operate and being part of the process to get them on board. There is always something new going on. I enjoy learning about the different industries that are out there and how our clients operate. Least...I always feel there is more to do/learn and not enough time in the day.

## How do you balance work/personal time?

This has become more challenging since the Coronavirus. Before 2020, I would have said I leave work at the office. When we first transitioned to working from home, I was working out of the living room. It was much harder to find a stop time. Once I decided to make a home office out of my extra bedroom, it has become easier. I do start a little earlier, but I make sure that my evenings and weekends are free to be with family and friends.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Accord was able to transition easily. My biggest struggle was the overnight change to paperless. After working up funding a certain way for years, you do things out of habit. Once we went paperless, I had to really think about my steps to be sure I crossed the T's and dotted the I's. I think in some ways that was helpful; it made us look at our processes to see the best way to streamline and be more productive.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I will be so glad when we are post-pandemic. I would think most companies will be a form of hybrid. Most people have a new way of working and may not feel as stressed working from home. I like the idea that if I need an office, I have one to go to, but for most day-to-day work I can work remotely. As for business travel, it is not as easy to social distance in those situations. We are all becoming so accustomed to having our bubble of space. I think that may take a bit longer... but I am sure we will be back!

# Keeping it simple

Congratulations to *Joanne Evans, Lisa Gibson* and *Leslie Ward* for simplifying our clients' lives and paving the way for other women in the financing industry.

Every day, these women lead by example to live our values and achieve our mission of *simplifying access to capital*. We are incredibly proud to have them on the Accord Financial team.





Asset-Based Loans Equipment Financing Factoring Small Business Loans



LESLIE WARD
Accord Financial

eslie Ward is a senior client service manager at Accord Financial's US Asset Based Finance unit. With 20 years of professional experience in accounting and customer service, Leslie plays a vital role in the success of the client service team at Accord.

Leslie reviews the daily clients funding and processes the client's wires/ach transaction. Her duties include daily AR verification, establishing and restating credit for existing and new debtors with clients, client collections, establishing field exam and review reporting, assists with client account audits, and the onboarding of new clients which consists of AR verification, Initial funding, and Client web training.

In addition to her core duties, Leslie is an essential team member in conducting a comprehensive procedure review to identify key operations, then facilitate the design and implementation of those systems and processes to simplify our clients' access to capital. While working at Accord and raising two boys, Leslie earned a BA in business administration and management and a master's in management and leadership from Webster University.

"Leslie's drive for growth and excellence is evident in the workplace every day, and by her personal achievements of earning a bachelor's and master's degree while raising teenage boys and working full-time. Her 'grit' exemplifies our core values of Raising the Bar and Staying Curious," stated Accord US ABL president, Terry Keating.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Always be eager and ready to learn new tasks. Be open, no matter how big or small the job is. Focus on your strengths and don't be afraid to display your talents.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Don't be scared to speak up. No question or topic is too small. Don't be a pushover, but also be willing to accept criticism as this is an opportunity to help you grow.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I have had great mentors that led, guided, and mentored me throughout the years. They supported and inspired me through the years, all while passing along valuable lessons and information.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I truly enjoy my daily client interactions. I am able to build a rapport and gain their trust. They feel cared for and valued.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I try to prioritize my time and task. Work on the most timeconsuming tasks first and solicit help if needed. I know it's hard to stick to set work hours but set a cutoff time and stick to it. Take small breaks throughout the day just to breathe.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

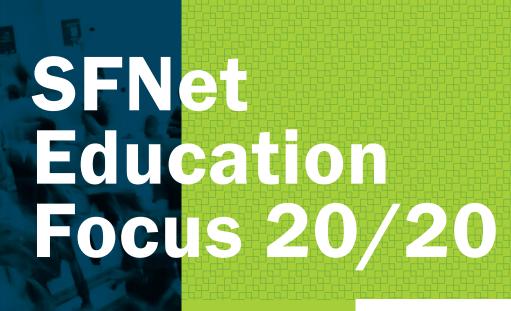
Since many women are working mothers, a strong work life balance is a must. Set a strict cut off time if work hours are extended. Proper training and continuing education are a must. Lastly, compensative and comparative wages to their male counterparts.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Working remotely hasn't affected my industry at all. We are able to perform the same tasks and duties as normal.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

With the COVID vaccine made readily available to the public, I believe the world will start opening/operating as normal. Travel bans will lift, schools will reopen, restaurants will lessen their restrictions, etc. and slowly but surely the world will go back to normal. Until everyone has received the vaccine and the numbers are semi-high, companies will work remotely to ensure the safety of their employees. However, I believe by the end of 1st Quarter 2022, everyone will be back in the office working as normal.



Networking
Industry data
Education
Advocacy

SFNet's new education program provides a well-rounded foundation for a successful career in secured finance. We have partnered with industry professionals to create classes across multiple discipline tracks, each with an eye to real-world application.

# Our program can be approached in one of two ways:

- Widen your focus: take all the core classes to develop a complete understanding of a specific product discipline
- 2 Streamline your focus: then choose the track most relevant to your functional goals

Visit SFNet.com and explore the Education section to learn more. If you have questions about Education Focus 20/20, contact Nora Walls at nwalls@sfnet.com.



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PATRICIA GOLDSON
Asset Based Lending
Consultants (ABLC)

atricia Goldson is a vice president and the national audit manager for Asset Based Lending Consultants (ABLC) located in Hollywood, FL. In this role, she leads a team of dedicated, professional, multilingual field examiners engaged in meeting the auditing needs of lenders nationally and internationally as well as providing monitoring services, fixed assets verification, business valuations and lender-to-lender reviews.

Patricia has over 17 years of experience in the ABL industry. Prior to working at ABLC, she worked as the chief information officer of an overseas mortgage company. She is conscientious, highly motivated, has a proven success in fast-paced deadline driven environments and thrives well in team-oriented settings. She holds a bachelor's degree in Management Studies with a major in accounting and a master's degree in Information Systems.

Patricia is actively involved in community social programs and is married to Aston Goldson.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played an important part in my career both as a mentor and a mentee. In 2002, I made a career switch from information technology to asset-based lending examinations and had the great fortune to be mentored by Don Clarke, who happens to be an industry leader. His mentorship helped me to successfully make the transition and, amongst other things, instilled in me a culture of wanting to learn something new every day. As I mentor, it gives me a sense of fulfilment when I see my mentees achieve their goals and in turn begin to mentor others.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Working remotely has impacted field examinations as it relates to the time taken to conduct these exams. Exams are taking longer as borrowers are challenged to provide the information in a timely manner with staff working remotely as well as some borrowers not giving priority to the field exam. This has resulted in scheduling issues. There is also the risk involved of not being able to physically verify the inventory included in the collateral. Test counts are compromised as they have either been postponed or are being done remotely, which has its challenges. Hopefully, as more persons are vaccinated, examiners will be able to safely resume site visits.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

In my opinion, post-pandemic work will continue to evolve. The pandemic has proven that more people can work from home and be productive than was previously thought. In fact, it is believed that productivity has increased as less time is spent commuting

and employees are able to focus on the work at hand.

Many jobs will become fully or partially transformed into digital jobs. This will require a revisit of traditional employment policies to address the widening digital gaps in the workplace as many employees still have not gained the necessary skills required in a digital economy. Research has revealed that people with low skills have been more impacted by the pandemic, and that women have been more impacted than men. Remote jobs will therefore continue so that parents and families, and women in particular, will be able to continue to work from home.

It must be noted that many employees miss the social interaction with their peers and would like to have the flexibility of a hybrid workweek, which allows them to be in the office for two or three days. Field examiners at some point need to be on site so they can literally "kick the tires and open the boxes." However, I think the time spent in the field will be shortened and restricted to inventory counts, clarifying grey areas with borrowers and examining sensitive data where necessary. Certainly, I feel that the borrowers will be lobbying for more desk-top examinations, which reduces the out-of-pocket expenses.

Air/business travel will be impacted as companies continue to utilize various platforms for remote meetings. The physical office space will shrink, resulting in a reduction in rent and other overheads, but will negatively impact commercial real estate.





JENNIFER CORAM

AmeriFactors Financial

Group, LLC

ennifer Coram is vice president of operations at AmeriFactors Financial Group, LLC. She joined the company in 2008 and has played a key role in helping the business grow exponentially through managing successful client funding. As the company has grown, Jennifer has been crucial in creating and maintaining integration between teams with extensive knowledge of all operational account-opening and funding phases.

Jennifer takes a holistic approach to addressing clients' financial needs and, because of her diverse and long-term experience with the company, she can offer creative solutions to clients' varied funding needs.

As a highly accomplished senior leader at AmeriFactors, Jennifer has also led the company operations on adapting to the COVID environment by updating operations, processes and making sure the staff has the right tools to keep safety first working from home or at the office. She has the talent and skills to step into any role at the company and handle situations not only as a leader, but also in day-to-day operations. This has been extremely helpful in keeping operations moving during COVID. Throughout her years at AmeriFactors, Jennifer has been a major part of ensuring client satisfaction, creative funding solutions and company growth.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

My advice would be to ask questions and learn from everyone that you can because no piece of information is too small. Always make yourself available for new roles and projects. Do not take criticism personally but, instead, learn from it. Be confident in yourself and don't apologize for your successes. To build a successful career, you need to put in a lot of time, effort and make yourself invaluable to your team. Once you do that, you will earn respect, build relationships and grow professionally in a manner that you can be proud of. Women can go far in any industry; we just need to not be afraid of putting in the hard work to get there.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Balance means something different to everyone. I think that on some days I am still trying to learn what my version of balance is. I think this varies from person to person and how they can manage their day-to-day stress. I do believe that having a balanced life makes you not only healthier, but more productive and happy, both in and out of work. For me, my career is extremely important so I have learned to be flexible and make myself available if someone from my team needs me. Priorities change all the time and through my experience I have learned to adapt to what is important for me in that moment. It is also extremely important to have a team around you, both at home and in the office, which is able to support you when needed.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

The commercial finance industry has already changed so much since I entered it several years ago. It is typically known as a male-driven industry and now each year more and more women are entering. It's exciting to see and be a part of it. I believe that the attraction to commercial finance has always been there for women, the pay and benefits have always been strong along with the chance to work for some amazing companies. Organizations just need to show women that we can grow within organizations and hold positions of "power" just like anyone else.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I most enjoy being able to work on my different projects throughout each day. It's nice to have diversity throughout each day and different challenges to work through all the time; no two days are the same. I also really like the team collaboration we have at my company. I find that it is always a positive experience to work with others and bounce strategies and ideas off each other. Least is hard to say because it's also something that pushes me, but it would probably be the days in which no matter how much you do, you cannot seem to get ahead. I thrive off of having a lot of responsibilities, but there are days where that can catch up to you.



ANGELA FIORENTINO
AmeriFactors Financial
Group, LLC

ngela Fiorentino is helping pioneer the way in-house attorneys can be utilized as a significant asset to financial firms. Angela is senior vice president/general counsel for AmeriFactors. She began her career as a stockbroker and later was chief compliance officer at a broker dealer. While working in the financial industry, Angela graduated cum laude with her degree in accounting.

After graduating cum laude with her J.D. degree, Angela began working for a Miami-based law firm where she handled complex commercial litigation and creditors' rights matters. She then joined a national law practice where she continued to handle complex commercial disputes and class action litigation. During her work as an attorney, she gained first-hand knowledge of the business and litigation risks financial firms face.

In 2017, Angela joined AmeriFactors. As general counsel, she handles all aspects of the company's legal needs. She develops creative solutions to help clients obtain the funding they need. When necessary, she utilizes her litigation experience to develop and execute collection strategies aimed at recovering funds on behalf of the company and its clients. Angela's work provides benefits not only to her company, but to her clients in minimizing risk and increasing revenue.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Ask many questions of colleagues and supervisors. Everyone - from all walks of life – has precious knowledge and insight to offer based on their own career or personal life experience. Talk to people, listen, and have an open mind.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I had internalized a strong belief in my abilities earlier. Objectively, someone looked at the available evidence and believed I was a good fit for the opportunity. And yet, I wasted a lot of time worrying about whether I deserved the opportunities that were provided to me and whether I could achieve what I perceived to be lofty standards. Sometimes, the simplest explanation is correct: If you work hard and achieve good results, people will take notice.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Some of my best mentorships have been unofficial relationships. I enjoy learning from other people. If I happen to develop a good rapport with someone, learning valuable lessons and tips from them happens naturally. It can be helpful for organizations to establish formal mentoring plans, but it is just as important – and perhaps more effective - for executives and others in positions of power to take an interest in all employees.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy getting to work as a team with people from different departments because I enjoy hearing other people's perspectives on a problem. When I worked for law firms, I only received the perspectives of other attorneys. I really like the diversity of ideas that comes with working as an attorney

for a company. We achieve great results for our clients and the company when the legal and business units develop solutions together and that is personally gratifying for me.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I commit to one task at a time and go "all in" on that one task, whether it is enjoying a moment with my family or friends or solving a problem at work. I try to put everything else out of my mind until the task I am completing is finished. Extraneous thoughts and feelings hinder productivity and the ability to be present in the moment.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Commercial finance organizations can encourage more interdepartmental and operational / executive-level socialization. Women value personal relationships and those relationships create loyalty to an organization. Women are also more likely to contribute thoughts, ideas and strategies in an environment where they feel supported and appreciated.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I think it depends on the job. For example, my job sometimes involves collection efforts aimed at obtaining payment for our clients. Often those efforts require hearings and depositions in which the ability to observe body language and physically interact can be helpful. It is more economical for me to attend these activities remotely, but I'm not sure we receive the same value when the issues are more complex. So, while I think organizations can and should continue to hold some informal meetings remotely, once in-person meetings are safe, organizations should carefully consider the added value of face-to-face meetings in some circumstances, even though this "value" may be less quantifiable.



SHADI ENOS JAHANGIR
Blank Rome LLP

hadi Enos Jahangir is a Partner in Blank Rome LLP's Los Angeles office and is a member of the firm's Finance, Restructuring and Bankruptcy practice group. Shadi has more than a decade of experience counseling clients in the areas of commercial lending and corporate finance. She represents financial institutions, leading private equity sponsors, and corporate borrowers in middle-market debt financing and investment-grade credits.

Her extensive experience includes widely syndicated, club and single-lender representation in connection with cross-border financings, restructurings, acquisition financings, recapitalizations, traditional asset-based lending facilities, and debt financings for technology companies. She also represents clients in senior-secured, first-lien/second-lien, mezzanine, unitranche, and unsecured financing transactions.

Shadi serves on the Board of Directors for *The Center in Hollywood*, an organization dedicated to ending homelessness and isolation in Los Angeles. She has also served on the board of The Financial Lawyers Conference and as an editor of the Commercial Law Newsletter for the American Bar Association.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Be authentic. Be yourself. It can sometimes feel challenging to work in an industry that is historically male-dominated. Should you try to be "one of the guys"? Should you try to be ultrafeminine? Should you try to be the most confident in the room or be a quiet studier of the crowd? My advice – just be you. Spend time figuring out who you are and what makes you tick. Then, embrace it. When you are comfortable in your own skin, you will be more confident, and confidence is magnetizing. If you are a sports nut and love talking about last night's game, that's great. If you are not (and, by the way, I am not), you don't need to try to learn the lingo and fake it. There are plenty of ways to meaningfully connect with people that don't involve sports. Have enough confidence to realize that you can build meaningful relationships with colleagues and clients, even if you don't fit a traditional stereotype.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has been instrumental in my professional development. I have been incredibly lucky to have had several people provide me meaningful and continued guidance throughout my career. In fact, to this day, I work alongside my amazing mentor who hired me out of law school, Tony Callobre. I have had the honor of working with Tony from my time as a summer clerk, through the ranks of an associate and now as a partner. From his guidance, I learned so much more than just the substantive area of finance law; I learned how to build and maintain a professional environment that is nurturing of others' goals. I feel it is my duty to help others in the way I have been helped throughout my career. As the saying goes, the rising tide lifts all boats.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

It is a marathon not a sprint. I was so eager to learn and improve as a young associate that I often took on too much work. I was fortunate not to have burned out, but there were a few times when I was headed in that direction. I now realize that, while we all have to work hard and dedicate time to perfecting our craft, it is also important to take a long-term view.

## What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

It certainly will be interesting to see what the working world looks like post-pandemic. Most of us are now very comfortable using Microsoft Teams, WebEx and other technology that allows us to stay connected while working remotely. Many of us have also enjoyed not commuting into the office. But, I think we all miss human interaction (in varying degrees) and there is no substitute for meeting clients in person. As such, I think companies will allow more flexibility to work remotely part time but there will be an emphasis on continued team building and collaboration.





Congratulations to our partner and friend **Shadi Enos Jahangir** on being named to *The Secured Lender* magazine's 2021 Women in Secured Finance.

Shadi is an accomplished and respected finance attorney with tremendous experience in commercial lending and corporate finance. Her commitment to the highest standards of achievement at work and in her community is outstanding.

We are very proud of Shadi as she is recognized by *The Secured Lender*.





LISA COLLIER
Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP

isa Collier is a partner in Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP's corporate practice group. Lisa's practice focuses primarily on advising commercial and investment banks in leveraged finance and asset-based lending transactions, including acquisition financings, leveraged buyouts, recapitalizations, bridge lending and loan commitments, and other secured lending transactions. She has represented the financing sources on a number of prominent acquisitions, including the acquisition of Multi-Color Corporation by LABL, Inc., an affiliate of Platinum Equity, the acquisition of SanDisk by Western Digital Corporation, the acquisition of RCN and Grande Communications by affiliates of TPG Capital, and the acquisition of EMC Corporation by Dell Inc.

Lisa has a broad range of financing experience in both domestic and cross-border transactions and has practiced in a variety of industries, including financial services, healthcare, media and communications, food services, retail, manufacturing, and technology.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Treat every professional experience as a training opportunity. While there is a lot to gain from formal training opportunities like continuing legal education sessions and similar programs, I've found that I've learned the most about my practice from my colleagues - and more importantly my clients - in the course of my day-to-day work. The best way to gain perspective on the legal and credit issues that are critical to our clients is from the feedback that we get in our daily interactions. These information-rich moments might include an issues list call with a client on a set of commitment papers or soliciting feedback from a lender group on a syndicated credit agreement. Every client is going to have a different history and different set of professional experiences that they bring to those discussions. Paying attention to their individual perspectives and approaches is a great way to become a well-rounded and thoughtful practitioner.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

My advice is to collect as many mentors as you can! Mentoring has played a huge role in my professional development. I consider a number of partners at my firm to be my mentors and seeing the unique ways that each of them approaches issues and practices has helped me develop my own professional style.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I thrive on the process of collaboration with clients, borrowers and other counsel, working together to find the right balance that will have everybody involved in a transaction walking away satisfied with the outcome. Finding such solutions for clients is always the most rewarding aspect of my practice. Those victories come in a variety of forms: negotiating a compromise when borrower's counsel is pushing for too aggressive terms in a document, meeting a tight timing deadline in connection with a leveraged buyout or helping a client pitch a creative structuring solution in the context of a refinancing. The biggest challenge is navigating the time pressures that often accompany high-profile transactions. But I think we all constantly surprise ourselves with what can be accomplished in even the most impossible sounding timeline – particularly when we approach the process with a flexible attitude and the ability to prioritize the aspects of a transaction that can take the most time.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I've found the key is recognizing that there is never going to be a perfect balance. We work in an industry that is driven by market cycles, so you have to recognize that there will be ups and downs from day to day and week to week and accept that for what it is. It is essential to take full advantage of the free time you have when it comes but, even during the busiest periods, I strongly recommend trying to find an hour or two for yourself every day to focus on the things that are important to you. And hopefully that change of perspective helps to reduce stress and restore equilibrium.



JULIANA OBREGON
Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP

uliana Obregon is counsel in the New York office of Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP where she focuses her practice on matters relating to Lending & Capital Markets. With more than 15 years at Cahill, Juliana has been a key member of the firm's ABL practice, helping drive Cahill's impressive growth during that period.

Juliana represents leading investment banks and commercial banks in connection with debt financings, including asset-backed loans, syndicated institutional loans, debt offerings, high yield bond offerings and exchange offers in connection with acquisition financings, leveraged buyouts, going-private transactions, recapitalizations, bridge lending and loan commitments, out-of-court restructurings and other financing transactions.

This broad practice has equipped Juliana to analyze different debt instruments and how they interact, protecting clients through their most complex multi-layered debt transactions, which often involve side-by-side ABLs, first/second lien term loans and/or secured and unsecured bonds.

Fluent in Spanish and French and with conversational Italian and Portuguese, Juliana puts her language skills to work on deals that span multiple international jurisdictions. She is also the mother of three girls.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I generally offer four insights to young women as they enter the firm.

First, love your trade. Enjoying your work makes it easier to show up, put in the hours and then excel. No matter how small the assignment, if you do it well, people will begin to trust you with more complex and meaningful assignments.

Second, I recommend associates be pro-active and take ownership of deals. Don't wait for a more senior attorney to ask for help completing certain closing deliverables. Show initiative and volunteer to get the ball rolling without an explicit request.

Third, don't miss the forest for the trees. When working on a complex credit agreement, it is easy to get bogged down in the weeds and miss the bigger picture. For instance, if you are asked to prepare a credit agreement schedule, don't just focus on the items listed on that particular schedule, but rather think through why the schedule is needed, the context where it is referenced and how it fits in the overall transaction.

Fourth, I try to help women find their voices. Numerous studies have examined how and when women speak-up at work – or don't. These findings resonated with me and I share the concepts with the female associates I work with. They helped me better understand how and when I might hesitate to speak – and serve as an important reminder to be assertive.

# What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy the substance of the work. Working with ABLs and other credit agreements is like building a complex puzzle, with various moving pieces. Every deal is interesting in its own, unique way, as you tailor each company's covenant package

to their specific business needs and industry and, in the case of ABLs, the borrowing base to each company's specific assets and operations. The negotiations are often a balancing act, where we aim to reconcile the views of our bank clients, who seek to mitigate the risk profile of debt instruments, and sponsors or companies, who seek to maximize their flexibility to operate with fewer restrictions. I also enjoy cross-border deals and the challenges resulting from having loan parties and subfacilities in different countries, with separate borrowing bases and with multiple asset classes across several foreign jurisdictions. Also, the constant evolution of what is "market" keeps the practice interesting.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I am a mother of three girls, so I have developed a few strategies to ensure I am getting quality time with them. First, I aim to be 100% focused during office hours so I can be as efficient as possible and get home at a reasonable hour to be with my daughters. Second, I live close to work, thus reducing my commute. In the COVID era, of course, I am commuting across the house to my laptop. And third, I work hard to maintain a schedule that consistently carves out time for my kids. I plan each day so that I can be there for the important moments of theirs, creating and maintaining important family rituals.



CAITLIN SANDERS
Callodine Commercial Finance

aitlin Sanders, managing director, is responsible for sourcing, originating and structuring new lending investments for Cal-I lodine Commercial Finance, a provider of asset-based loans to middle-market companies in the U.S. and Western Europe. Caitlin's coverage includes the New York, New England, and Midwest markets. Prior to joining CCF, Caitlin was responsible for underwriting, structuring, and portfolio management at its predecessor firm, Gordon Brothers Finance Company. Prior to joining GBFC in 2013, Caitlin was a senior analyst in Gordon Brothers' valuation group. Prior to joining Gordon Brothers in 2011, Caitlin was a fixed income credit analyst at Logan Circle Partners, LP, where she conducted fundamental research and relative value analysis for potential investments across the capital structure within the telecom, cable, media, technology and healthcare sectors. Caitlin began her career as a fixed-income credit analyst at Delaware Investments. She received her BA from the University of Pennsylvania.

Caitlin serves on the Leadership Council of the non-profit, Boston Scores. She lives in Wellesley, MA with her husband, Steve, and son, John.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Don't be afraid to be different. For the better part of my career, I have been one of two women and sometimes the only woman within my company. It is easy to feel the internal pressure to assimilate or not be seen as "different." What I would say to women beginning their careers in the commercial finance industry is that being different can be a benefit as well. When you're the only woman in a meeting or at a dinner, you are harder to forget. Use that to your advantage. Instead of sitting back and allowing others to control the conversation around you, contribute to that conversation.

I would also recommend seeking out other women in the industry, whether it be someone in a similar role, or someone who you engage with on a regular basis as you work through the deal process. I have found a great network of women in the Boston ABL market. We all have different backgrounds and professional roles, but we share a lot of similar experiences. We have lunch together, we golf together, and we have held consistent Zoom cocktail hours throughout COVID. Having a group of people who support you on both a personal and professional level is an invaluable asset.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

What I enjoy most about my role is the daily interaction with people both inside and outside of the industry. I spent eight years on the underwriting and portfolio management side of business, and it has been nice to expand upon the relationships formed during that time and to continue to make new ones. In my originations role, I spend most of my day seeking out new lending opportunities and introducing our product to potential borrowers. I believe that we have a best-in-class team, and I enjoy having the opportunity

to represent them in the market on a daily basis. I am also competitive by nature, so I enjoy the challenge of winning new business and doing my part to help the team succeed.

# How do you balance work/personal time?

Balancing work and personal time is an ongoing challenge. As women, we put incredible pressure on ourselves to do everything perfectly. Having support at home and in the office has been the key to my success. I am lucky to have a husband who has a similar professional role, so there is a basic understanding of how demanding the job is and what the expectations around work are. Our CEO has also been supportive in every aspect of my career and personal life. Having someone at the top who promotes a culture of work/life balance has been essential in allowing me to get to where I am in my career.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

It sounds simple, but having more women in senior roles will continue to make the industry more attractive to women. Some of the large banks have done an excellent job of retaining and promoting women. That is meaningful because those women serve as mentors to women both inside and outside of their institutions. While some firms may have a long way to go, the industry itself looks better every day.



# CONGRATULATIONS TO CAITLIN SANDERS!

We are honored to congratulate Caitlin Sanders for being recognized among The Secured Lender's "2021 Women in Secured Finance", and a valued member of the Callodine Commercial Finance team.

Caitlin is a true asset to the platform.



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ESSA THIRY
Change Capital

ssa Thiry is SVP of business development at Change Capital, a social impact-focused investor and capital provider based in New York and Los Angeles. She joined Change Capital 3.5 years ago, launched a new territory on the west coast, single-handedly established a strong presence in the region, and grew the customer base from next to zero to dozens of clients and millions of dollars in financing in a very short time period. Prior to joining Change Capital, Essa was a business development executive for Hana Financial, a large ABL and factoring provider in Los Angeles.

Essa is an active committee member for Face Forward International, a non-profit focused on providing life-changing surgery and support to victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and cruel acts of crime. She also serves as executive vice president of the Fashion and Retail Group of City of Hope, an organization that provides medical care for cancer patients throughout the country.

Essa is an active member of SFNet, serves on the board of the New York Institute of Credit's Women's Division, is an International Factoring Association So-Cal Chapter board member and Women's Committee head, a member of the Turnaround Management Association, the Association for Corporate Growth, and other commercial finance industry organizations.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Building a strong network is key for your personal success, as well as the success of your organization. Start by getting actively involved in local and national professional associations such as SFNet and consider joining or starting a mastermind group. Present your authentic self, I think that always resonates with people. Look for mentors. Never stop being curious, humble yourself and learn all you can. Continue educating yourself and improving your skillset. Build a reputation and personal brand you are proud of. Be proactive in looking for opportunities, advocate for yourself and for others, especially women and minorities. Come from a place of "yes", find the positive in everything, focus on solutions, not problems. Seek to identify personal responsibility in every situation; this will allow you to evaluate what is in your control, and that's powerful.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I feel very fortunate to work at an organization that has cultivated a really unique and supportive culture. We are all friends and working together is a little like working with family. Although I enjoy many aspects of my role at Change Capital, from the friendships I have made in the industry, to helping colleagues at partner firms close deals by filling shortfalls, and providing additional liquidity to their valued portfolio clients, what I love the most is helping great companies capitalize on opportunities. Especially because Change Capital is social impact-focused, I feel extraordinarily lucky to have so many amazing stories of women, minorities, and immigrants taking risks, working incredibly hard, and leveraging our capital to make their dreams come true, achieving the American dream for themselves, their families, and their employees.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I'm a big advocate of striving to achieve balance with everything in life. For me, that doesn't necessarily translate to not checking e-mails after a certain time. What that does mean, is fully embracing my whole self, as a mother, a professional, daughter, sister, friend, and woman who is passionate about her own goals and interests, and NOT FEELING GUILTY FOR IT! Balance sometimes means work will require 100% of my time and attention, and sometimes family or personal time will demand 100%. It may mean working late into the night after my daughter goes to bed so I can attend a mid-day school play or waking up early to make a class at the gym. Whatever it takes to meet and overcome challenges and maximize my and my family's life experience; consciously making choices that create a lifestyle that reflects our values. I try my best to be fully present in whatever role I'm in at any given time. One way to do that is to check in with yourself...where am I? Here. What time is it? Now. Find a support system, don't be afraid to delegate or ask for help, and don't forget to be a steadfast supporter and helper for others. Practice selfcare, make time for and nurture interests and hobbies that bring you joy. Not only will you be a more positive and patient parent, the more well-rounded you are and life experience you have, the more people you will find commonalities and connect with both personally and professionally.

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**DEBRA PUTZER**CIT

ebra Putzer is senior vice president in Credit Risk Management at CIT, where she holds dual leadership roles as chief client credit officer for CIT Commercial Services, a leading provider of factoring and financing, and as the senior credit officer for CIT's Asset-Based Lending group. In these roles, Debbie is responsible for the risk management of the loan portfolios as well as the approval of new business transactions.

A 30-year CIT veteran, Debbie has extensive experience in factoring and asset-based lending, with proven leadership capabilities in portfolio management, new business underwriting, corporate/regulatory compliance, problem loan management and field examination. Previously, Debbie was the senior portfolio manager of the Asset-Based Lending Group at Century Business Credit Corporation (now Wells Fargo Capital Finance). Early in her career, she became a Certified Public Accountant while working as an auditor with a mid-sized NYC-based accounting firm.

Debbie is active in the NYC Chapter of the Secured Finance Network and previously served on the boards of the Turnaround Management Association (NYC Chapter) and the Commercial Finance League. She graduated from the State University of New York at Albany with an accounting degree and also attended the Wharton Institute of Secured Lending.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

For women starting out in the industry, the best way to learn is to pay close attention to what your colleagues and other professionals do or say. Listen, observe and be engaged. Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for clarifications. Don't be afraid to speak up. Nothing can accelerate your learning curve faster than being an active, attentive listener.

Also, focus on networking to develop quality relationships, which can play a very meaningful role in helping you grow. Get involved in industry organizations like the Secured Finance Network and attend their networking and educational events whenever you can. Assetbased lending and factoring are relatively small industries and the number of women in these fields is even smaller. Make it a point to connect with the female professionals. I know I did, and today, years and years later, I keep running into the same women I met when I got my start. Relationships like those are important in the beginning, but they also will remain vital for years to come.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Over a career, you build a lifetime of experiences. You grow from all of them, and they shape you. Not all those experiences are good ones. There is a lot of risk in what we do, and things don't always turn out the way you hope they will. But you learn from both the positive and the negative. It all helps you grow and sharpen your knowledge and skills. That's what experience is all about. The goal is to treat every day as a learning opportunity and to realize that learning is a career-long process that never stops. I'm always learning. I'm always trying to grow.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

Without a doubt, collaborating with my colleagues is the best part of my job. My CIT colleagues are a wonderfully committed, smart, hard-working group of people. We've got a great mix of seasoned professionals working alongside sharp, young, upcoming professionals. The best way to be successful and to get to the right solution is to work together as a team. I feel very lucky that I have such a great group of colleagues to work with.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry?

It's been a remarkable year of tremendous challenges. We went from working fulltime in the office, traveling for business and networking to shutdown and working remotely. I never would have dreamed that we could have made such a seamless transition.

Looking back over the last year, I think the biggest impact has been how COVID affected the clients. Every business faced challenges of some kind – some more than others. Most survived but, unfortunately, a few did not. Interestingly, quite a few companies actually managed to improve their financial performance amid the pandemic as they implemented cost-cutting initiatives, accelerated their e-commerce build-out or introduced new products.

The enduring lesson from this pandemic is the need to maintain open lines of communications with clients and colleagues. While that's always important, it proved critical during the fast-changing business environment that evolved over the last year or so. Relationships that were solid going into this pandemic are even stronger now thanks to our commitment to ongoing communication.



# Strength. Leadership. Dedication.



Congratulations to Debra Putzer, senior vice president and chief client credit officer, on being included among The Secured Lender's Women in Secured Finance for 2021. We're proud to recognize both your dedication to our clients and your outstanding achievements.

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JESSICA BENEVIDES-CARON
Citizens

essica Benevides-Caron is senior vice president and portfolio manager team leader for Citizens. Based in Boston, Jessica is responsible for the asset-based lending portfolio in the northeast, including the retail finance team. In this role, she leads a team of portfolio professionals responsible for managing \$4 billion of asset-based lending credit commitments. The team serves clients in a wide range of industries, including retail, manufacturing and diversified wholesalers in the middle market and large corporate segments.

Jessica joined the ABL portfolio management team at Citizens in 2016 and took on the responsibilities of team leader in 2018. Prior to joining Citizens, Jessica served in various roles across underwriting and portfolio management functions with First Niagara, Wachovia and Fleet Bank. Her leadership, including mentoring and training, is an integral part of the development of the credit analysts on her team. Her involvement in the Citizens Commercial Banker Development Program also provides the group the ability to recruit and develop this talent.

Jessica has a bachelor's degree in accounting from Bryant University. She currently lives in the Boston area with her husband and their two children.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

It's important to use your voice. Ask the difficult questions, give your opinion, and stay authentic. Sometimes women have a different perspective, and we may approach problem solving and conflict resolution in a different way. It's important to have different perspectives when you are trying to make tough decisions. Your opinion matters and it can be impactful.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Work with people you respect and enjoy spending time with. Typically, you spend 10 hours a day with your team, and a positive work environment can be extremely important for your mental and physical health. I truly believe people do not leave bad jobs; they leave bad bosses. Throughout the course of my career, I've had the good fortune to work on fabulous teams with amazing individuals. As evidenced by this last year, banking can be stressful at times and your quality of life is better if you like and respect your teammates.

# How do you balance work/personal time?

This is a very timely question, given what we just experienced during the pandemic! During the last 12 months, I felt torn between working from home, managing my team, tackling home schooling and squeezing in personal time. It can be difficult to give 100% to any task when you're spread so thin. Give yourself some grace and live in the moment.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Flexibility is key to attract and retain women in commercial finance.

As a wife and a mom of two children, it has always been difficult to juggle the demands of my career and my life at home. Over the course of my career, my best experiences have been with managers who understood the importance of work/life balance, and they allowed me the flexibility I needed to maintain that balance. With their support, I was able to thrive. Another critical component is career path. The organization needs to have a supportive culture and show women there are opportunities for growth.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

The pandemic has been a blessing and a curse in so many ways. During the first few weeks of the pandemic, it was amazing to see how fast our team could transition from full in-person to almost full remote. Technology was able to support the transition, and my team did not miss a step. We stayed in constant communication and utilized video conferencing tools to maintain the connection. In my opinion, the key to working remotely is open and frequent communication and trust. It's important to pick up the phone, make sure each team member understands the ultimate goal, and how to achieve it. It's also important for leaders to trust their team and know they will deliver a quality work product.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I expect a hybrid work environment will be the "new normal" in the post-pandemic world for many companies. While person-toperson contact will always be important, I believe leaders across the industry will use the insight gained during the pandemic to reimagine how (and where) work is done.



# READY TO LEAD. READY TO INSPIRE.



Citizens Commercial Banking celebrates Jessica Benevides-Caron for her ability to mentor and inspire the next generation of leaders while working with mid-size and large corporate clients. Congratulations to Jessica and all of the inspiring women recognized.

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NICOLE KARCHENSKY
Dopkins ABL
Consulting Services

icole Karchensky, CPA, is manager of field examinations for Dopkins ABL Consulting Services, where she is recognized for her leadership in coordinating and servicing client relationships to ensure the overall success of each engagement. In addition, she is responsible for providing training, mentorship and coaching to the Firm's team of field examination professionals. Through her communication and proactive client service, her great work and dedication to her clients has resulted in stronger client relationships. Nicole plays a critical role in the Firm's development of internal field examination policies, procedures and best practices. As a result, Nicole continues to be instrumental in the growth of Firm's reputation as an industry leader of providing high-quality field examinations to the ABL industry.

Nicole began her career at Lakelet Advisory Group, where she focused on complex business valuations, business optimization, turnaround and restructuring engagements. Nicole received her Master of Science in forensic accounting, summa cum laude, from the State University of New York at Albany, and her Bachelor of Science, double-majored in accounting and finance, summa cum laude, State University of New York at Fredonia.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

My first piece of advice for women in any industry is just to be yourself – do not change who you are to fit a "mold" that doesn't exist. After that, my best piece of advice is just to keep asking questions and never stop trying to learn. You are going to be surrounded by years of knowledge and experience from your peers and colleagues; they are the best resources you could have. No one knows everything, and no one is expected to know everything! The knowledge you will gain from just talking to your colleagues and asking questions alone is the easiest way to grow.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has been absolutely crucial in my personal development – I guarantee I would not be where I am today without the support that I have received along the way. Every step of the way I have been surrounded by individuals who were invested in my success, challenged my abilities, and supported my growth. I strive every day to give that same kind of support to my team around me.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I had understood the value of making mistakes – it would have saved me a ton of energy and stress over the years! Looking back on my career, it was actually the times where I missed something that I learned the most, and they actually led to better and stronger relationships.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Without a doubt my favorite part of my job is working with my team! I'm lucky to be surrounded by a talented group of professionals who are always improving themselves and surprising me. Least favorite would be the necessary paperwork and admin tasks.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

This past year has been a real challenge, given the necessary changes needed to function during a global pandemic. From an industry standpoint, remote collateral field examinations have been difficult as companies themself adjust to the remote work. Collateral field examinations tend to take longer as information flow slowed down. Ultimately, this led to stronger relationships with our clients as we were inadvertently forced to talk to them more, and work through all of the bumps together.

From a personal level, the ability to work remotely has been incredibly beneficial for my career. My family had an unbelievable opportunity to spend the entirety of 2020 living in Japan. Being able to work remotely made it possible for me to continue with my career during that time. Working remotely abroad had its own challenges, primarily associated with the 14-hour time difference I had from my colleagues. But I work with an incredible team who was willing to work with me to have either early morning or "after hour" meetings at times which weren't too obscure for either party to ensure that we were continuing to meet our clients' needs.

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JAIME GILLESPIE
eCapital

aime is a seasoned professional with over 20 years' experience in the financial services industry. Her previous roles include customer service leadership, project and change management and, for the last 10 years, she has held numerous human resources roles, in addition to establishing her own leadership coaching and consultancy firm. She joined eCapital in 2018 as human resources manager and was promoted to chief human resources officer in 2021.

In her role, Jaime is responsible for managing the alignment of the company's newly expanded workforce and cyclical human resources programs including engagement, performance and compensation. Jaime is a certified coach with the Gallup organization and has introduced a variety of strengths-based people practices to the organization to help identify and foster the diverse talents of our employees. As the voice of eCapital's workforce, she encourages open, regular communication across the organization. Jaime works closely with executive leadership to ensure that every eCapital employee is empowered to use their talents to reach their goals, has the right tools to complete their tasks, and works in an environment that is optimized for best performance.

Jaime is a graduate of the Business Administration program from George Brown College and studied human resources at the University of Toronto.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

It can be challenging for women to feel confident and secure in an industry traditionally dominated by men. Know your strengths, have a clear set of goals and don't let intimidation impact your desired career path. It is important to approach your career as a journey on which you will learn, grow and develop your talents and expertise. Focus on what inspires you, approach each step in your career as an opportunity and build upon your experiences as you progress.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Work/life balance is so important. As you can imagine, this is a key area of focus for my team in promoting a healthy work environment at eCapital. We encourage practices such as scheduled breaks throughout the day and taking care of yourself, whether that's taking a walk during lunch, joining the company's guided meditative breathing break on Thursdays or socializing with co-workers during a team-building event. Personally, I find that planning ahead is extremely helpful. At the beginning of each week, I take the time to prioritize my tasks, personal and professional. What do I need to accomplish? What adjustments can I make if the list is too overwhelming? We all need to be easier on ourselves. Achieving balance is not easy, but if you focus on manageable tasks and set expectations, it is possible.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Attracting and recruiting more women to the secured finance industry is vitally important to promote diversity of thought and

ensure our industry strives toward more equal representation. We need to reflect the diverse clientele our industry serves. At eCapital, more than half of our leadership roles are filled by women. This is a statistic we are extremely proud of. To encourage more women to join the industry, I believe it is important to actively promote women in financial leadership roles and to provide more opportunities for thought-leadership and collaboration, such as SFNet's Women in Secured Finance events. The more organizations show that there are a multitude of opportunities for women in finance, the more women will feel encouraged to join us.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Now that remote work has been normalized, I think it will remain a viable option depending on an individual's role and responsibilities. Some teams work best when in close proximity to each other, allowing them to feed off the energy and creativity of the group. For other roles, working from a home office connected to company networks and communication tools ensures productivity. There is no doubt that increased flexibility will become part of our post-pandemic work culture. To what degree remains to be seen. But if we can attribute any positives to the pandemic, it has taught us that we can adjust to what were unthinkable circumstances and has proven that our technology has evolved to the point where we have options when it comes to our approach to work.



# The team at eCapital brings it. Every. Single. Day.

Thank you to all of the amazing women in the finance industry for their contributions.

At eCapital, we are one team with a singular goal:

# Empowering companies by accelerating their access to capital.

Through our confidence, experience, persistence and determination, we work to achieve this together.

# **Congrats!**

# **Julie Gaines**

SVP, Business Development Officer

# Jaime Gillespie

Chief Human Resources Officer

# **Tracy Groves**

Chief Marketing Officer

# **Mary Ann Hudson**

EVP, Managing Director





JULIE GAINES

eCapital Commercial Finance

ith over 30 years of experience in financial services, Julie is proud to facilitate solutions for eCapital Commercial Finance as SVP, business development officer. Serving SMBs across multiple industry sectors, Julie leverages eCapital's vast financial resources, advanced technology and innovation to provide customized alternative financing solutions to undercapitalized businesses. No matter whether the business is in manufacturing, staffing or any other market, Julie is committed to supporting clients' financial needs with fast, easy-to-manage solutions.

As an experienced entrepreneur, she has lived the life of the business owner and understands the challenges of running your own company. This familiarity is the root of her passion for providing growth capital solutions to companies at all stages of their lifecycle. For Julie, helping businesses thrive by accelerating their access to capital is better than having that first cup of coffee in the morning.

Offering a range of scalable benefits, Julie works with the eCapital team to create customized financial solutions to complex problems. To her great satisfaction, she develops long-term relationships with clients as their business grows.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

As you know, Rome wasn't built in a day. Likewise, building a career is a long-term process full of challenges, some setbacks and worthwhile accomplishments along the way. Roll up your sleeves, be prepared to do the work and have the patience knowing that women can (and do!) succeed in the secured finance industry. The best advice I can offer to anyone just starting out in the secured finance industry is to learn the business from experienced professionals, those that have charted their own path to success. Don't be afraid to ask lots and lots of questions, show initiative and, most importantly, always be learning.

# What role has mentoring played in your career?

There is great power in mentoring and being mentored; it truly can have a life-long impact on both parties. Role models and mentors have been at the forefront of my professional success. These are the people from whom I continue to learn and grow every day. Mentorship has enabled quicker advancement, greater earning potential and more job satisfaction. I believe that the best mentors are those that ask lots of pertinent questions to help guide you to your own solutions. A positive mentoring relationship provides additional insight, constructive observations and thought-provoking conversations to help you grow. As a role model, we are all here to help each other succeed.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Having personal experience as a small business owner, I fully understand the challenges, frustrations and rewards of running your own business. Too often, the financial constraints that

business owners face become their greatest pain point and largest obstacle holding them back from success. What I enjoy the most is the role reversal I now perform. Instead of facing these obstacles, I now am in a unique position to provide creative and alternate financial solutions that will allow businesses to thrive. Providing a pathway to success by presenting business owners with a flexible working capital solution is tremendously satisfying. And, I know everyone says this, but there is truly nothing about my role that I don't love. Helping people and businesses succeed is so rewarding.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Balancing work and personal time are a challenge in almost any career, but enjoying job satisfaction is a huge advantage to establishing a healthy and happy lifestyle. With secured finance, it's great to be able to combine the passions I have in my career and weave them into my personal life. Some days it's less balanced than others, but I've found what works for me.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

The alternative lending space is rapidly growing as a mainstream financial solution for undercapitalized businesses. The challenge for our industry is to have the financial backing and human resources to keep pace with market demand. Bringing awareness to the opportunities that lie ahead for young women entering the financial industry is essential. Recruiting more women right out of college and providing opportunities to grow within an organization will be a definite step forward in this endeavor.



TRACY GROVES
eCapital Corp.

racy is the chief marketing officer for eCapital. In this role she leads the development and execution of corporate and divisional marketing and communications activities across all operating business units.

Working with a team of communications professionals and external specialists, Tracy ensures that the key messages articulated through our mission, vision and values are brought to life in a unique and relevant "eCapital way." Blending data and current technologies with innovative thinking, Tracy guides her team with clarity of purpose to elevate the company brand. Ensuring eCapital's voice is authentic, she pushes for honest representation of the brand to resonate across all marketing channels. A strong believer in "we are stronger together," she encourages collaborative team effort in all tasks. Tracy's ongoing strategies and communications leadership positions eCapital as a leading provider of alternative lending solutions.

Tracy is a results-driven practitioner with 25 years of marketing expertise. Prior to joining eCapital in 2013, Tracy led the marketing programs team at Sage, a global computer software company. Tracy holds a degree in marketing from Capilano University.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Trust yourself; you're smarter than you think. Establish a strong work ethic and work hard; this is what will really separate you from the pack. Early on in your career, it's important to give your boss what they ask for – and then a little more! Follow this through by doing what you say you're going to do. You'd be surprised how much this will make you stand out.

Above all, build strong relationships and surround yourself with good people. Relationships are key to a successful career and collaboration is powerful. Keep learning – from self-education, from others and most importantly from a mentor. If you set goals and take steps every day to make them happen, there is no limit to what you can accomplish.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

What I love best is seeing the impact that our services have on our clients' successes and that what we do truly makes a difference. We hear from clients all the time about how they couldn't have done it without our support. They feel like we are an extension of their team. Our financial support and guidance are critical to these businesses; their success is our success.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I would never have guessed that working remotely would have such a positive impact on my teams. As a very tech-driven company, we were fortunate to have the infrastructure in place before the pandemic which enabled us to transition 400+ employees to remote working seamlessly. I have team members all over the

U.S. and Canada and, in a way, everyone being remote brought us closer together. We quickly adapted to new environments (kids and dogs included) and video calls have become the norm. This style of working has enhanced our ability to collaborate and enabled our employees to support the needs of their families in these unprecedented and demanding times.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I don't think remote work at the scale we have been subjected to over the past year will become the new norm, but I do believe it will survive as a new standard. Some markets are dependent on mobility and communion such as service industries, live entertainment, sports and many more. For these industries, social distancing and remote work can't end soon enough. For others, the benefits of remote work are too valuable to do away with completely. Our business has grown substantially in a very short time — enlarging our work force with skilled and talented people is no longer complicated by limiting the pool of candidates to local personnel. Instead, we now have the ability to tap into highly specialized talent, no matter where they are physically located. This is a tremendous advantage as eCapital continues to grow the organization to meet customer demand.



MARY ANN HUDSON eCapital

n what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, Mary Ann, EVP, managing director, stands out as a leader in alternative lending to the transportation industry. She has been a true pioneer within this niche market with almost three decades of managerial, operational and digital application development experience. Her primary focus has been to provide easy-to-access financial services designed for busy owner operators on the go. This effort has played a critical role in challenging the status quo and driving radical change within the transportation space. Mary Ann's success is rooted in a thorough understanding of the needs of the trucking industry. Active in many transportation-focused organizations, including American Trucking Associations and the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, she developed a clear perception of the needs of her target audience. Mary Ann continues to capitalize on this in-depth knowledge to maintain her leadership role in the quickly advancing industry of alternative lending.

Prior to joining eCapital, Mary Ann served over 14 years as the head of Transportation at Bibby Transportation Finance and 13 years with COMDATA Network Inc. In these roles, she provided hundreds of millions in financing to companies that primarily do business while on the road. Mary Ann studied management information systems at Hopkinsville Community College.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy being dedicated to solution-focused efforts that lead to positive results; it generally leads to strong relationships anchored in mutual trust. Being knowledgeable, thorough in preparation and forward-thinking in approach is empowering as you go about your day. Over the years, I have been fortunate to have worked with some very talented individuals in the alternative lending industry from all over the world. This experience has deepened my ability to be responsive and adaptive to the financial needs and situations of eCapital's transportation clients. From this advantage, I'm able to forge long-term relationships with our transportation clients who depend on reliable funding to support business growth and remain sustainable. Being recognized as a trusted advisor is very enjoyable.

It sounds cliché, but there really isn't anything I don't like about my role. My greatest frustration is just not ever having enough time in the day to get everything done!

### How do you balance work/personal time?

We live in an ever-changing and fast-paced world, and balancing work and personal time is more challenging than ever with today's technologies and social platforms that allow you to be "connected" all the time. Finding the right balance is important to help you stay focused on each area of your life. Discipline, structure and having the ability to compartmentalize the various activities of your busy life is key to finding balance. When it comes to your work, prioritize and organize your days as much as possible. Then, take your PTO or vacation days and use them to engage in the activities that uplift you — giving yourself plenty of time to recharge is an important aspect of maintaining your overall balance between work and personal time. This way you can be more focused in all aspects of your life.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

The pandemic has forced change upon change, creating a lot more flexibility in how people and organizations manage their work duties. Whereas, expansive brick-and-mortar office space was once the necessity of large organizations, this is now no longer the case. eCapital serves an essential service industry — trucking has been critical for keeping the nation's food and medical supplies in reaching their needed destinations. Daily access to working capital is vital to keep these trucks moving. Despite the massive disruptions across all levels of infrastructure and services, reliable same-day funding to our trucking clients has remained seamless and uninterrupted. This is due to our robust technologies and dedicated teams. To gain and retain talent in the industry, a form of hybrid work weeks will undoubtedly become the norm. I believe we now live and work in a world where former obstacles are no longer barriers to innovative organizations. Technology-driven companies like eCapital will continue to move forward while traditional companies will suffer. This is where I feel fortunate to be involved in a technologically advanced industry where innovation is at the forefront of all that we do.



LAUREN SAGLAMER

auren Saglamer is the portfolio manager at FGI. She's a proven leader in international asset-based lending with a track record of success in portfolio relationship management and client services. She rose in the ranks at FGI over the last 13 years, building the infrastructure for the firm's operations team.

Lauren relentlessly pursues client excellence. She takes the initiative to understand each client and the challenges their industries face, providing solutions tailored to their unique needs. Lauren has been responsible for overseeing execution of key client renewals at FGI, playing a vital role in negotiating refinancing terms and serving as a liaison through the legal process. She manages a global team of account executives – a team that was pivotal in protecting the portfolio of financed assets during an unprecedented time, given the impact of COVID on businesses. She did this all while being a new mother and serving as a mentor for soon-to-be graduates at her alma mater, Pace University.

Lauren is not only a respected leader among her peers and senior leadership at FGI, but she is an industry insider in cross-border financing and will continue to be a trailblazer.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

It is okay to take a beat. I think women put an enormous burden on ourselves to respond quickly, and to have perfect recall of every detail. You'll burn out if you hold yourself to this standard. It's not a sign of weakness to say, "Can I get back to you?" so you can give yourself time to think through complex situations and craft a thoughtful response with accurate data.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

It has been instrumental. I've never been formally mentored, but I've been fortunate to come across a select few people in my career who have taken the time not only to teach me, but to advocate for me. I've learned about commercial finance, sure, but they've also taught me to speak-up for myself, how to highlight my skill set, and to remind me of my value. They made sure my accomplishments were recognized and invested in me staying stimulated and contributing to the firm on a bigger level.

As a manager, I strive to pay this forward at every opportunity, intentionally working to create a supportive and uplifting environment that will ideally encourage my team to continue the tradition as they become more senior.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

My most rewarding moments have always come out of the opportunities to teach or to be a source of guidance. This has come in the form of training new hires, strategizing with my colleagues, or easing the worries of a concerned client. I've also been fortunate enough to be a part of a firm that has entrusted me with some really fun assignments over the years

- like opening the FGI office in Florida and building the new operations team there.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Working remotely has come with significant personal and professional sacrifice, particularly for working mothers in our industry. If somebody told me a year ago that I would survive working from home every day with my young son, balancing clients and caretaking throughout the day – I would have laughed. Slowly, but surely, we made the impossible possible. For me, that looked like logging back on at night to make sure I was caught up with my work and raising my hand to ask for help when I really needed it the most. The conversations that I used to have with my team by swiveling around in our chairs now had to be coordinated across our calendars just to get on the phone. We leaned heavily on each other to navigate this new infrastructure and I was able to witness some really incredible growth both in myself and everyone around me.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

The landscape has changed for certain. I cannot foresee us going back to the full-time grind of long days in the office and time-consuming commutes, when we now know what we can achieve from home – particularly with technological advances we're seeing. From an economic standpoint, businesses see the benefit of smaller office spaces, lower overhead, and luring geographically diverse talent. Having a hybrid structure or going fully remote gives employees a flexible schedule, really making them feel like that elusive work/life balance may finally be within their grasp.



AUBRIE DE SYLVA
FrontWell Capital Partners

ubrie De Sylva is a vice president, originations at FrontWell Capital Partners. An experienced finance professional with over 10 years of originating new deals and ongoing deal management, she has been with FrontWell since inception and has been involved in almost every single aspect of developing a growing business and fund, from origination efforts, marketing and CRM implementation.

She was a former SVP and relationship manager with Bank of America Merrill Lynch in Canada from 2017 to 2020 and a director in Corporate Banking with HSBC from 2016 to 2017, starting her career at Scotiabank in 2011 to 2016. Aubrie holds a MBET from the University of Waterloo and is a certified management consultant.

With a multitude of personal achievements outside her professional occupation, she is a breast cancer survivor and board director. An accomplished national-level track cyclist who has trained with the Canadian National Team, she competes as a semi-professional road cyclist with Girondins de Bordeaux Cyclisme Feminine. Additionally, Aubrie is a current vice chair on the Board of Directors for the Ride to Conquer Cancer, benefiting the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, and was previously a director at Large for Cycling Canada, overseeing fiscal policy, strategy and governance.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Learn as much as you can from senior figures in your organization. While I am a fan of firsthand experience being the best teacher, a well-tenured bank of knowledge is a close second. More often than not, a firm's intellectual and human capital are its greatest asset.

guidelines for myself around work/life balance at home – it's far too easy to sit down with dinner and say to yourself, "I'm just going to read a few articles and send out a few emails"; two hours later you're still at your computer and have sacrificed time or responsibilities from your personal life. I've had to focus on smart working, and delegating tasks so I don't take it all on myself.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I knew the importance of first impressions and building relationships during those first few years. Too often with technology, and especially now during virtual and remote working, relationships can appear relatively transactional – you want longstanding relationships that you've worked on, with individuals you will work with or for throughout your career. Those are the people you'll lean on in the 11th hour when things are tough – those people are the ones who matter the most.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

You've got to prioritize what's most important to you. I literally sit down in my home office on Sunday afternoons and write a schedule for my week with my must-haves and non-negotiables. Be selfish with your personal and rest time as well; you can't pour from an empty cup.

What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

We've all felt the pressure to be "on" when not in the office. It's certainly been a challenge for me, but I've had to set pretty strict

# THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN FINANCE AND OPPORTUNITY



**FrontWell Capital Partners** is a private credit fund focused on providing transitionary senior debt financing to middle-market companies in the United States and Canada. Our product offering includes asset-based revolving credit facilities and senior secured, cash flow and asset-based term loans, and we actively engage in special situations in the form of bridge loans, rescue financing, secondaries, portfolio acquisitions, debtor-in-possession (DIP) financings, liquidity relief loans and structured loans.



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info@frontwellcapital.com 416-613-8111



ASHTON BENNETT FSW Funding

Ashton Bennett is the director of operations at FSW Funding where she manages the asset-based and factoring portfolio. She is responsible for implementing and driving efficiencies, reducing areas of risk, and maintaining client relationships. In this role, she leads a team of portfolio analysts who manage the day-to-day client relationships and portfolio monitoring for a wide range of asset-based lending transactions. Ashton started with FSW in May 2017 as a portfolio analyst while finishing her undergraduate degree in finance and economics at Grand Canyon University.

Most recently, Ashton's attention to detail and problem solving was instrumental as FSW converted the factoring and loan portfolio to a new SaaS platform. She managed the 9-month project and was responsible for automating many of the operational processes, which have since increased productivity and efficiency.

Ashton also started FSW Pays It Forward, which was created to support local organizations that keep communities strong, diverse, and vibrant. FSW Pays It Forward is committed to making a difference in Arizona through volunteering, fundraising, and donations. Ashton organizes team events to raise money for local charities. Ashton is an active member of Women in Secured Finance and SFNet Young Professionals.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

For women just starting in the industry, focus on learning as much as you can in the beginning and then, when possible, seek out more responsibility. It can be easy to become complacent in a role, to merely focus on given tasks and nothing else, but that can quickly lead to burning out. Real professional growth is active and gradual. It takes place by consistently going above and beyond the standards, thereby differentiating yourself from those around you. There will always be opportunities to learn more, which means there will always be opportunities to grow. That is why I suggest assigning yourself professional goals and writing them in a journal. Then revisit them throughout the year to ensure you remain on track, holding yourself accountable. It's the small steps that you take early in a career that set the tone for your future.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Finding the right mentor, someone that you respect and trust, is critical to your professional development. There will be difficult times throughout your career. You will be uncertain how to make the right choice. Lean on your mentor in those moments. Share openly with that person. Ask for help when it is needed. That is what I have with my mentor and it has been invaluable. She inspires me both professionally and personally. I can honestly say that I would not be at this point in my career without her today.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Finding the right balance will be different for everyone and finding it will be one of the biggest challenges you face. You may have a desire to solely work harder and longer hours to differentiate yourself

from those around you. That's understandable. But also understand that choice comes at the sacrifice of your personal growth. Both professional and personal development must happen for you to advance in your career. Just find the right balance. Find activities that allow the opportunity to decompress from the stressors inherent to our work, while also challenging you as an individual. For example, I participate in CrossFit because it challenges me both physically and mentally. And the same can be said for running, which I either do outside with friends and colleagues or on my home treadmill. Both have proved to be useful outlets for everyday stress.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

It is our responsibility, as women, to help develop and encourage other women for future success. We need to mentor young women at the workplace, engage with them in the classroom, and create discussions with them on social media. Right now, there are opportunities to mentor young women in our industry. We need to take advantage of that. We need to be active in organizations, like SFNet, that allow us to connect with one another for advice and leadership. We need to connect with universities where we can provide internships, shaping the careers of young women. The more exposure women receive early in their careers, the better their development will be. If we are there for each other, each of us will find success in our own way.



TAMMY KEMP
Garrington Group
of Companies

ammy Kemp is the chief credit officer for the Garrington Group of Companies. An industry veteran with 25 years of experience in growing loan portfolios, leading teams and delivering client-focused lending solutions.

Working exclusively in entrepreneurial companies provided Tammy with the opportunity to learn from the ground up, working as a field examiner, collateral analyst, underwriter, special accounts manager, through to leading realizations and portfolio management.

Most recently, as the CCO at the Garrington Group, Tammy is focused on sourcing and using technology as a means of providing valuable portfolio performance data across multiple and diverse lending portfolios. Recognizing that while asset-based lending will always be a people-focused industry, technology has the power to amplify access to data and ideally provide teams with meaningful information, allowing them to ask timely questions and better identify trends.

Tammy has a passion for building relationships and believes that a strong bond between clients and lenders, coupled with an engaged and empowered portfolio management and underwriting team, is key to risk mitigation and portfolio growth.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Start with a mindset of flexibility coupled with a willingness to learn and a spirit of dedication.

Setting goals is also so important, both for the long term as well as for the short and medium term.

Five-year goals are great for setting a vision; however, there is real value in setting quarterly objectives and annual goals as signposts along the way. Do not forget to look up and outward, checking in with yourself along the way. We can get focused on the "what" and forget about the "why." The "why" is what keeps us motivated.

Be flexible and open to different opportunities. Working smartly, being focused, and following your own career path is important, but there can be value in taking a detour. Particularly if it offers an opportunity to work with a different team or individual you may admire.

Early in my career, I wish I had focused on getting more involved in collaborative opportunities, especially with other teams or departments. Exposure to other management styles and working with different people can really accelerate learning and growth.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Be an advocate for yourself.

Checking in with trusted colleagues or mentors formally or informally is a great way to calibrate where you are. I found it difficult to really assess where I was in relation to my goals. I was focused, but found it difficult to see the bigger picture. Having a trusted resource to help with that earlier would have been beneficial.

I added the word "trusted" deliberately; advice and feedback can come from lots of places and in many different forms, curating this advice is vitally important. Not all advice is equal; be true to yourself and your goals.

Be willing to fail, and when it happens, embrace it. It really is true; we learn more from our failures than success.

## What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

When we were all together in an office, we could see each other's faces, each other's body language. We knew when a colleague was engaging a client in a tough conversation, was struggling with a client's borrowing base or if they were grappling with a personal matter

In the office we could support each other almost instantly with a smile or a chat over coffee; that immediate connection and support is gone.

The shift from in-person to virtual from a technical funding perspective, was relatively painless. The hard part, I think we discovered, is how to make new or maintain significant connections, absent face-to-face meetings.

As a leader, finding new ways to meaningfully connect with the team as well as clients has been challenging.

Flexibility, transparency and clarity in how and when we communicate has been key to nurturing our relationships with each other as teammates as well as entrenching our relationships with clients.

Longer term, I think the work we have done and the way we have solidified our relationships will have a lasting impact and will deepen our connections with our teammates and with our clients.



AUGUSTA MELENDEZ
Gerber Finance

ussie heads up marketing and business development activities for Gerber Finance, encompassing all lead generation through digital marketing, brand awareness and public relations, as well as client development. Under her marketing leadership, the company has announced several new divisions, including Naturally Gerber, focused on the natural products industry, a substantial growth area for Gerber. She additionally leads culture for the organization and runs the company's philanthropic work through the Gerber Finance Foundation, which is committed to supporting communities by providing relief from food insecurity.

With a background in psychology, training and counseling, she brings a unique, purpose-driven and collaborative approach to all she does. She has held various marketing roles throughout her career, and also served as a school counselor.

Gussie holds a BA from Georgetown University, an MSEd from Fordham University and she is a board member for Hope Community Services. A mom of three and a former D1 college lacrosse player, Gussie enjoys being outside with her family and now coaches one of her children's lacrosse team in her spare time.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

This industry is full of amazing women and men who are willing to share their experiences and knowledge. Take advantage of the time you can spend with colleagues and contacts who are eager to share! Ask questions and be open about areas in which you feel you need to learn more and expand your understanding. If you are given an opportunity to try something new, attend an event, or do something out of your comfort zone, take it! You may not feel you are ready but, if someone gives you the opportunity, they likely think you are.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I have had the privilege to be mentored at Gerber by outstanding leaders. Jennifer Palmer and Gerald Joseph took a chance on me as I learned the industry. We are a close-knit team at Gerber, and colleagues are always willing to share knowledge and ideas or collaborate to work through a challenge. I am thankful to be part of a supportive culture and learn from mentors who lead by example, and I intend to pay it forward.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I genuinely love my job. I learn something new every day. As head of marketing, I am involved with clients, deals and networking. My work on company culture and the Gerber Finance Foundation allows me to use my counseling and psychology background to collaborate with co-workers and the community. I am so appreciative of the chances I have to be a part of a group that makes a difference both in finance and in the world.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

This year has given new meaning to work-life balance! My colleagues and I are fortunate to have had a smooth and supportive transition to working remotely last March. Our senior leadership team decided early on that we should expect to be home at least through March 2021, which allowed us all to settle in and not have the stress of wondering what our next step would be. As a mom of three children, I of course faced the challenge of balancing homeschooling and work commitments during this past year, but Gerber created so many initiatives to support families as we work remotely, and that has made a big difference. Meeting my family's needs as I fulfill my commitments always requires some give-and-take, but I think this past year has shown that it may be more about a willingness to be flexible than finding a perfect balance.





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Gerber Finance Inc. is happy to congratulate Director of Development Augusta Melendez on being featured in SFNet's 2021 Women in Secured Finance Issue.

Your passion for both Gerber Finance Inc. and the Gerber Finance Foundation is extraordinary and inspiring.

Congratulations to all honorees in this Issue.







EMILY EDSENGA
Goldberg Kohn Ltd.

mily Edsenga is a principal at Goldberg Kohn Ltd. in the Commercial Finance Group. She represents banks, finance companies and other financial institutions in a broad spectrum of both asset-based and cash flow commercial finance transactions involving borrowers in a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, business services, retail and software and technology. Emily's practice is focused on structuring, negotiating and documenting debt financing transactions, including refinancing, acquisition financing, dividend recapitalization transactions, working capital facilities, split-lien and first-lien/second-lien transactions, mezzanine financings and other complex financial transactions, as well as workouts and restructurings. She also has experience representing corporate borrowers and private equity sponsors in connection with acquisition financings and other commercial finance transactions.

Emily is admitted to practice in Illinois and Michigan. She received her law degree, cum laude, from the University of Michigan Law School in 2009. She received her B.A. in environmental biology and her B.A. in Spanish from Claremont McKenna College, *cum laude*, in 2005.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

The first few years of practice can be a difficult adjustment, for both men and women. Associates face a steep learning curve and the metric by which success is measured, as well as the path to getting there, is no longer as clear-cut as in law school. It is critical to find your bearings early on. Ask yourself: how does the task in front of you fit in to the overall transaction? What is the purpose of the agreement you have been asked to draft? The sooner you connect the dots and see the 50,000-foot view of a transaction, the sooner you can begin focusing on the details, and the job becomes much more interesting and rewarding. Take the time to ask questions of senior attorneys. I am always most impressed by those who express a genuine interest in learning and take the initiative to educate themselves.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Having the perspective of someone who is successful in a role that I was hoping to succeed in was (and is) invaluable to my career development. A mentor is a valuable resource to navigate substantive legal issues, work-life balance issues, and client relationship issues. It doesn't have to be a single person, either – building relationships with established individuals in your field gives you access to different perspectives and more opportunities to find what works best for you. As a young associate, it was especially encouraging for me to work with women who I saw were able to sustain a successful and rewarding legal practice while also having a life outside of the office. This gave me perspective; if they can do it, why couldn't I?

### How do you balance work/personal time?

At this point in my life, I don't think it is possible to achieve balance on a day-to-day basis, but I am able to balance priorities on a macro-level by setting realistic boundaries and sticking to them. It is unrealistic in my profession to have set work hours, so I have to be flexible and take advantage of down time when it presents itself. I also outsource tasks that don't need my personal attention, or that might not be the best use of my time, as much as possible. I have learned to not be afraid to ask for help or apologetic when I need it.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I think there was a general trend in this direction that was greatly accelerated by the pandemic. While I suspect that many people (myself included!) are looking forward to returning to an office environment and the occasional work travel, now that we all have been forced to adapt to working remotely, I would not be surprised if more people work remotely more often. Whether that is one or two days a week, a few days a month, or full time will, of course, vary by person and industry, but I do think the experience of this past year has proven that it is feasible and that we will see firms adopt more liberal policies as it relates to working from home. That said, I think this experience has also shown that face-to-face interaction with colleagues and clients is paramount to building and maintaining client relationships and firm culture so, overall, I anticipate that post-pandemic practice of law will look much like it did pre-pandemic.



SARAH GRIGGS
Goldberg Kohn Ltd.

arah Griggs is a principal in Goldberg Kohn Ltd.'s Commercial Finance Group and focuses her practice on secured transactions and commercial finance.

Sarah represents banks, finance companies and other financial institutions in a large variety of asset-based and cash-flow debt finance transactions, including acquisition finance transactions, split-lien transactions, working capital facilities, second-lien financings, mezzanine financings and broadly syndicated transactions, as well as workouts and restructurings. Her experience extends to all aspects of a commercial finance transaction, including structuring, drafting and negotiating loan documentation for initial transactions, loan modifications, forbearance agreements, debtor-in-possession facilities and exit facilities. Sarah has structured complex finance transactions involving borrowers in a wide range of industries, including software and technology, restaurants, retail, manufacturing and business services.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I would encourage women starting out in the industry to focus building and developing their network both within their institutions and in the industry. Not only do these relationships help advance one's career, they also make the day-to-day work more enjoyable. Nowadays, there is a lot of emphasis put on finding a senior mentor (which is very important), but I encourage young attorneys starting out to also focus on building a varied web of contacts and relationships (e.g., peers at both your institution and in your industry and individuals you supervise) and not just focus on obtaining a senior mentor. My network of peers and members of my team have been an invaluable resource and support throughout my career and have been integral to my success.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I had known to trust myself more. At the beginning of my career, I doubted and second-guessed myself constantly. On a call, if someone stated that something was incorrect or expressed an opinion contrary to mine, my first instinct was that I was wrong and that the other person was correct. After the call, I would go back to double-check a document provision or email correspondence and the vast majority of the time I was correct. Over the years, I have learned to trust myself and speak up to voice my point of view and opinions. A lot of this came with time and experience, but I encourage young attorneys to trust themselves and have more confidence in their abilities.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

As a mother of two young children with a full-time working spouse, I am still working on finding that balance. Some days are better than others. The one helpful lesson I have learned is to not assume you can't handle your work commitment and family commitments without giving it a try first. Before I had children, I would always think "I don't know how I can do this job with kids." I thought about pre-emptively making some career changes because I wasn't sure I could be a mother in my career. However, after the birth of my first child, on the advice of a trusted mentor, I decided to give full-time working motherhood a try. I would never know unless I tried. I hired some extra help, started getting my groceries delivered (pre-COVID) and managed to find a balance that worked for myself and my family. Again, I significantly doubted my ability to handle a second kid, but after the birth of my second daughter, I once again made some adjustments and was able to find a balance that worked. As my children continue to grow and my career progresses, I am sure there will be numerous many more adjustments and re-balancings in my future, but moving forward my initial assumption will be that I can do it rather than that I can't.



FEDERICA PIETROGRANDE
Gordon Brothers

ederica Pietrogrande is a managing director at Gordon Brothers. Federica focuses on the firm's development investment strategy across Europe, which utilises a highly flexible and opportunistic approach for alternative debt and equity investments. She helps structure deals and is committed to the entire lifecycle of investments from origination through to exit.

Additionally, Federica supports Gordon Brothers' legal strategy internationally. She works within different business practices across all jurisdictions to structure and manage deals, address specific legal issues, qualify, quantify and mitigate any relevant risks involved.

Prior to joining Gordon Brothers in early 2018, Federica practiced law for 15 years at major international law firms in Italy and abroad. She specialised in corporate bankruptcy and restructuring with a focus on distressed investing and cross-border transactions. Federica has a law degree from Rome Universita' La Sapienza and an LL.M in Banking, Corporate and Finance from New York Fordham Law School. She is also a member of the International Insolvency Institute and Insol Europe.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Have the right attitude, work hard, be honest and reliable, do not believe in shortcuts, identify and develop a relationship with potential mentor(s) and start cultivating your own network among your peers. This is well-known advice and worth reiterating because it's so relevant and important.

Women don't need to behave or dress like a man to be successful. It's important to work on your self-awareness, pick your battles and, most importantly, have a kind sense of humor. It goes a long way!

In terms of personal experience, female examples of leadership have been very important to me. When I started my career, the industry was very male-dominated, especially in Italy, so I was fortunate to have worked with some amazing women who had a profound effect on me.

These women were highly respected and successful, and while they all had knowledge, commitment and determination in common, they had very different personalities, styles, backgrounds and life circumstances. Their examples taught me it was ok for a woman to be ambitious and successful while being yourself and remaining authentic.

To that end, I want to give a very special thanks to Leah Dunlop, head of Corporate & Finance, former managing partner at Hogan Lovells in Italy; Toni Fine, dean for International Students at Fordham Law School in New York and author; Susan Block-Lieb, professor at Fordham Law School in New York; Robin Keller, former head of U.S. Business Restructuring and Insolvency, now senior counsel emeritus, at Hogan Lovells in New York; and Omeca Nedd, former senior associate Business Restructuring and Insolvency at Hogan Lovells in New York.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

It's fundamental to have an open and honest conversation with your family, partner and close friends about your career and life aspirations,

and the earlier the better. You cannot expect them to fully understand your life, your priorities or limited availability if you do not explain yourself, particularly if they work in less demanding industries.

Culturally, women are expected to be more present at home for their families and loved ones. Your limited availability means you and the people around you will need to be patient, understanding and supportive of your career. I want to give a very special thanks to my incredibly supportive husband who has always encouraged me to achieve my goals.

You can achieve and do everything in life. It might just take longer than anticipated, so be patient with yourself.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I need to be focused and generous with my time because the industry I work in is demanding; balancing work and life can be challenging. I don't like routine, so I've developed my own personal meditation and yoga, which I practice as often and for as long as I can. I enjoy spending alone time outdoors and disconnecting from the world when the opportunity arises.

I developed a little trick years ago when I felt particularly overwhelmed that I still practice whenever I need to bring some balance into my life. I have a notebook, and I start by creating a quadrant which features non-work focus areas. These include family and friends, administration, art and culture and wellness.

The goal is to do at least one activity in each quadrant every day and write it down. This could be anything like a five-minute stretch before going to sleep, an hour of jogging, reading an article or enjoying an art exhibition.

It's not about the duration, it's about the mindset. I believe a lack of balance in the long run might create unmanageable tasks. Once you divide and conquer, the seemingly unmanageable becomes manageable!





JENN CRONIN
Great Rock Capital

enn Cronin is a managing director and head of marketing at Great Rock Capital. She joined the company in 2018 to lead Great Rock's marketing initiatives and, as their first marketing officer, Jenn started with a blank slate responsible for developing, implementing and executing the company's marketing strategy. She has played a key role in growing the originations platform from a team of three to nine, which increased Great Rock's footprint to six new cities across North America.

Jenn spent the first 16 years of her career at MBIA Inc., where she held various roles with increasing responsibilities in marketing, new business development, investor relations and risk management. During her tenure at MBIA, she helped launch new products, grow business verticals, and served as a company liaison for equity and fixed income investors. With her understanding of capital markets and credit skill set, Jenn has been able to expand the marketing role beyond traditional confines.

Jenn earned her M.B.A. in investment management and B.A. in finance from Pace University. She is a member of the Turnaround Management Association, Secured Finance Network, and the Association of Corporate Growth.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Don't be shy! While the percentage of women in the finance industry continues to grow, the scale still tips well in favor of men. This is a huge opportunity and your time to shine...take full advantage to demonstrate your intellect and confidence, because nine times out of ten, people will remember you and the conversation. Also, be a sponge and learn from everyone around you without putting a major focus on titles and experience; it really takes a village. When I joined Great Rock three years ago, I was brand new to this industry, and the insight I gained from our analyst team was just as important as the guidance from our senior leaders.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

There is a substantial difference between being busy versus being productive. While there are circumstances beyond our control where we must work around the clock, exhaustion can really backfire. A sharp and fresh mind is invaluable to both you and your company.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I maximize the time when my mind is the clearest. No one is cut from the same cloth, and we are all unique. I am one of those people who did their best thinking while brushing their teeth or during my morning drive to the office. It was hard to maximize that time but, over the last year, I've taken advantage of the flexibility provided with a remote work environment and am far more productive before 9:00 a.m. than I am during the

late afternoon. Getting a jump on the day not only results in a more efficient output for me, but it frees me up earlier to spend time with family and friends or participate in virtual networking events. Planning also saves a material amount of time. Before I check out on Friday, I lay out my to-do list and calendar for the following week. I include both work and personal responsibilities and, while the list changes and evolves daily, it helps me focus and optimize my time.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Having been in a new business and marketing role since 2014, I had become a road warrior. At the height of my travel, I remember a time when I visited eight different baseball stadiums in three weeks and knew I had seen the Mississippi River twice in less than one week, but could not remember exactly where I had been. I would say those days are in the past. I do think corporate travel will start to come back later this year, but it will be slow and strategic. Relationships will always be a cornerstone to success in our business, and over the past year technology has been invaluable in helping to maintain and establish new relationships; however, a shared experience or a handshake (maybe an elbow bump) can go a long way in certain situations.







Great Rock Capital is happy to congratulate Christina and Jenn on their contributions to the Commercial Finance Industry, along with their leadership and dedication to our firm.



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Great Rock Capital

hristina Zielinski is senior vice president & lead underwriter of Great Rock Capital. Christina joined Great Rock Capital in 2016 to build-out and lead Great Rock Capital's underwriting and portfolio management functions. As the initial and only underwriter and portfolio manager, Christina took on the full responsibility of underwriting new transactions plus managing credits once in the portfolio. During her tenure at Great Rock Capital, she has underwritten over 30 transactions in an efficient but thorough manner, by providing leadership, balancing hands-on analysis, and being an effective negotiator. In addition, she has been instrumental in developing a team of six underwriters and portfolio managers to support the firm's growth.

Prior to Great Rock, she was an assistant vice president in credit risk for the Natural Resources group at Barclays, where she performed underwriting and due diligence for new clients and managed a portfolio. Prior to Barclays, she held positions at Louis Dreyfus Commodities and GE Capital in their Risk Management Program.

Christina holds a Bachelor of Science in business administration from Northeastern University.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Do not believe your success will hinge on every deal that you are working on at that point in time. Yes, it is important to focus on the transaction at hand, but each one will have its ups and downs prior to closing. Believe in your individual contributions and be confident in those contributions to the team's and the organization's success.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I've had great mentors throughout the course of my career, and they have been fantastic sounding boards for questions and difficulties, ranging from major changes to small issues. I will say most of my mentors have helped through informal channels, but they have been instrumental in shaping my perspective around my decision making. I seek out mentors that are not necessarily in the same product line and can be in different teams within larger organizations. Not being afraid to reach out to mentors (even if it has been a while) and asking for help has been beneficial for me to keep those relationships fresh and strong.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Learning about new businesses and industries makes the role very exciting. I see a lot of interesting situations and no two deals are alike, which makes every day different. This can also make my role challenging. Situations can change quickly, potentially resulting in an inability to close a transaction that the team has spent a considerable amount of effort and time on. We try to take those situations and learn from these as much as we can.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

It is important to know how to prioritize. Learning to prioritize the most important tasks at the beginning of each day and week is critical to managing a busy schedule with competing priorities inside and outside of your organization. Additionally, being able to identify what tasks and projects that can be delayed, along with having flexibility that not everything on your to-do list has to be completed each day, are key to keeping a balance.

I've found it helpful to schedule my day in blocks and leave time each day to have at least an hour to an hour and a half of focus time to allow for work that requires deep thinking and concentration. During the pandemic, I've started taking quick walks outside during the day, which helps fit in exercise and allows for re-focus (typically before the workday starts and then around lunch time). In addition, I typically have a time when I stop working each day and limit the after-hours time I spend checking emails to 15 minutes. Maintaining this discipline helps to fit in personal time.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Pre-pandemic, frequent business travel and being in the office full-time was a part of my role, and I expect that will come back eventually; however, the team pivoted quickly with frequent check-ins and deal status updates, both internally and externally. We've found that regular and predictable communication with prospective clients is helpful.



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SHARI L. HEYEN
Greenberg Traurig

hari L. Heyen is co-chair of the firm's Global Restructuring & Bankruptcy Practice and co-managing shareholder of the Houston office. Shari has experience in complex restructuring, bankruptcy, insolvency and complex commercial litigation matters. She has represented numerous creditors' committees, debtors, bank groups, acquirers and other significant constituencies in national Chapter 11 cases and workout proceedings, including complex oil, gas and energy cases. Shari has broad experience in the prosecution and defense of fiduciary litigation, real estate, oil and gas, health care, receiverships and alternative energy matters.

Shari has been recognized for her restructuring and bankruptcy law experience by *The Best Lawyers in America* (2010-2021), *Texas Super Lawyers* (2004-2020), and *Legal 500*. She has also been listed multiple times as a Winning Team Member by Global M&A Network's Turnaround Atlas Awards in its recognition of Greenberg Traurig's Restructuring & Bankruptcy Practice; and in 2019 she was named "Top USA Woman Dealmaker" by Global M&A Network, and one of *Houston Business Journal's* Women Who Mean Business in the "Outstanding Leader in Law" category.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I tell junior attorneys and young professionals to foster relationships with a wide range of people. Your law school colleague could be the next general counsel or CEO. Of course, having a mentor can help a young professional navigate a new position. However, I would challenge new attorneys to identify and secure a sponsor. This is a much more targeted relationship because a sponsor is fully invested in an associate's career growth and development, focusing on personally introducing them to opportunities and contacts who will likely positively affect their practice or future book of business.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Fast-paced complexity. Those are the things that fascinate me and most restructuring cases deliver on both fronts. Many times, I feel like a first-responder – and in cases where a company's survival is on the line, I am. During the height of the pandemic the intensity and volume of matters on which we worked on for clients could have been frightening for a less-cohesive team. It takes critical thinking and creativity to tackle challenging business issues for clients. Having the right team in place can make the difference. Very important to me is having a diverse team that offers a diversity of experience and delivers commercial solutions in real time that work in our complex real world.

What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Challenges often result in "better." We have always had the

capability to work remotely, therefore the transition to full-time remote was not difficult. Restructuring attorneys have historically been road warriors, traveling to courtrooms, depositions, negotiations, and face time with clients. We know how to do this. Having enhanced technology has presented clients with many efficiencies and greater accessibility and connectivity. However, previously we could have side conversations in hallways or during breaks during a court proceeding. A great deal of negotiations took place during these breaks. We have had to adapt by having virtual break sessions, but some of the chemistry gets lost during screen time. Greenberg Traurig scaled our technological capabilities to accommodate a global workforce of more than 4,000. In the restructuring practice the transition to being fully remote required us to envision and then implement a fully remote court room setting. So that is what we did. We set up a virtual court room in-house. This has paid huge dividends and has garnered praises from judges. While virtual courtrooms and digital visits are valuable to our clients, one loss has been the ability to shepherd junior attorneys in person. We are making it work, but I am looking forward to returning to the in-person model, even a hybrid model, post-pandemic.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Work for us will always reflect our historically elevated level of commitment to client service. We work where we can best meet client needs. During the pandemic, we have learned to scale technology and use it to successfully foster and grow relationships on virtual platforms. In a post-pandemic world, we will need to strike a balance between meeting online and in-person client meetings, which continue to be important. We are likely to see more of a hybrid situation, where there will be a mix of remote and in-office work to the benefit of clients and employees alike.



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Shari L. Heyen
Co-Chair, Global Restructuring
& Bankruptcy Practice;
Co-Managing Shareholder,
Houston Office

Greenberg Traurig congratulates our friend and colleague Shari L. Heyen

for her feature in *The Secured Lender*.

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SARAH GILBERT
Hahn & Hessen LLP

arah Gilbert is a partner in the Business Finance Group at Hahn & Hessen LLP. Her practice focuses primarily on representing financial institutions and borrowers in all aspects of commercial lending transactions (including restructurings and workouts). She has extensive experience in structuring, negotiating and closing a wide variety of transactions, including acquisition and leveraged buyout financings, asset-based financings, exit financings, debtor-in-possession financings, and unitranche, second lien and mezzanine facilities.

Sarah has provided training and presented lectures to clients on a wide variety of business finance topics. She has also developed and presented continuing legal education programs and hosted roundtables for lawyers on developing issues and trends in secured lending and related legal documentation.

As a California native, Sarah earned her B.A. from California State University, Chico and moved to New York City in 2004 to attend Fordham University School of Law.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

If I've learned anything from living through a pandemic, it's that I can't possibly predict what the future will hold for my practice in a post-pandemic world. When I left my office last year, in preparation for the impending shutdown, I remember taking one last look around and thinking I really hope I didn't forget anything important because I won't be back for a few weeks. It's now been over a year since leaving my office that last time, and our entire firm has been working remotely without any issues. While I do miss the personal interaction that daily office life provides, our business has not suffered from the transition to remote working. Our firm has proven to be quite flexible in where, when and how we work, and I expect this trend to continue even when our "offices" are back up and running. Frankly, this newfound discretion over the structure of our work days is what women, especially those with families, have been seeking to enable them to accommodate their complex work/life schedules. It's unfortunate that it took a pandemic to shift the work model in women's favor, but I hope these changes stick.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Law firms generally do a great job of recruiting women. The problem lies in keeping women as long-term employees. I know many women who have left the industry once they decided to start a family simply because they knew the obstacles created by raising a family while maintaining a law practice would be too difficult a hurdle. If we want these women to stay, we need to offer them options to help keep them in the workforce as other aspects of their lives evolve and we need to make sure

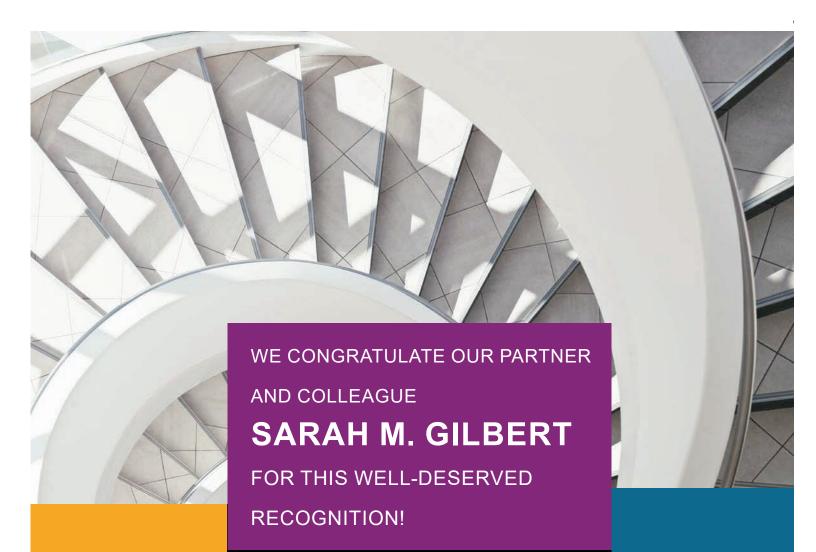
that they know such options exist before they feel like they need to choose between career and family.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I am lucky to have spent my career at a firm where my colleagues and clients are some of the loveliest people you will ever meet. Working with people whom I have come to know so well over the years has fostered a level of teamwork and collaboration that brings a great amount of satisfaction to the job. Knowing that my hard work benefits both myself and people that I respect and care about is truly rewarding. It is encouraging that my firm has been able to maintain these close relationships despite the fact that I have not seen my colleagues or clients in over a year. Success in this field is grounded in strong relationships - my team's focus on fostering such a uniquely collegial atmosphere has ensured that my firm serves its clients not only by providing exceptional legal counsel but also by cultivating lasting relationships among its lawyers and its clients which promise success in any context, be it realizing new opportunities or facing new challenges (global pandemics included).

### Least?

Video Zoom meetings. When the pandemic ends, these have got to go.



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SIMONE PROBYN
Hilco Global

imone Probyn is the European managing director for finance and operations at Hilco Valuation Services, a business unit of Hilco Global, operating in the UK and Europe providing valuation, advisory and monetization services. Simone is responsible for all the company finance matters as well as the operations for each of the office locations.

Simone joined the team in 2018 and quickly established herself in the MD role leading the transition of the company's IT and other systems from traditional server-based systems to cloud-based, and implementing collaborative working methods. This meant the company was well positioned to seamlessly cope when the pandemic hit in early 2020. Simone has worked closely with the MDs with respect to expanding and improving service lines, preparing business plans, and providing advice and guidance for the development of these new income streams to the company.

Simone is a CIMA-qualified accountant, having trained initially in practice before moving into industry, working in both construction and FMCG. She attended the Cranfield School of Management in 2016-17, completing the Advanced Development Programme, Organisational and Strategic Leadership. She is married with two children, ages 18 and 15.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Do not underestimate the value of networking as soon as you enter the industry, even though you may feel that you do not have the time or that you should be concentrating on learning your new role. Focus on building relationships by getting involved with different organisations and attending events that will expand your reach. Take the opportunity to learn from leaders and peers within these networks, don't be afraid to ask questions and gain knowledge of the industry which will not only help you to integrate, but will also assist you with developing an insight into the breadth and opportunities within the industry. Always keep in touch with your network and offer help and support where you can, as this will usually be reciprocated if ever you need it.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

It really is never too soon to find a mentor. Look for someone who can coach you through challenges you will inevitably face and help you shape and define the direction you want your career to go, keeping you focused on your journey. Be prepared to step outside of your comfort zone; sometimes you just have to "go for it" and, if you do make a mistake, don't beat yourself up about it but treat it as a learning experience. Also, as your career develops, never be afraid to admit a job or a company is no longer a good fit for you; don't wait in the hope things will get better; instead take charge and make a change sooner rather than later.

### How do you balance work / personal time?

The work/personal time balance took me a long time to get right, particularly in the earlier years of my career when striving to reach goals at speed and I still don't always master it. Returning to work following maternity leave, which had afforded me time away from work to reflect, gave me the opportunity to rethink priorities and work/life balance. I do find it helpful to plan and organise my personal time, much in the same way as I plan for work (I do like making lists!) and, if personal time is limited, I try to ensure that the time I do have is quality time. Overall, it is important to keep everything in perspective. Our work is important, but at the end of the day so is family and personal time.

# What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

During the pandemic many have enjoyed the flexibility that working from home has provided and even the most cynical of companies has had to evolve and embrace this way of working, even going so far as to seeing not just the potential cost savings that can be made, but also the benefits to employees' personal and mental well-being. However, we should never underestimate the value of face-to-face collaboration in the office, the ease of building relationships and how chance conversations and spontaneous meetings can drive decision making. Having that distinction between work and home can also aid the work/life balance, with the commute providing a defined end to the working day, something many have missed over the past 12 months. Post-pandemic, I think companies that can invest in their digital infrastructure, whilst maintaining an office space, will see the benefit of the hybrid workweek, with both styles of working boosting employee motivation and productivity.

# BRAIN POMER



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**VALUATION + MONETIZATION + ADVISORY** 



CHARMY SHAH
Hilco Global

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harmy Shah serves as senior vice president, Strategic and Financial Planning, at Hilco Global, where she is responsible for coordinating overall corporate strategy.

Charmy joined Hilco in 2006 as a financial analyst at Hilco Receivables and progressed to more senior roles over the next five years to vice president at Equable Ascent Financial (EAF), the successor company to Hilco Receivables. She returned to Hilco Global in 2014 to start up the financial planning and reporting department. Among her many responsibilities are overseeing the annual and strategic planning process, acting as a key liaison with Hilco's lenders, and evaluating investments and M&A opportunities. Among her many achievements at Hilco are the development of its management reporting and forecasting models and processes; negotiating numerous credit agreements and amendments; and managing the financial diligence process to facilitate a partnership with Caisse de Depot et Placement du Quebec. At EAF, Charmy was involved in the valuation of over 300+ portfolios.

Charmy has earned an MBA in finance from University of Lincoln, UK, BCom from University of Delhi and has also passed the CPA exam. Growing up in Dubai and moving across the world has sparked her passion to travel the world. She lives in Buffalo Grove, IL with her husband and beautiful twin daughters.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Looking back at my career and years in the industry my advice would be threefold.

- Always be willing and excited to take on new challenges and opportunities when they present themselves. Working on projects outside your comfort zone are key steppingstones to continuous growth. One of the keys to be able to continuously expand your responsibilities is to think out of the box and find smart, creative solutions.
- Be passionate about what you do. Deliver excellence in your work product every single time, thinking not only about the immediate answer to the question but predicting subsequent questions and potential recommendations.
- Change is the only constant and the ability to adapt to change while maintaining a positive attitude is a key element to success.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

My role has steadily grown over the years and offers a rare combination of three roles in one. I have had the opportunity to expand from FP&A into treasury and corporate strategy. Being in corporate, I have a bird's eye view of all Hilco businesses which spans across a broad spectrum of industries and services and provides a unique experience. We commonly say in Hilco, "There is never a dull moment." In my 15 years at Hilco I have seen it grow and evolve severalfold. Hilco and its members are very entrepreneurial, which tends to keep my role challenging and exciting as we try to evaluate new investments, acquisitions, and strategic growth opportunities. I have had

the opportunity to be in the forefront of this growth and work alongside the leadership team as we formulate the go-ahead strategy.

### How do you balance work / personal time?

The pursuit of balancing work and personal time in my opinion is a myth and can be very stressful. I find it better to simply embrace the imbalance and constantly reprioritize between work and home. There are days and times when work demands my undivided attention. This is then balanced at home by spending quality time with my daughters playing games or watching movies, taking a family vacation, pursuing my hobbies, and finding some "me" time doing meditation and soul searching. I have realized it is extremely important to unplug, which gives space for new thoughts and ideas to evolve.

# What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Covid has changed the way we look at traditional workspace. Employees have been highly productive in the remote work environment. On the flip side, there is a definite benefit of going to a physical workspace for collaboration and idea generation. Post-pandemic, a hybrid workweek with lesser travel requirements is a definite possibility. 2020 has proven that companies can deliver results without the need to travel with technology. In the post-pandemic world, it is the time to leverage from the lessons learned without having the need to go back to old ways.



LINDSEY THIESFELD
Hilco Diligence Services (HDS)

indsey Thiesfeld is a senior associate with Hilco Diligence Services (HDS) in Chicago. Lindsey joined HDS in late 2018 as an analyst and was promoted to associate in October 2019 and to senior associate in August 2020. Currently, Lindsey works to manage all aspects of complex domestic and multi-national field exams, and has worked with borrowers based in the UK, Germany and Australia. Lindsey is also highly involved with training and developing new HDS team members.

Lindsey's asset-based lending diligence experience covers a variety of industries, including manufacturing, transportation, retail, oil & gas, agriculture, and specialty finance. Through her role, she often has the opportunity to work closely with both the lender and the borrower to create and implement solutions that satisfy the requirements of all parties.

Lindsey started her career with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), where she focused on leveraging transaction-level securities trading data in order to identify potential risks posed to retail investors. Outside of work, Lindsey is highly involved with the non-profit organization America Needs You, serving as a volunteer mentor and a member of the Associate Board working to create economic mobility through professional mentoring for ambitious first-generation college students in the greater Chicago area.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Don't be afraid to speak up and ask questions. Also, there is no one "right" way to be a leader. There are quiet leaders and outspoken leaders. There are detail-oriented leaders and big-picture leaders. I feel like women experience a pressure to become more masculine in their communication and management styles in order to be taken more seriously. It has taken me a long time to realize that you can be an efficient, intelligent leader with a smile on your face and a couple of exclamation points in your emails! Find your leadership style and be true to it. Finally, to borrow a phrase I recently learned, "ambition" is not a dirty word. Women are allowed to unapologetically pursue success, set lofty goals, and achieve them.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I knew that no one has it all figured out, at least not in their twenties! Everyone is constantly just trying their best and learning and adapting every day. Once you realize that, it becomes much easier to navigate any situation professionally and empathetically. Also, you are going to spend a lot of time as the only woman in the room—find a way to make people remember you were there, as well as ways to bring more women with you the next time around. I also wish I knew that staying organized is the most important component of meeting deadlines and being successful. The people who look like they've got it all figured out are really just organized.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

My favorite part of my role is the opportunity to work with so many different businesses and clients. Pre-COVID, I loved the business travel and the opportunity to visit different client sites as well, and I love the aspect of continuous learning that is built into the work that we do. No two projects are the same, and I am constantly flexing my problem-solving skills to adapt and respond to the situation at hand. I also enjoy training and mentoring newer colleagues and getting to watch them mature into capable leaders and individual contributors. My least favorite part of my role is the amount of e-mails I get!

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Hire more women, promote more women, and pay women more. Also, women's issues are everyone's issues. Men, who historically and currently represent the majority of decision-makers within organizations, need to start caring about gender equity in the workplace as much as their female counterparts do. Diversity is not a zero-sum game, and men do not "lose" when more women succeed. It isn't the responsibility of a women's focus group to solve every gender-related problem that exists in corporate culture. Actionable steps to create a more equitable workplace for women: make all salary data public, implement and encourage paid parental leave, and allow flexible work arrangements for all employees.



KAREN PILARZ
Huntington Business Credit

aren Pilarz, senior vice president, manages the collateral analyst and field exam teams for Huntington Business Credit, the Asset Based Lending group for The Huntington National Bank. Karen joined Huntington via the acquisition of FirstMerit Bank in August 2016, where she held the same position.

Throughout her career Karen has been an integral part of many acquisition integrations as well as system upgrades and conversions. Karen has developed training programs for both collateral analysts as well as field examiners and is responsible for Huntington Business Credit's Intern program. For many years, Karen was an instructor for the Secured Finance Network's Collateral Control Workshop.

Karen has over 25 years of experience in asset-based lending and has spent most of her career in a senior management role. Karen began her ABL career as a field examiner at United Jersey Bank and has held various roles in both Field Exam and Portfolio Management. Karen holds an MBA from Fairleigh Dickenson University and a BS from Bryant University.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

My advice would be the same to women, or anyone, entering the industry: Don't be afraid to ask questions. Learn from your peers and colleagues. Find someone that can teach you the business. Push yourself out of your comfort zone and accept new challenges. Build your network by developing relationships with colleagues, clients and industry peers. Find a mentor, someone who can guide you in your career, whose opinion you trust, and in whom you can confide.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Throughout my career I have had people I could turn to for advice. I now try to do the same for others. I enjoy training and mentoring people new to the industry and helping them understand concepts or calculations. I have worked over the years to develop training programs for new collateral analysts and field examiners as well as work with our ABL interns each year.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

The thing that I like most about my job is the people with whom I work. I have been fortunate in my career that I have stayed with the core group of coworkers for the last 20-plus years through various institutions. We work hard and have been successful together and I trust and respect them. Over the years we have built an ABL group with a national presence, a strong portfolio and a diverse team of seasoned employees.

In addition, I can honestly say that I enjoy what I do. My job is rarely boring and there is always something new to learn, a challenge to overcome or a problem to solve.

Least? Meetings that should have just been an email!

### How do you balance work/personal time?

This has become a bigger struggle now that we are all remote since my home is now my office. You have to make a concerted effort to shut it down like you are leaving the office. I work for an organization that promotes a work/life balance and provides the resources to promote a better lifestyle.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

The pandemic has proven that we can work remotely and still be successful. I think this is going to change our office habits - going forward we are going to have much more flexibility and not be tied to going to an office every day. I still think going to an office occasionally is nice for team camaraderie and collaboration with coworkers. Teams and Zoom are nice, but there is something to be said for in-person contact.

## What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

We, as an organization, pivoted to working remotely very seamlessly. Our IT organization did a fantastic job supporting this new environment and, believe it or not, a pandemic response was part of our disaster recovery plan, so we were in good shape.

One of the challenges we faced is doing field exams remotely while maintaining the quality of the work. The first few months were scary, and no one knew what to expect but, as time went on and protocols were developed, our field examiners did slowly start going back to customers for some limited work.



When you spend your days making a difference, people notice. Huntington Business Credit® congratulates all the professionals who have been recognized in this year's Women in Secured Finance issue, including our own Karen Pilarz for her recognition as a leader in Secured Finance. Karen has played a significant role enabling the growth and success of Huntington Business Credit. Thank you Karen for your contributions to the finance industry, for being a mentor to your team and colleagues, and for your passion and dedication to helping our customers achieve their strategic goals.



Karen C. Pilarz
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JPMorgan Chase
Commercial Banking

ennedy Capin is an executive director and senior originator in Asset Based Lending (ABL) for JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking. Kennedy has been with JPMorgan Chase's ABL group since 2011, holding roles of increasing responsibility in Atlanta, New York and London. Since 2017, Kennedy has been responsible for the sales, structuring and execution of complex international ABL solutions for multi-national corporate clients. She has also worked in credit risk as a credit analyst, portfolio manager and senior underwriter.

Kennedy has been instrumental in several ABL cross-border innovation and business-process improvement initiatives, which ensure ABL retains its competitive advantage and delivers a positive client experience. She's also been closely involved with multiple JPMorgan talent development and diversity initiatives. These include developing Commercial Banking's EMEA-based Culture Council, serving on the Leadership Team for the Black Organization for Leadership and Development's EMEA chapter and volunteering for the firm's Service Corps program. She received a BS in business management, with focuses in both accounting and corporate finance, from the University of South Carolina. Originally from Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, Kennedy currently lives in London with her husband, Seth, and enjoys cooking, traveling, and scuba diving.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Give yourself some permission to make mistakes along the way and know those mistakes won't be fatal. Learn from them all the same and move on, instead of obsessing or beating yourself up too much.

Perception is often reality, so be conscious of your words and your actions. Equally, be your unique self all the time, not just at home. Judy Garland said it best when she said, "Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else."

Regularly evaluate what you enjoy working on and what you don't, as well as what success looks like to you and what you think it will take to get there. Then, tell your manager and your advocates. Remember, your success benefits you, your team, and your firm.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

At the beginning of my career, I wish I knew how to be more balanced in my approach to work. My personality leans more introverted, and I tend to easily lose myself in work. To be successful and get ahead, you can't solely rely on working hard, despite the importance of that quality. You also need to be visible, networking both internally and externally, and have strong communication and emotional intelligence skills. The combination of those things will set you apart. I also wish that I knew it was healthy and necessary to establish boundaries between your work life and your personal life and that asking for help to achieve this does not mean you have failed.

Lastly, don't allow yourself to become paralyzed if you don't know the answer, or if you don't have all the answers you think you need to make a decision. Instead, it's OK to say "I don't know; let me follow up" but also get comfortable making decisions based on the best information you have at the time you have it.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

The idea of balance with work and life is somewhat of an oxymoron. They are rarely equal in terms of time spent, often in a state of flux and different from person to person. But I have found it helpful to identify some personal non-negotiables, which are a couple of things that I need to do each week regardless of my schedule.

During the work week and more days than not, I cook dinner at home with family and sit down to eat and chat uninterrupted by work. Another item is one full day on the weekend where no work is done. Ideally it would be both days, but I definitively aim for one day when I don't even check my emails. I've also found that openly communicating my schedule and limits to teammates often make it easier for others to plan accordingly.

One new item I am determined to do better this year is take vacation more evenly throughout the year, instead of in a big chunk at the end of the year or during the summer (or worse, carrying over unused days). I need and want the breaks more often and have a natural inclination to not work on shorter vacations.



JPMorgan Chase
Commercial Banking

indsay Griffard is an executive director in Asset Based Lending (ABL) for JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking, where she manages a team that underwrites and manages ABL loans. She joined the ABL team in March 2015 as a credit risk manager and transitioned to senior underwriter before being promoted to executive director in February 2019 and underwriting team leader in November 2020. Prior to joining JPMorgan Chase, Lindsay worked at GE Capital, where she held various positions, including ABL field exam manager and ABL underwriter/portfolio manager. She received a BS in finance from Quincy University. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, spending time outdoors, and training for endurance events.

Throughout her career at JPMorgan Chase, Lindsay has overseen some of the most structurally complex ABL transactions, while still serving as a leader, manager and mentor to many ABL analysts and junior team members. Her colleagues and clients recognize her value-add, often seeking her guidance on structure and strategy. She displays her leadership attributes also through her work with JPM's Women on the Move initiative and participation in the firm's Executive Director Sponsorship Program. Through these programs, she helps promote career growth and development opportunities for women and strengthens her professional network.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played a huge role in my career. I am fortunate to have a good mix of mentors from previous roles, other institutions, and within JPMorgan Chase. I leverage my mentors in both my professional and personal life, and I pay it forward by mentoring junior professionals. Some mentor relationships happened naturally, while some others were initiated through mentorship programs. Through my experiences with mentorship, I've learned that it is ok to initially feel uncomfortable when sharing your wins or challenges with someone outside of your network. Mentors can offer a different perspective that you may not have considered if you only talked to a co-worker, manager, or family member.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Organizations looking to attract and retain more women should offer flexibility for all employees regardless of their situation, as well as initiatives focused on empowering and retaining talented women. JPMorgan Chase's Women on the Move (WOTM) program is a global initiative geared towards helping women further their professional development, establish connections, and enhance their leadership skills. I serve as the Global Communications Lead on the WOTM in Risk and Compliance Americas Steering Committee and as the co-chair of the Event Committee for the Chicago WOTM chapter. My involvement in WOTM has expanded my network around the globe, and I am honored to work alongside women at JPMorgan Chase who are top thought leaders and innovators.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

My advice is to attend industry events and get your name out there. Early on in my career, I had a colleague who took me under his wing and made sure I was invited to industry events and client outings. I had to get comfortable with sometimes being the only woman at these functions. Building a network beyond your firm is important, as these connections are helpful in many ways and may enable you to meet lifelong friends. I recommend taking up a hobby, a sport or any type of activity that will help you meet people outside your firm and industry.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I knew how important it is to take time off and unplug. I am still working on this after years of constantly being plugged into work and having that feeling that I needed to be "on," which resulted in a lot of unnecessary stress. I now try to limit the times that I check my email during evenings and weekends and the number of notifications I have for it. I also do more upfront preparation for when I am going to be out for vacation, which allows me to relax because I know my co-workers have the information necessary to keep things moving along. I also try to anticipate any items that may pop up. Do I still check my email while I am out of the office? Yes; however, I do my best to only check it once a day and not reply. As I mentioned before, this is still a work in progress, so I often seek vacation destinations without wi-fi. National parks are great for this!



JPMorgan Chase
Commercial Banking

elli is an executive director and senior originator for Asset Based Lending (ABL) at JPMorgan Chase Commercial Banking, where she executes ABL originations for middle-market companies. She joined the ABL group in 2014 as a credit risk manager overseeing daily portfolio management of ABL facilities and was promoted to her current position in 2015. Prior to joining JPMorgan Chase, Kelli worked as an ABL underwriter/portfolio manager at US Bank and as an investment analyst at GE Capital. Kelli obtained a BS in finance from the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University. In her free time, Kelli enjoys spending time with her family, traveling and wine.

Since starting her current role, Kelli has been one of the top-five new business originators for middle-market clients. Kelli has financed over 90 client transactions and maintains an extensive loan portfolio. Kelli ensures her clients' expectations are consistently exceeded through her close partnerships with ABL team members and colleagues across the firm. Kelli also mentors the team's more junior originators and has volunteered for numerous special projects to help streamline processes and enhance the client experience.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Two major pieces of advice I would consider:

- Be confident and do not be intimidated. When I first started in the industry, I will never forget the many times when I was not only the youngest person, but also the only woman in the room. If you listen, participate and add value, then they will quickly forget your age and think of you just as they do the rest of the room.
- Work/life balance is critical. Do what you need to do to make it work for you and your family. When my first child was born, I constantly felt guilt when I rushed out of the office to be home by 6 p.m., but I wanted to ensure I had at least an hour with my child every evening. Ultimately, everyone has different life demands, and you cannot worry about what others are thinking. As long as you get your job done and prove to be a dependable team member, no one should care what time you leave the office.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Your career is not something that develops overnight. You need to start in the less glamourous role and learn the foundation of the business. For me, that meant being an ABL field examiner when I had no idea what an ABL loan was. You then need to find opportunities to keep building upon that foundation. It can take painstakingly long, but if you continue socializing your career goals while exceeding expectations, then professional growth will naturally occur. Also, growing my industry network has been more important than I ever thought it would be, as it has helped me create opportunities, solve problems and progress my career.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Great mentors have been vital to my career, and the best relationships have been those that formed naturally throughout my career. When I was an analyst, I became close to a female colleague of mine who has provided me with support and guidance throughout my career. She has not only been a great teacher but also has encouraged me to keep taking the next step. She's been my biggest advocate and am grateful for her friendship. As I've grown, I regularly reflect on our relationship, and I do whatever I can to pass on that mentorship to younger women in our business.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I thoroughly enjoy helping business owners. I believe the nature of our work enables us to support middle-market business leaders in meaningful ways and truly help them grow their business. We play an integral part in our clients' business operations, and it is so great to routinely feel that connection when meeting with a client.

I do not enjoy losing deals.

# What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

The pandemic has transformed the traditional work environment that we have all grown accustomed to. Evolving technology has enabled us to perform our jobs remotely. I imagine a flexible hybrid model will likely be widespread, as in-person collaboration and client discussions still remain important. I believe this model is much friendlier to the needs of working mothers.



KELLY DOLESE MCKINNEY
LHPH Capital

elly Dolese McKinney is vice president of Risk Mitigation for LHPH Capital. She came to LHPH Capital with a diverse background of lending to non-bank consumer financial institutions which includes buy-here, pay-here dealerships, indirect auto lenders and traditional consumer finance lenders. Prior to joining LHPH Capital, Kelly spent over 15 years working for commercial banking financial institutions within specialty finance lending teams.

Kelly plays a key role in all risk aspects of LHPH. She enhanced the full credit risk management program at LHPH Capital with emphasis on reducing underwriting turnaround times, enhancing portfolio management, and creating best practices to provide a remarkable customer experience. She also implemented a third-party risk management program and is working on an enterprise-wide risk assessment.

Over her 20+ year risk management career, Kelly has held roles as a credit analyst, underwriter, portfolio manager, and managing underwriter. She holds a Bachelor's degree in finance and a MBA from University of New Orleans. She maintains her Credit Risk Certification (CRC) through the Risk Management Association. She also has an Operational Risk Management competency certificate from RMA as well as a consumer lending compliance certificate from National Auto Finance Association.

# What advice would you offer to woman just starting out in the industry?

Embrace learning new things. You will find success and fulfillment in learning something new each day. Seek to understand by asking questions and speaking up. Start small, if needed, by asking questions of individuals in a one-on-one setting after a meeting or conversation. Find your way of retaining what you learn, whether it be a journal or an app.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I would tell my younger self to be open to all possibilities and stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone. The journey is truly where life happens. Early in my career, I was so focused on a specific job I wanted and completing the prerequisites, that I was slow to notice or even missed opportunities to enjoy the journey along the way. My current ongoing five-year professional and personal plan allows for flexibility and opportunities that may not be known today. Be open to opportunities as a different path may provide greater success and happiness.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played an instrumental role in the woman I have become. I have had and still have mentors. They are my biggest fans and greatest promoters. As I have developed in my career, I have taken the opportunity to mentor others. Mentorship provides counsel in career advancement decisions or tough conversations while providing wisdom to another person based on one's own journey. I encourage all readers to look around

yourself today and find someone who inspires you. This is a valuable person to reach out for guidance or support.

### What do enjoy most about your role?

My current role is refreshing, invigorating and challenging. I spent my whole career learning the ins and outs of credit and operational risk management. I have a catalog of best practices in all areas from pre-screening to risk identification and mitigation, documentation and portfolio management. In my current role, I have the flexibility to implement the best practices from those experiences. I am also strongly encouraged to seek out new practices or efficiencies. I am a member of a fascinating and talented leadership team where we each influence strategic objectives.



YING HSU
McGuireWoods LLP

ing Hsu is a partner in McGuireWoods LLP's debt finance group in Chicago. She is co-chair of the Women Lawyers Network of the firm's Chicago office, as well as the chair of the Chicago office's recruiting committee.

Ying concentrates her practice in middle-market finance transactions, focusing on asset-based lending, fund finance, and leveraged acquisitions. Her experience includes senior secured, cash flow and asset-based facilities, second lien and mezzanine debt, working capital lines and dividend recapitalizations. Ying has worked on transactions across a broad variety of industries but has focused on structuring, negotiating and documenting credit facilities in the healthcare sector.

Outside of the office, Ying has been heavily involved with the Apollo Chorus of Chicago, serving on its board of directors for a number of years and providing pro bono legal services. She is also a member of the President's Leadership Council, an auxiliary board of The Field Museum, and serves on the board of The Catalyst Schools. Ying earned her law degree from New York University School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Yale College.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career

Our careers are marathons, not sprints, and the paths we take may deviate over time. As a law student, I had the goal of being a partner at a law firm, without having a good idea of what that really meant on a personal or professional level. Over the years, I spent a lot of time thinking about how to balance career goals with personal goals. It took me a long time (probably longer than it should have!) to realize that each phase of my career and my life would require adjustments and, more importantly, to accept that my career might not look like my friends' and colleagues' careers. It's a long haul, and we each have to define what a "successful career" means to us individually.

It is also never too early to start building your network. As an associate, I found it easy to stay at my desk and bill my hours, but that also meant that I didn't always take the time to prioritize relationships with friends, colleagues, and professional contacts. In the long run, it's not just our skills that matter, but our relationships as well.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Having great mentors has been key to my staying in the practice of law. As a young associate, feeling overwhelmed by the hours and the stress, it was important for me to see how more seasoned attorneys approached their practices. As I became a wife and mother, it was invaluable for me to see other working moms with kids managed their legal careers and family schedules. Not all of my mentors were "formal" mentors – but having the ability to look to more senior attorneys and see how they approached their practices was incredibly helpful in my own career path.

Now, as a partner, I prioritize time to mentor law students and young associates at our firm. I was the beneficiary of such great wisdom from my mentors over the years, and I think it's important for me to pay it forward for the next generation of lawyers. I have big shoes to fill, but I hope my advice and support are helpful!

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Like many professionals in client service, I feel like this is the million-dollar question! I have always taken the position that it is unrealistic for me to balance my work life and my personal life on a daily basis and that it is best to strive for a reasonable balance over a longer-term period. I try to reserve time in the early mornings and evenings for my family, but I also found that being too rigid with my schedule didn't always work well for me. Now, I try to approach my schedule with a more flexible outlook. Some days might be more work-focused, especially at a quarter-end, while some days might be family-focused. It is an ongoing juggle, but an important one, especially now in our current work-from-home environment. It is easy for our normal work/life boundaries to be lost in the shuffle right now, making it all the more important to prioritize that balance.





# MCGUIREWOODS CONGRATULATES YUAN-YING HSU AND PENNY ZACHARIAS

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PENNY ZACHARIAS
McGuireWoods LLP

cGuireWoods partner Penny Zacharias promotes the advancement of women in her firm, in the lending industry, and in the Pittsburgh business community. She has developed a practice representing domestic and international financial institutions in asset-based lending, leveraged finance and other lending transactions. She also handles the structuring and documenting of large, syndicated transactions. Secured lenders, as well as companies in the security alarm, medical alert, and other industries with a recurring revenue model, rely on Penny's vast experience.

Penny also advises domestic and international banking clients and investment firms in the areas of microfinance and impact investing. Notably, McGuire-Woods was "Highly Commended" in Financial Times' Accessing New Markets and Capital category for Penny's representation of Developing World Markets in connection with the origination, placement and investment of proceeds from a first-of-its-kind off-grid, renewable and climate action note (ORCA).

Penny serves as chair of the firm's Pittsburgh Women's Leadership Forum and co-chairs the firm's Women in Private Equity & Finance (WPEF) initiative. WPEF is a novel networking platform for women working in private equity and lending to raise their profiles, share thought leadership, expand business opportunities and help the industry continue to make progress. She also serves on the firm's National Recruiting Committee. In 2020, she was named a "Woman of Influence" by the *Pittsburgh Business Times*.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Get involved early with an organization, an industry or affinity group, or some other outlet in the field that is of interest to you. If you start to build your network out early on in your career, it will feel more and more natural over time, and will help you develop and grow your business. You also never know where your contacts are going to end up in their careers, so staying close to those contacts will serve you well over time.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

There is so much "small stuff" that is not worth sweating. Unfortunately, when you are just starting out, it is not always to see it that way. Not to be overly cliché, but it truly is a long game, and there are going to be times where you feel as though you are performing at a really high level and there will be times when you may need a boost. It all does level itself out over time, and you often end up learning the most in the most trying and difficult situations.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

A significant role. I've been fortunate, and fully recognize this. Our jobs are so multifaceted and having the benefit of different people to help you through different aspects of your career is so critical. Having the benefit of different mentors at various stages of my development helped me tremendously to learn

just how many different ways there may be to solve a problem, work through a particular issue or just build consensus among a deal team. I still regularly heed some of the advice I received early on from some strong, trailblazing women.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I love the variety. As a debt finance attorney, I work on transactions that span a multitude of industries, and I love learning about these companies and their growth stories. No two deals are alike which keeps everything fresh and allows us to bring the right solutions to our clients.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

The word "balanced" is really not the right one, as it suggests some element of order. I think "manage" fits better – there are days when you are of sheer necessity going to be managing one aspect of your life far more effectively than another. When I recognize this, it allows me the space to prioritize the needs of any given day (or hour), and everything comes into better focus for me.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Raising the visibility of both new and seasoned women in the profession. Having a network, both within and outside of one's organization, is important. It's important to be able to speak with others who are or once were similarly situated to you.



KIM GORDON MONTICELLOAM, LLC

im Gordon is a managing director with MONTICELLOAM, LLC, where she leads the asset-based lending vertical. Kim has over 30 years of commercial lending experience, with a specialized focus in the healthcare industry. Prior to joining MONTICELLOAM, LLC, she was an SVP, senior credit administrator at Opus Bank, where she was responsible for all facets of credit oversight for the healthcare lending, structured asset-based lending, lender finance media and entertainment lending verticals within the commercial banking group. Kim has also worked as an SVP, director of credit at Monroe Capital, LLC where she helped develop a middle-market healthcare lending company specializing in revolving lines of credit and term loans. Before taking on her role at Monroe Capital, LLC, Kim acted as deputy chief credit officer for Ridgestone Bank, founding member and chief credit officer for Bridge Finance Group, Inc., and VP of Credit/Portfolio - Healthcare Division at FINOVA Capital Corporation. Kim received her BS in finance from the University of Illinois - College of Commerce and Business Administration. She is a longtime and active member of the Secured Finance Network and Turnaround Management Association- Chicago Midwest Chapter.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Whether it is the beginning of your career or steps along the way, do not be afraid to ask questions. If you do not understand something, speak up. In my experience it is unlikely you are the only one who is confused or needs clarification. This will help you build your skill set and allow you to do a better job. I would also suggest being flexible and open to taking on projects and responsibilities outside of your comfort zone.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

The importance of networking, maintaining, and cultivating relationships. If you have a strong network, you can take that wherever you go and rely on it in different facets of your career. It is important to identify with your organization, but it is also key to develop and sustain your own reputation.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Very early on in my career I was lucky to have two male mentors who I believe strongly influenced my career and success. They gave me an opportunity to take on a role I was not completely ready for but were willing to teach me and guide me through the process. This laid the foundation for future opportunities.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

It is not easy to do this, especially once you have a family. But one thing I always try to do is eat dinner with my family and then work after that if needed. In addition, I encourage people to ask for help personally or professionally, if you feel you need it to be successful.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Organizations need to continue to support the entire team and offer roles to everyone who is qualified for the positions. Leadership in organizations should not make assumptions about whether to offer a woman a position because they think she may be too busy or have too many other responsibilities on her plate to be able handle the role. Let the individual make the decision and adjust accordingly, just as a man would do. The position should be offered to the most-qualified person. I also think organizations should be more supportive and open with employees talking about family and family responsibilities. This industry is fast paced and can be demanding. The job can still be done well, by a man or woman, and they can still attend a family member's activity.

# What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I have been working remotely, at least a few days a week, since my oldest child was born 21 years ago. My mentor and manager had the foresight to see that you can be successful and execute on your role remotely. This progressive thinking allowed me to remain in the work force and continue to build my career. They felt it was better to retain a key employee and allow for flexibility, than to have me leave the organization. I think that to be successful with this set-up, you must be flexible with your schedule and be in person as needed, have a dedicated workspace, and create clear boundaries between your home and your home office.



Parker, Hudson,
Rainer & Dobbs LLP

athleen Currey is a partner in the commercial finance practice group with Parker, Hudson, Rainer & Dobbs LLP. She represents financial institutions and borrowers in secured lending and financial restructuring matters and has extensive experience with syndicated loan facilities, asset-based financings, debtor-in-possession financings and negotiating complex intercreditor agreements. Kathleen graduated from the University of South Carolina (B.S., business administration (finance), 1986) and Emory University School of Law (J.D., with distinction, 1993) and is listed in Chambers USA (2013-present) and The Best Lawyers in America (2016-present) in banking and finance.

Kathleen is the program chair of the Secured Lending Seminar, Institute of Continuing Legal Education in Georgia (2020 – 2021) and is a frequent speaker and author addressing a variety of secured finance topics, including intercreditor, workout and bankruptcy issues for the secured lender. In addition, Kathleen is a frequent speaker and writer on the topic of diversity and inclusion. Most recently, she was a panelist for the Georgia State Bar Bankruptcy Section, Diversity & Inclusion Ethics & Professionalism CLE in February 2021, a moderator for Georgia State Bar Diversity Program Fall Learning Lab and a co-author of "Leading the Way to Creating Diverse and Inclusive Firms," *Georgia Bar Journal*, April 2019.

# What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Be curious. I have always thought that the practice of law, particularly in the commercial finance practice area, is a lifetime apprenticeship. There is always something new to learn (about a borrower's specific industry, the unique concerns of a particular borrower, the legal aspects of a transaction and how to better advocate for your client) and that is what makes this practice area so interesting. Each day I think about what I learned.

# What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Early in my career I was very focused on learning my craft, which, of course, was critical, but I now know that I also would have enjoyed spending more time building relationships outside of my firm. Devoting more time to that in more recent years has been very rewarding.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I have had (and still have) many great mentors and I have learned different lessons from each of them. The most important thing that I have learned from all of them is always to act with integrity. With that as a guiding principle, you can never go wrong.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

Early on in my career I enjoyed contract drafting (the more complicated the contract, the better) because I loved the challenge of capturing exactly what the parties intended and making sure all the provisions worked together. It was like putting together a puzzle. As I have become more senior, I have realized that my relationships with people, both internally and externally, are what drive me to be the best lawyer that I can be and that is what is most fulfilling.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Creating balance has been different for me during each stage of my adult life. When my children were young, I was very focused on work when I was at work and I was very focused on my children when I was at home. As my children have grown and I have become more senior in my career, I do not have an expectation of compartmentalizing work and personal time. I know that I must meet the needs of the client, regardless of when those needs arise. Not trying to compartmentalize work and personal time has been very freeing and I consider it a luxury to be able to operate that way at this stage of my life and career.

# How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

I think the biggest challenge is not attracting women to the industry; rather, it is retaining them over the long term. I think the single most important thing we can do to retain women is to recognize that each person's path and the pace of her career is unique. There is not one way to be successful, but the most important thing is to stay in the "game."

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Prior to the pandemic I rarely worked from home, so it was an adjustment going to full-time remote working overnight. Once I purchased the right equipment (including upgrading my internet service), it was smooth sailing and I have not looked back. Because of the available technology, we have been able to serve our clients seamlessly and I feel like I know my co-workers even better now because we have been more intentional about preserving and growing our relationships. I am a big fan of video conferences (especially for internal meetings). I think the biggest challenge is to continue to be intentional about training younger attorneys.



## :parker hudson

We congratulate our colleague

Kathleen Currey

or being reconsized as a leading

for being recognized as a leading Woman in Secured Finance

At Parker, Hudson, Rainer & Dobbs we promote and value a culture of leadership with a diverse workforce of highly talented professionals. We believe that a diverse working environment enhances our ability to provide the highest quality of legal services.



STACY HOPKINS
Paul Hastings LLP

tacy Hopkins began her career in commercial finance as a law clerk to a United States Bankruptcy Judge. Following her clerkship, she joined Paul Hastings LLP as member of the Finance & Restructuring practice and became a partner advising commercial finance companies, hedge funds, and banks on leveraged loans, asset-based financings, debtor-in-possession financings, syndications, and leasing transactions in a variety of sectors. Stacy then joined Wells Fargo and served as senior vice president in the Healthcare Finance group at Wells Fargo Commercial Capital. In this role, she led the negotiation, documentation, and execution of all transactions (asset-based, cash flow, and real estate) in a business capacity for the group across a variety of healthcare sectors.

Stacy has re-joined Paul Hastings LLP and is leveraging her business insights to advise clients on structuring, negotiating, and documenting cash flow and asset-based transactions across all lifecycles of a loan. While she has extensive knowledge of healthcare finance, Stacy is also experienced in other sectors, such as casinos, restaurants, media, manufacturing, and entertainment along with structuring and documenting unitranche and split collateral deals.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Being flexible and understanding that thorny situations are for the most part temporary.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played an enormous role in my career. By mentoring, I mean not just mentors for me, but also the mentoring of others. I've gained a lot of insight and learned a lot from those I've mentored. I sought out mentors while I was in law school and much of the advice they gave me holds true. I would encourage others to seek out mentors not just in their particular industry, but also outside their industry. Fresh perspectives are priceless. Plus, you may want to pivot your career at some point.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

Making a deal work! It's incredibly satisfying to find workarounds to challenges on a deal. Especially when working a deal to finance a healthcare-related company as it is particularly rewarding to facilitate those companies that are providing necessary healthcare or improving how healthcare is provided. However, there's a collective expectation that a response must be instantaneous. We live in an instantaneous world. We are all moving at incredible speeds with technology, and that's fantastic. However, some situations require thought and analysis before responding. Setting expectations is always a challenge.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Let's be real – balance is a misnomer. Not even a balance is always in balance. It's more of a juggle. I prefer to approach it from a "role" perspective and be present in whatever role I'm in at the

time, understanding that those roles may vary from day-to-day and minute-to-minute. I am not saying it's easy, but thinking about work and personal time in this manner helps me focus my attention to where it needs to be at that time, whether it is work, family or friends, and without worrying about whether I'm achieving balance.

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I pivoted my career during the pandemic and recently rejoined Paul Hastings. Yet I am still working in the same place in my home since last year. It's a bit surreal. Given that everyone else is working remotely, I find it's easier to connect and network with others, even if it's for the first time. I'm sure others, like me, are eager to talk to someone other than whom they share living quarters with! The challenges include that my new "co-workers" (a/k/a my family) in the "home headquarters office" are loud on their calls and aren't doing their share of cleaning up the "break room" downstairs!

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Working remotely definitely has its pros and cons. It has been a great equalizer for networking because everyone is in the same boat and willing to have conversations whether on Zoom, Facetime, or just by phone. The in-person connection is somewhat lacking, but there are positives. The pandemic has proven that working from home can be successful and, with many companies looking to curb expenses even pre-pandemic, I believe there will be more flexibility in work styles, whether it be hybrid workweeks or office hubs. Plus, doing away with a trafficladen commute is always a positive.



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KIM SALIBELLO
People's United Bank

im is a senior vice president and underwriting manager for ABL group of People's United Bank. She started her commercial finance career right out of college when at Fidelcor Business Credit as an assistant account executive. She worked her way through their career path that included collateral analyst, field examiner and relationship manager. During that time CIT Group purchased Fidelcor and it became part of a bigger organization. Kim eventually moved on to positions with Century Business Credit and NationsCredit and Bank of America. After Bank of America, Kim spent some time in the turnaround consulting field with Executive Sounding Board and Getzler Henrich. Kim returned to the ABL space in 2011 when she joined People's United Bank. She never would have guessed that taking that position at Fidelcor over 30 years ago would have landed her on this amazing journey. She is incredibly grateful for the people and experiences that have come her way.

Kim earned a Bachelor of Science degree from State University of New York at Oswego and graduated cum laude with minors in economics and sociology.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I would and have said to women starting out in the industry that the most important trait that you can bring to this industry is curiosity. When I was in college, I did not study asset-based lending. I'm not even sure if there was any mention of it in any of my business classes at SUNY Oswego. On your first day, you may want to impress everyone, but the honest truth is that no one expects you to know much. What I expect is for you to show up with the willingness to ask lot of questions...lots. I love to share the wisdom that I have gained in these multiple decades of being employed in this field, but I never want to lecture anyone. In order for me to be effective in training or mentoring you, I need to get to know how you think and how you process information. There has to be an intellectual curiosity and a willingness to learn. It sounds cliché, but there really are no stupid questions. Another piece of advice to those just starting out is to raise your hand often when new opportunities are offered. It will show your managers that you are willing to expand beyond your defined position. Each opportunity should be viewed as a chance to further your experience. My last piece of advice would be to find a mentor- it doesn't have to be anything formal but reach out to other women who may be a few years (or decades) ahead of you in their career. Most women are willing to spend time with you offering guidance and advice, but you need to take that first step and ask.

What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I think people have surprised themselves as to how productive they can be working remotely. Once we got past the technical issues and everyone settled into a routine, we realized that we could still get stuff done regardless of where we are sitting. Initially, I was really keen to get back to the office; I prefer to have a separation of my work life and personal life and I thought there would be too much cross-over if I were to work from home. As time has progressed, I have come to embrace the flexibility of working from home. The key for me was having a defined work space where I could be separated from everything else going on at home. I think this time has shown everyone that reporting to a dedicated office is not necessarily required to be effective. As a result, I think you will see a more hybrid work environment. Face-to-face meetings will resume at some point, but I think we have all gotten more technologically savvy and you will see virtual meetings and events continue for the near future.

### There's Only One Thing That's Unique About Kim Salibello.

### Everything.



As an industry leader, Kim consistently demonstrates unyielding commitment to her clients, to the community and to her team.

There's only one Kim Salibello, and we couldn't be more proud to have her leading our Asset-Based Lending Underwriting team.

Congratulations on being profiled in the Secured Lender's Women in Secured Finance Issue as a leader who stands out in the crowd by demonstrating leadership qualities, going above and beyond in her role and by mentoring and fostering the development and advancement of ABL professionals.





EMILY CARROLL
PNC Business Credit

mily Carroll has been in the industry for nearly 20 years, beginning her career at Finova Capital and then joining PNC Business Credit as a field examiner. After two years in field exam, Emily was promoted to underwriter. A few years later she relocated to PNC's Los Angeles office to fulfill a need for a relationship manager. As an RM, she managed a portfolio of up to 15 accounts, including several difficult workouts. She then rejoined the UW group as a UW team leader, and shortly thereafter was promoted to regional manager. As a regional underwriting manager, Emily manages a national team of underwriters and is responsible for overseeing all aspects of new business ABL and various cash flow product underwriting. Emily and her team have underwritten ~\$8.4B in commitments. Emily co-wrote and teaches the SFNet Intro to Account Management course. In 2017 Emily received the SFNet 40 Under 40 Award. Emily obtained her B.S. in finance from Villanova University and her M.B.A., with honors, from Drexel University. She currently resides in the Philadelphia suburbs with her husband and three young children.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I would advise them to be flexible and open-minded with their career paths. Many of us start out with clearly defined career goals, when and where we would like to progress to the next steps – and that's great. It's necessary to identify goals so you can work to achieve them. However, there have been times in my career when I was asked to consider a position of little interest to me or to relocate despite my uncertainty. Each time I said yes, it ended up being a great career opportunity for me and opened many more doors than I expected. If I had stuck to my plan and not been open-minded about trying new positions or relocating, I don't think I would have progressed nearly as far as I have in my career.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Ah - the ever-elusive work-life balance. As a working mother of three children under the age of 5, I admit I struggle with this one. My job can often require long hours. Generally, I try to step away from the computer and phone during "Prime Time" (evenings), so I can spend a couple of quality hours each day with my young kids between their return home from daycare and bedtime. If I am particularly busy, I will sign back on after they have gone to bed and get in a few more hours of work. I think it's also important that our senior leaders set the tone of work-life balance. In our field, it certainly is not always practical to wait until the next business day, but there are plenty of times when emails and calls can wait. I am trying myself not to send emails late at night or to schedule non-critical calls on evenings and weekends, in order to be more respectful of people's time.

It is also important to include some time for self-care. Find

something you love that relaxes you. For me this is running, and I try to do it for at least half an hour every day. You may not think you have the time, but you must find it! I guarantee you will be happier, less stressed and more productive at work.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

As more women fill senior positions and act as mentors, more younger women will be attracted to those roles and see them as attainable. Many early-career women don't think it's possible to have a successful career and be a mother, so I think it's important to speak out about the challenges and successes of working motherhood. Until recently, I felt I had to hide the fact I am a mother and feared I wouldn't be taken as seriously in the business world. But I've recently realized that I would be doing working women a disservice. I want our industry to be more diverse and, in order to attract women who are mothers - or want to be - we need to demonstrate that our organization supports them. Of course, this can be challenging. Some things may need to be sacrificed, and you may need to outsource some household tasks, have a flexible and supportive partner or seek help from family. But I assure you - you can make it happen. You don't have to choose between having a successful career and a family.

## We celebrate you for leading the way, every day.

PNC Business Credit is proud to recognize Emily Carroll, Katy Jordan, Aimee LeWinter and Michele Scafani for their noteworthy contributions to PNC and the secured finance community. Every day, you set an example for what passion, commitment and hard work can do. We celebrate your significant achievements as you continue to inspire others across the industry.

pnc.com/donedeal





**KATY JORDAN PNC Business Credit** 

n her current role, Katy Jordan was a key player in developing the concept of the Channel Finance product into a highly flourishing PNC Business Credit vertical. Jordan is responsible for all new business development for the program.

A ten-year industry veteran, she joined PNC Business Credit as a business development officer in 2019. Most recently, Jordan served as senior underwriter in the Supply Chain Finance division of Wells Fargo Capital Finance, focusing on new business, restructures, and mergers and acquisitions for middle-market to large enterprise customers. She began her career with Castle Pines Capital International, specializing in Channel Finance transactions in Latin America and Western Europe. Jordan is a member of the Secured Finance Network and the Denver area Association for Corporate Growth.

She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Miami School of Business and her MBA from the University of Denver. Jordan gives generously of her time and is involved in the Denver community through her participation in the Metro Denver Partners youth mentoring program, among other volunteer activities.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Do not underestimate the importance of relationships. No matter what role you currently hold or what your career ambitions may be, your success also will depend on the relationships you develop. Be your authentic self when forming connections with colleagues and clients. A former manager once gave me a great piece of advice: to find common ground with someone when forming a new relationship. You may be surprised how easily conversation flows once you have identified a mutual interest. Do not be afraid to reach out to people you are interested in getting to know better with an invitation for coffee, lunch or a quick call. Most people will be flattered that you are curious to learn more about them.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played an incredibly important role in my career, my career transitions. It is also incredibly important to have diversity outside of my workplace. Each of my career transitions has resulted

both through formal mentoring programs and through informal relationships built over time. Mentors have encouraged me to consider different career opportunities and take on new challenges in each of my roles. The guidance and advice I received from mentors has helped me feel confident and empowered in each of in your mentoring relationships. My mentors have included men and women, managers and peers, and colleagues and role models from mentor sponsorship, advocacy and encouragement of my pursuit of a new opportunity.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

In addition to working directly with clients, my current role allows me to work across many internal groups within PNC Business Credit and PNC Bank. I enjoy building, developing and expanding relationships both with external clients and internal colleagues. Working across multiple cross-functional groups within the Bank has improved my ability to bring value-add ideas and service to customers, while enabling me to be a respectful and knowledgeable partner to my colleagues. In my current role, I support a newer Bank product, which has given me the opportunity to take on many responsibilities beyond traditional business development activities. Facing new challenges almost every day has given me the confidence to problem solve in situations where I previously would have looked to others for a solution.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

There is a lot of truth to the statement that a very successful career may not always follow a linear path. I now realize that having experience in a variety of roles better prepares you to be successful in your current and future positions.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

By recruiting more young women out of college to grow the number of women in entry-level positions. The industry also could do a better job of identifying and addressing common concerns among women in the workplace, such as how to balance career and family and overcoming biases towards certain male-dominated roles.



AIMEE LeWINTER
PNC Bank

n 11-year PNC veteran, Aimee LeWinter is responsible for delivering banking, advisory and value-added services to private equity and private credit firms, other financial sponsors and related portfolio companies across each phase of the fund life cycle. In addition to strategy and execution, LeWinter also facilitates coordination and partnership across the PNC enterprise for an enhanced client experience.

With over 17 years of experience in the industry, she previously has served in various business development and leadership roles, most recently as senior vice president and business development officer, middle-market relationship manager and commercial banking team leader.

LeWinter is a mentor with Women of Tomorrow, the past chair and active member of the ACG South Florida Women Connect committee and a former board member of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, Leadership Broward Foundation and Jewish Federation of Broward. She also is a past recipient of the South Florida Business Journal's Top 40 Under 40 award and the South Florida Sun Sentinel's Top Workplace Professional award. LeWinter began her undergraduate studies at Emory University and received her BSBA and MBA from the University of Florida. She is a Certified Treasury Professional.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Seek out training and continuous learning opportunities at all stages of your career. In addition to formal training programs, look for other development opportunities such as webinars, corporate learning options and project work. Become a student of your industry by staying on top of current events and understanding your customers' needs and where you can add value. Develop your network early in your career. Internal connections can help you better understand the broader organization, provide sounding boards for new ideas and yield organic mentor relationships that will help you throughout your career. An external network also can serve many purposes, including developing prospective clients, gaining market intelligence and establishing referral sources, peer groups and mentor relationships.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played a significant role in my career, as a mentor and a mentee. The mentor relationships I've established have helped me take ownership of my career development. In many cases, those mentors became executive sponsors who have advocated for my continued progression within the company. As a mentor, I aim to help my mentees identify their goals, strengthen their skills and prepare for their next role. I encourage them to be proactive and truly own their career development. To further support young women, I volunteer with Women of Tomorrow, whose mission is to inspire, motivate and empower at-risk young women to live up to their full potential through group mentoring.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Work/life balance is a concept I never paid attention to until I had kids. I was proving my value early in my career and prided myself on

being the hardest worker with near-perfect work. My justification was that there are 24 hours in a day, and it was okay if sleep suffered. Once I had kids, my priorities shifted. I was determined to continue to excel at work, while still spending quality time with my family. I started to work smarter and focused on the productive activities that would drive success, while minimizing the time spent on the rest. I also compartmentalized my time and scheduled both work and personal engagements, with focus on work during work time and on family during family time. While every day is not perfect, I strive for balance over a longer timeframe, such as throughout a week or a month.

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Working remotely has been surprisingly beneficial and has significantly improved my productivity at a critical time. I moved into my current role in early March 2020 to build out the national strategy and execution plan for a newer bank initiative. The role requires interacting with our deal origination teams across the Bank's footprint, our financial sponsor relationships and virtually every line of business in the company. Less than two weeks later, we moved to a work-from-home environment. I found that I was able to connect effectively with people via video conference and even build new foundational relationships. I also was able to cover more ground in a shorter period of time from my desk, since there wasn't any travel or commute time. Within six months, our strategy was defined, rolled out, executed and achieving tangible results.



MICHELE SCAFANI
PNC Business Credit

ichele Scafani is responsible for growing new business revenue and loan volume in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest while managing a team of bankers in their sourcing, structuring and closing activities. Michele has expertise in several areas including asset-based lending, cash flow lending, technology finance and structured finance.

A 25-year industry veteran, she joined PNC Business Credit as a business development officer nearly six years ago. Michele began her career as a senior field examiner for Bank of America and most recently served as National Underwriting Manager for MUFG Union Bank.

She is involved in the San Francisco chapters of the Secured Finance Network and Association for Corporate Growth and has served as a panelist for the Turnaround Management Association.

Michele also chairs a PNC initiative to encourage women to pursue business development careers and serves on the executive committee of PNC ForWARD (for Women's Advancement, Recognition, and Development). She received her B.A. in Business Economics from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Assume a number of different roles and responsibilities so that you can form a broad experience base. A diverse professional background makes you that much stronger in each subsequent role and opens up more opportunities for you. Be the best you can be in every role you take on as you build your career.

It's never too early to start building your network, as strong professional connections will benefit you in both the short term and long term. Find mentors along the way, as their insight and support will be extremely beneficial.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Be aspirational. Early in your career, it can be challenging to see the big picture beyond the next promotion in your current function. Take time out once in a while to look at the overall organization and industry. Determine what you want to do long term – in five, ten and 20 years – not just for your next role.

Reaching out to your network also will allow you to understand different perspectives from people in different parts of your organization or industry. Talk to as many people as possible to learn what it takes to get there, then set goals for yourself to achieve the milestones that will lead you to your dream job.

Don't be afraid to reach out to senior managers for career advice, as you'll elicit valuable feedback that you wouldn't normally get in your day-to-day job. Junior level employees, especially women, often are self-conscious about seeking advice from executives and worry about wasting their time. You're going to find that most of them are happy to provide career advice.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Everyone has their own definition of balance. For me, it's "work hard, play hard." Ultimately, if you're passionate about what you do for a living, then it doesn't feel so much like work. In the financial industry, we all work really hard. I find balance by following my passions on my own time, like skiing and traveling.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I most enjoy helping our business development officers achieve their goals. I find it fun to collaborate and become part of a solution that enables a transaction and helps a company grow. Every deal has its ups and downs, but I appreciate the challenge of working through issues with my team to find solutions that work for both the client and the Bank – it's a bit like figuring out a puzzle.

I also find great reward in mentoring our junior bankers and helping them learn to see the big picture issues as well as the small, critical details of a deal. The time I dedicate to initiatives encouraging women to pursue careers in banking and business development is very important to me as well. When I began my career in this industry, my views were influenced by the very few women in senior roles at the time. I love the quote from the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who said, "When I'm sometimes asked when will there be enough women on the Supreme Court and I say, "When there are nine," people are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that."

Administrative tasks are my least favorite part of this role. My expense reports are perpetually late!



THERESA HEARN
RedRidge

heresa Hearn has performed financial due diligence on transactions across North America, Europe, and Australia ranging in value from \$1 million to over \$1 billion. She possesses highly valuable transaction advisory experience across a broad range of industries - including healthcare, manufacturing, energy, oil and gas, media, consumer goods, and transportation and logistics. A graduate of the Indiana University Kelley School of Business, Theresa holds a Bachelor of Science degree in both accounting and finance and is a member of the Healthcare Financial Management Association.

A pioneer for women in due diligence, Theresa's analytical prowess, dedication to clients, and consistent devotion to success are a step above the rest. She is an expert problem solver - from high level to complex details - regularly drawing on experience to provide clarity, leverage, and thoughtful insight to every deal. In her role at RedRidge, Theresa leads deal teams in quality of earnings, specialty finance, and lender service engagements - ensuring the best work product is delivered to her clients. She is always willing to give the most of herself.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Take initiative and be in control of your career path from day one. Do this by seeking out individuals in the organization you admire and respect – learn from their successes, take cues on what works, and emulate their approach. I've always looked for ways to bring value and help others. Forging your path forward is the best way to learn, build relationships, and find meaningful success.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Be confident and find your voice. The truth is: you are respected and valued – even in a room filled with senior colleagues and years of experience. I was fortunate to work with exceptional managers and teammates who appreciated my point of view early on and took notice as I grew in my career. Feel empowered to share your perspective – you are being listened to.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

In my role, I most enjoy the diversity and challenges each day brings. No two days are exactly the same and wearing different hats is standard practice for everyone on the team. Our company culture is also very encouraging and uplifting, meaning we share in excitement and responsibilities. Currently, the most challenging aspect of the job is less side-by-side, personal interaction as the pandemic work environment continues. To overcome this, I've adapted and found ways to nurture relationships, even from afar.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I've found open communication is the best way to balance work and life routines. Be honest with your employer (and yourself) about when and how much time you need to attend to your children, home

and personal wellness. I am a mother with young kids, so logging off each evening to spend time together is imperative. My team respects my obligations and responsibilities – as a mother and valued team member. Set appropriate boundaries early to maintain excellent balance.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

The most important thing to remember: representation matters. If a female candidate does not see women in management or leadership positions within an organization, she is less likely to picture an ascending career path and apply. I believe women belong in recruiting, decision-making and hiring roles to ensure all perspectives and voices are heard.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

While we all wish we could return to the office and normal work interactions, I am feeling a strong desire for continued flexibility – including incorporating hybrid work weeks with a mix of remote and in-person. I have grown to appreciate the efficiencies from a flexible schedule, including making more connections in less time (with less travel required). Continued travel and face-to-face work will likely depend on the depth of the business relationship and the development required.



AMANDA ROBERTS
RedRidge

manda Roberts is the former president of the Midwest Chapter of the Secured Finance Network and an active member of the Association for Corporate Growth. She holds a Bachelor of Science in marketing from Indiana University Kelley School of Business and is also an active supporter and contributor to GRIP Outreach for Youth organization in Chicago. Amanda is an experienced originator and underwriter, with previous relationships at LaSalle National Bank.

Accessible to clients day and night, Amanda's natural goodwill, resourcefulness and vast connections bring added value to our industry. She knows the merit of her network - regularly tapping into these relationships to deliver expert guidance, insight and support. Amanda oversees business development and strategic growth efforts at RedRidge, having excelled in every role in the business. Through Amanda's leadership, the company has accelerated growth to cover over 150 clients globally. Her direct efforts and dedication to its clients reinforce its reputation for high-quality diligence across the U.S. and U.K.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Never focus on what makes you different – such as being a woman in a male-dominated industry. It's best to silence that voice within you. Don't sell yourself short. Instead, concentrate on your core strengths and the value you bring. With this perspective, you will overcome challenges naturally. You can be a successful businesswoman and a successful mother – believe and achieve it.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Networking is key, both internally and externally. Remember to nurture network connections early in your career and to plan for the career you want. Ask yourself: where do I want to go? In business development, building lasting relationships is vital to success, so I am always looking for common ground to connect with clients and colleagues.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I most enjoy meeting new people and getting to know them – beyond what they do in their professional careers. For me, understanding a client's story and knowing them on a personal level is extremely rewarding. Dive in and you'll continue relationships for years to come. Since clients often determine my schedule, the most challenging aspect of my role is constant availability and bringing the right energy to every engagement.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Love what you do, be versatile and seek flexibility from your employer. As a mother of three young children, balancing work and home routines is so important. Multitasking comes naturally to me, so I work on efficient time-management to ensure I'm most productive whether it's time to work or time to unwind. Striving for balance is an excellent

example I can show my daughters – demonstrating every day they can be anything they want to be.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Simple: be fair and hire people with the best skills. Specifically, create roles for people with families, including flexible schedules, and be respectful of your staff's life commitments. Employers must have the mindset that women can be great employees and great moms.

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

In my role, I am accustomed to traveling and meeting with clients face-to-face, but I've adapted to succeed. Working remotely has added tools to my arsenal, allowing me to touch more contacts in less time. This new work environment works well with current relationships, but is slightly more challenging when forging new ones. When reaching out to firms or individuals I do not know well, I look for connections. Finding common ground is a great way to overcome a cold introduction.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

The pandemic leveled the playing field, meaning even the most buttoned-up CEO can expect a family interruption on a business call and no one thinks differently. Today there is less pressure on personal presentation and more focus on the solutions provided. While it seems webinars, virtual seminars and Zoom meetings are the new normal, I believe it's important to find the silver lining. Personal relationships, building respect and trust still matter. For example, review the Zoom guest list early and make connections in advance. Approach post-pandemic work differently and create efficiency in new ways.



## THE FUTURE OF REDRIDGE

We are proud of our strong female leadership who continuously set the highest standard in our industry. To celebrate and honor their recognition, we've elevated our brand to match—delivering confidence into the future.



AMANDA ROBERTS

Managing Director



THERESA HEARN

Managing Director

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JENNIFER DRAFFKORN
Rosenthal & Rosenthal

ennifer Draffkorn currently holds the position of senior vice president and portfolio manager for Rosenthal & Rosenthal and oversees a team focused on account management, operations and international trade services for their purchase order finance division.

Jennifer has over 27 years in the financial services industry working for Transcap Trade Finance (acquired by Wells Fargo Bank), and Wells Fargo Capital Finance division. She joined Rosenthal in 2016 to help develop their newly created division, Rosenthal Trade Capital.

Jennifer came into the finance industry after working several years in the whole-sale apparel industry for an importer, design and distribution company. There she gained international expertise with a strong understanding of international trade and logistics, giving her a unique perspective on working with clients to put together lending facilities. Having that first-hand experience of what importers and distributors deal with in their daily businesses, she is able to apply that working knowledge to create a facility that works well for both the lender and the client. Jennifer is married and has enjoyed living in Denver, Colorado for the past eight years. For relaxation, she enjoys spending time in the mountains with family, baking and small gatherings with friends.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Earlier in my career, I would dwell on a problem and not immediately focus on finding a solution. Through the years, my perspective has changed and each challenge that I have faced has been a learning experience. I no longer dwell on the problem; rather, my time is now focused on a solution to the issue at hand to keep moving forward. I've learned to challenge my team by having them not just bring a problem to my attention, but also to have a possible solution ready to discuss. Experience has taught me that this approach expands everyone's thought process and usually, by working together, produces a solution in a timely fashion. Managing my time efficiently, as well as my team's, has proven to be invaluable, especially at peak busy times.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I have been focused on purchase order financing for the bulk of my commercial finance career, and I am happy to say it continues to interest and challenge me. The majority of our clients are importers, which means I must stay current on importing logistics, customs regulations and international trade news. Being able to assist my clients with these issues can be the difference between successfully navigating and completing an import transaction or having it fall apart due to circumstances outside of the financing piece of the transaction.

I also enjoy building relationships and helping my clients succeed in their businesses. The roles I have held in my career have always included relationship management. Getting to know my clients, understanding what they need and assisting with modeling their opportunities has always been paramount. Seeing the value of the financial services I've been able to provide my clients time and time again and knowing I can make a real positive impact on a client's success, has been especially important to me. Purchase order financing is not meant to be a long-term financing solution so, when

we can provide clients with timely results of an improved financial position so they can move their business forward, we know we have done our part and that brings me and my team a wonderful feeling of accomplishment.

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Since joining Rosenthal five years ago, I have been working remotely while building the Purchase Order Finance business division and team, so my perspective is a little different. I haven't looked at this as a challenge, but rather as a model for change. Our business division serves a national client base, so a conventional office-centric team is not essential to our success. Communication is key and, since our team is spread out across multiple locations, we have daily morning calls for personal check-in's and organizing daily work, assigning tasks and recapping successes and concerns on specific issues. We also utilize instant messaging and online chat programs to make it seem like the co-worker you are communicating with is in your office or right next door. Currently, it seems like people default to communication by email while working remotely and I feel communication by phone, is now more important than ever to retain that personal connection with clients and team members. Sometimes the written word can be misinterpreted so having that balance between electronic communication and phone conversation can be essential to a lenderclient relationship as well as between co-workers.



Congratulations to our colleague and friend,

### Jennifer Draffkorn



on being named one of one of SFNET's top women in Secured Finance

We celebrate Jennifer and all the other amazing women being recognized for their tremendous contributions to our industry

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NATHALIE BUTLER
SG Credit Partners, Inc.

athalie Butler is managing director at SG Credit Partners and is responsible for structuring, underwriting, deal execution and portfolio management of SG Credit's collateral-based lending division. Nathalie joined SG Credit in 2020 to formalize and grow SG Credit's collateral-based lending platform to lower middle-market businesses.

Nathalie has more than 20 years of experience in asset-based lending, portfolio compliance, special assets, asset valuation and asset disposition. She began her career at Buxbaum Group where she appraised and liquidated inventories and other assets for ABL lenders and was ultimately promoted to vice president of their asset appraisal and advisory group. Nathalie then transitioned into lending in 2010 as one of the first employees of GemCap, where she led the underwriting, funding and compliance of asset-based loans secured by accounts receivables, inventory, equipment, real property and intellectual property and served as senior vice president.

Nathalie received her Master of Business Administration in finance from the Argyros School of Business and Economics at Chapman University. She lives in Orange County, CA with her husband, two sons, and blue heeler dog. Outside of work, her interests include gardening, cooking, yoga and traveling.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

There is a lot to learn in secured finance and college or university alone will not fully prepare you for the job. I would tell women starting out in the industry to take every opportunity to learn by asking lots of questions and participating in conferences and workshops. Try to attend continuing education whenever offered (and if not offered, let your supervisor know that attending these will increase your contribution to the firm). Take on as much as you can handle, for example by volunteering to help on projects outside of your job function. Start networking early. Networking will expose you to the different roles in secured finance and will provide you with a broad picture of the industry. Consider your strengths and what interests you. Focus your career early on towards what you are the most passionate about.

I would also advise women starting out to make sure you share your point of view and ideas. Women can bring different and new perspectives on an issue, and research has shown that firms with women executives outperform those that don't. It can be a little daunting at first to speak up but, if you don't participate in the conversation, you are less likely to be noticed and get ahead.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

My work/personal time balance has adjusted over time and will continue to change. I focused on my career right after college, but later I chose to leave the workforce for a couple of years after my first son was born and pursue my MBA. I was able to spend time at home during the day with him, and then his brother, and attend classes at night. Although my days were full, I greatly enjoyed networking and the opportunity to expand my finance and management skills. Now that my children are a little older, I have more time and flexibility for work.

It is never a perfect balance, and you cannot be present all the time, but it helps to know that having a working mother has many positive outcomes on children when they become adults. Time management and planning ahead is also key for me and, although I don't do it enough, it's important to schedule some "me time" and recharge.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

One of the things I enjoy the most is being able to provide funding to companies who need it and which may not otherwise be able to obtain credit from traditional financing. It is very rewarding to see a client I funded succeed and achieve their goals, even if it means that we eventually get refinanced out. I also love learning about different industries (some that I didn't know existed), and businesses: how they started, how they operate, and what sets them apart. Helping people and learning something new every day are some of the main reasons why I love doing what I do. The thing I enjoy the least is...inaccurate financial reporting.

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GAIL REINTS-PRATL
Sky Business Credit, LLC

ail Reints-Pratl is the founder and president of Sky Business Credit, LLC, a factoring company committed to supporting small businesses with funding needs up to \$1.5 million. With over 20 years of factoring industry experience, Gail is an expert at structuring factoring lines to provide maximum flexibility for clients. She believes factoring is a cash-flow tool that all small businesses can use to fuel their growth. Gail is always fully transparent with clients and treats them with the same respect she'd hope to find if she was a customer.

Gail has a bachelor's degree in business administration from DePaul University. Prior to founding Sky Business Credit, Gail oversaw the Midwest region for an international account receivables financing company. She is an active member of the Secured Finance Network (SFNet) and a longtime member and prior board member of the International Factoring Association and has been a subject matter expert for their account executive certification program.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Give it at least two years to decide if you enjoy working in this industry. I work in factoring, and you either love it or you don't. There's not a lot of in-between. If you aren't loving it by the end of two years, it's probably not for you. If you do love it, learn as much as you can and you will probably make it your career.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

That there are no limitations to how far I could advance my career in this industry. Contrary to my hearing that finance was a "man's world" and that at most meetings and conferences I was one of few women, I was never treated as though I didn't belong. Quite the opposite - I was always treated with respect and encouraged.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played a huge role. I never had "formal" mentors, but I always looked for people around me to learn from. That comes naturally for me because I'm always looking for ways to learn more. Early on at my first job in factoring, the owner of the company, Trevor Morgan, made it a point to teach me all aspects of the business. Later on in my career, I credit Stewart Chesters for teaching me to be a better manager of teams. Without his mentorship, I don't think I would have had the courage to start my own company, which has been operating successfully since 2010. Lastly, there were two people in the factoring industry I approached early on in my career and became friends with that had apparently determined I knew what I was doing professionally. What I didn't know until very recently was, behind the scenes, they opened some doors that provided me with opportunities that I may not have had otherwise. That was very humbling information to find

out. It just goes to show that you never know the effect that other people have on your life in even the smallest ways.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy being able to help small businesses accomplish their goals. It's so satisfying to hear a small business owner say they wish they had known about us sooner, or that we helped them grow their business because they finally have the cash flow they needed to expand. If I had to pick what I like least, I'd say it's not always easy running a small business as all the decisions are on your shoulders. I've learned sometimes it's best to say, "you know what, guys, no one has all the answers, but let's try this." However, I love what I do and I wouldn't have it any other way.



Congratulations to our founder and president, Gail Reints-Pratl, for being honored as one of Secured Lender's 2021 Women in Business.



From holding leadership positions for an international accounts receivable financing company to building Sky Business Credit from the ground up, Gail's tireless work ethic and dedication to helping clients succeed are an inspiration.

Gail is the driving force behind Sky Business Credit, which provides working capital to small businesses to help them meet their financial goals.



LUCY CSIZMAS
SLR Business Credit

ucy Csizmas, a 25+ year veteran of asset-based lending, has been a managing director at SLR Business Credit for over three years and is based in Southern California. As part of Solar Capital Partners, with over \$7.5BB of investable capital, SLR Business Credit provides asset-based and factoring facilities secured by accounts receivable, inventory and equipment, ranging from \$500,000 to \$50MM.

Prior to joining SLR Business Credit, Lucy spent 10 years at a national bank-owned asset-based lender. Lucy was responsible for West Coast origination for asset-based lending transactions and factoring transactions for sister company. In addition, Lucy has held senior positions with investment banking firms as well as asset/business valuation and turnaround firms. Lucy's expertise is in providing value-added financing solutions to lower/middle-market companies that are in the manufacturing, distribution and service industries. Lucy is a member of the Turnaround Management Association (TMA), Association for Corporate Growth (ACG), The Secured Finance Network (SFNet), and the Opus Connect.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I would advise them to be flexible and willing to learn and find a mentor(s) who is aligned with their personal and professional goals whether they are male or female. I believe that the wider and more diverse the support system when first starting out in our industry, the more knowledge and opportunities will present themselves and oftentimes, from the least expected people/resources.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Please see above! Along with "negotiate like a man" when asking for a promotion, which I believe should now be termed "negotiate like an empowered woman."

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

My mentor helped to form my career as a teacher and more importantly an inspirational advisor leading by example. As a woman entering the field of finance in the late '80s, he not only sponsored me for my Series 7,63 and 24 securities licenses, but instilled in me the confidence that there was no "glass ceiling" that I could not break through with the right amount of focus, knowledge, perseverance and tenacity. An interesting related story is that, when I was taking my securities exam in 1986, one of the questions was "Which two states still require a married woman to have her husband's signature in order to open a stock trading account?" and the answer was Texas and Utah! In 1986!

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy being a value-added resource to our borrowers and referral sources, making a difference to companies that might otherwise not be able to obtain sufficient working capital to sustain and grow their business. Least? The challenges associated with not being able to ultimately align our solution with the current market

environment, which is highly competitive and expectations at times unrealistic.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

I have my personal senior office administrator – my adopted Chihuahua Terrier, to help me on both fronts!

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I believe that everyone has had their own personal challenges/ experiences with the dynamics around working remotely. I think that our industry has adapted very efficiently and creatively with virtual conferences, zoom meetings and even drone-facilitated inventory test counts! In my role as managing director for business development on the West Coast, it has been challenging not being able to meet in-person with my colleagues and referral sources, but I believe that most everyone has adapted for now. It is more difficult without meeting in-person with prospective borrowers, but we have thankfully been able to arrange management calls/Zoom meetings and companies recognize that we are all experiencing an extremely unusual dynamic (hopefully NEVER to be repeated). This dynamic has not created a negative impact with our ability to fund new borrowers. In fact, I had the unexpected benefit of funding a rapidly growing paper towel/products manufacturer and a hand sanitizing products company early last year so there were certainly opportunities created by rapid demand if the lending institution was nimble enough to react accordingly.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I believe it will be more individualistic than perhaps anticipated. Time will tell!

## The 2019 Secured Finance Market Sizing & Impact Study

The Authoritative
Tool for the Secured
Finance Industry to
Plan, Benchmark,
& Raise Capital



The Secured Finance Foundation, in conjunction with Ernst & Young, has conducted the first of its kind Secured Finance Industry Market Sizing and Impact Study for the purpose of benchmarking, strategic planning, attracting capital and assisting in advocacy efforts on behalf of the industry.

Through primary and secondary research, the study dimensions the size and scope of the commercial marketplace for secured lending and its related products and services. Part primer, part data compilation and part analytical assessment, the study provides the reader with a detailed view into the **highly interconnected segments of this network** and their collective impact on capital deployment and economic development. The findings dimension an industry that is far-reaching, influential, thriving and presenting significant growth opportunities for its participants to expand their served and available markets.



JENNIFER ROSS
SLR Business Credit

ennifer Ross is a senior vice president with SLR Business Credit and manages the operations team working out of the Utah office. Her current responsibilities also include management of a factoring portfolio and underwriting new business.

Jennifer began her career in consumer and mortgage lending and transitioned to commercial asset-based lending and factoring when she joined Summit Financial Resources in 2009. During her tenure with Summit, Jennifer held various positions in both operations and portfolio. In 2019 Summit was acquired by SLR Senior Investment Corp where Jennifer played an instrumental role in integrating the existing Summit portfolio and staff to the SLR Business Credit platform.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

There are so many answers to this question. It is hard to know where to begin. My best advice would simply be to always take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself. Some opportunities are clear: take advantage of offered training, licensing, and participate in special projects and networking opportunities. Other opportunities are not as clear and can come disguised as problems. Do not be afraid to get involved! Some of my best "education" has come from working through and resolving issues with the help of a mentor.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy problem solving and finding solutions. It is extremely rewarding when you can assist a client through a difficult time in their business. I also enjoy collaborating with my team to find ways to improve upon processes and procedures within our organization.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

When I started my career, I had several small children. For me, work-life balance was often very difficult. In my opinion, flexibility is key when attracting women to our industry. I think offering family-friendly benefits and encouraging all employees to use them helps develop an organizational culture that can make work-life balance much easier. Actively developing women as leaders is also a great way to attract women to your organization.

What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

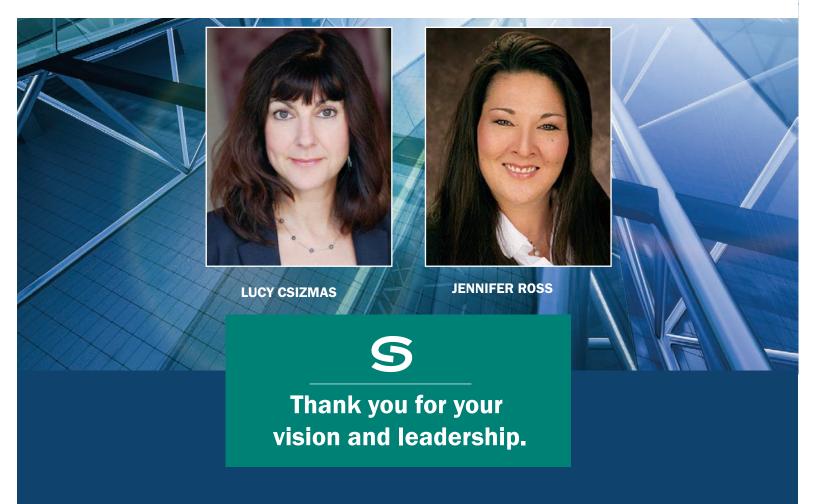
Due to travel restrictions, securing new business has been a

challenge. As an organization, we have had to find creative ways to use technology in place of in-person meetings to originate prospects and communicate with networking contacts. Camaraderie and team building that comes when colleagues are in the same physical location is also something that has been missed and is something that I used to take for granted. Looking back, some of our best collective ideas have developed organically through casual workplace conversation that turned to business. While working remotely, SLR Business Credit has used virtual conferencing on a regular basis to try and keep in touch with each other. Some have been formal meetings, while others have been casual "virtual happy hours" that included other household members and even pets.

### What do you think work will look like post-pandemic world?

Due to health concerns during the pandemic, remote work has become a necessity for many of us. As a result, many businesses that would not have considered this option in the past have found that working remotely can be successful. I think some businesses will opt to continue full time remote work permanently; while, others may offer more flexibility to work remote as necessary or will use a hybrid in-person/remote work week schedule while retaining an office space for meetings, training and team building. I also believe that business travel will be reduced but not eliminated. Because virtual conferencing has become a common practice over the last year, more consideration may be given to whether the travel is necessary, or if the same goal may be accomplished through the use of technology tools.

### SLR Business Credit congratulates our colleagues Lucy Csizmas and Jennifer Ross for their features in *The Secured Lender*.



SLR Business Credit moves quickly, with confidence, to provide your financing. We lend on a custom mix of assets, without regulatory restrictions, to meet your cash flow needs today.

SLR Business Credit stands ready to create a financing structure that meets your unique financing needs, and execute on those needs, immediately.

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You are our priority. Period.



TREE BUCKINGHAM
Sterling National Bank

ree Buckingham is an accomplished, transformational leader with decades of experience in specialty finance lending. Over the course of her career, she has served in various roles within commercial finance including collateral, audit, portfolio, and underwriting before becoming focused in the field of loan operations. Her industry experience has established her as a respected expert in the arena of mergers and acquisitions, system conversions, and team building.

In her current role as senior managing director of loan operations at Sterling National Bank, Tree is responsible for executing on all aspects of lending operations for asset-based lending and equipment.

Key passions that drive her success are building teams through empowering and equipping others, improving processes, modernizing systems, and maintaining data integrity. She believes that the highest performing teams are a result of trust, emotional intelligence, and shared knowledge. An avid learner, and someone who lives under the mantra of "paying it forward" both personally and professionally, Tree remains dedicated to intentionally learning the business from all facets to gather a strong acumen that can be shared with her peers and colleagues.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I fully understood the importance of human relationships, and how much they impact the culture of an organization. At the end of the day, a career is so much more than technical skills and accomplishments—it's about building and nurturing an internal community of people. I believe a corporate ecosystem is made healthier by an inclusive, diversified collage of colleagues joined by a common purpose.

Even before the climate of uncertainty we're in today, it was said that the only constant in the financial industry is change. And constant change, of course, can have a dramatic impact on culture. That's why I've worked really hard throughout my career to ensure that we never lose sight of what makes our team, our community, "work" at a human level—and to fiercely protect it. Sometimes that means having the courage to challenge conventional thinking and norms—and even embrace our emotions rather than suppress them—to ensure that we never compromise when it comes to investing in the right people in the right roles at the right time to nurture successful and productive relationships.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I'm a huge believer in mentoring. The way someone explained it to me once is "coaching is talking at you, mentoring is talking with you." It's the deeper relationships that manifest the true value of mentorship, and you have to be invested in establishing and building that relationship.

Early in my career, I was blessed to have a few strong male and female influencers who I sought out and forged relationships with, and they infused my talents, thoughts and my trailblazing tenacity to help shape me into the professional I am.

Even today, mentorship continues to play an important role in my professional growth. I've been fortunate to participate in an executive mentorship program at Sterling National Bank with one of our senior executives for the past couple of years, and it's been invaluable for me. Having an established mentor has given me access to fresh perspectives, ideas, and approaches that continue to fortify my professional growth. My relationship with my mentor has helped me become more focused than ever on "forging without fear"—and my teams' success and my overall commitment to our organization couldn't be stronger as a result.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

As a mother of three daughters (and a son), I think about this daily. The advice I give my daughters is to know your worth. Make sure your worth is rooted in character, talent, and an unrelenting passion to be a change-maker. In the right environment, your value will be seen by the people deserving of your uniqueness.

I also wholeheartedly recommend cultivating your personal brand. It's all about how you carry yourself—your business intelligence, your emotional intelligence, your appearance, your self-awareness—and the statement that makes about the value you bring to an organization. Having a brand and confidently sharing it with others inside and outside an organization is vital to career success and sanity.

Finally, don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone and align with other women early on. We have a connection group here called Extraordinary Women of Sterling, where we can go to share our successes and learn from one another. I believe internal resource groups like this are a great venue for young women to find their voice and feel supported, and that's going to make us all successful.



### DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENTS REQUIRE REMARKABLE LEADERS.

We are honored to congratulate Tree Buckingham, our Senior Managing Director in Specialty Finance Loan Operations, for being recognized among The Secured Lender's "2021 Women in Secured Finance".

At Sterling National Bank, we understand that bringing excellence to our clients starts with promoting excellence from within. That's why we take great pride in building diverse teams with strong leaders dedicated to forging effective relationships inside and outside the bank.

We're grateful for Tree's unparalleled commitment to extraordinary results for our clients, leadership, and culture, that has positively influenced our organization.

**SPECIALTY FINANCE:** ASSET-BASED LENDING • COMMERCIAL SERVICES EQUIPMENT FINANCE • FRANCHISE FINANCE • INNOVATION FINANCE LENDER FINANCE • MORTGAGE WAREHOUSE LENDING • SPONSOR FINANCE





LYNNE CIACCIA
US Bank

ynne Ciaccia has more than 30 years of asset-based lending experience, most recently with U.S. Bank for the past six years. She is a senior vice president, asset-based finance portfolio team leader and her current responsibilities include managing a team of five individuals who oversee a portfolio of large corporate asset-based relationships. This involves coordinating credit and relationship needs with relationship managers, other internal product partners, as well as clients, to deliver best-in-class execution, advocating for clients within the bank, while appropriately managing and balancing credit risk.

Lynne is a Chicago native and earned her Bachelor of Science degree in business administration, with a specialization in finance, from Marquette University, where she met her husband. Lynne lives in a suburb of Chicago with her husband and two sons. She is active in both work and community organizations, including being a member of the U.S. Bank Women Business Resource Group, SFNet Midwest Chapter Education Committee, SFNet Women in Secured Finance, the Holy Ghost Church Finance Committee and is currently president of the Addison Trail High School Citizen's Advisory Council.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Know your strengths and your weaknesses and work on both at all times. Also, keep a sense of humor and don't take yourself too seriously. You don't have to be perfect and know everything. Be comfortable not knowing and asking questions. It is not failure or weakness, but quite the opposite. Success and knowledge are a lifelong journey. The desire to learn and grow are important traits that will get you noticed over the course of your career.

Additionally, success is not all about the title and money. It is doing something you love every day and building relationships.

Finally, believe in your worth and have confidence in speaking up for yourself. No one has more to gain from your success than you do. If you want something, ask for it and believe you deserve it. Make your case logically and with solid reason. Additionally, keep in mind that timing is everything and you may not always be successful, but at least you had the conversation and it may work out later.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

First, be open to new ideas and embrace change when it comes. Over the course of your career, you will experience a lot of change. Also, recognize and accept that change can come from your own perspective as well. I believe that, if you don't welcome and accept change, growing and advancing may be more difficult. Advancement in your career doesn't always mean a promotion. If you're learning, you're advancing. All of your collective experiences are important to becoming well-rounded, happy and successful.

Finally, networking is extremely important. Always find the time to keep in touch and help others whenever you can. It's very easy to get so busy you let networking slide. Schedule time; set aside an hour a

week and be intentional. As big as this industry seems, it is actually very small. Building a strong network will provide you with a ton of benefits throughout your career, as well as make work more enjoyable.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

My mantra has been work first, play later through most of my career; however, I now understand that I do not have to be on the job 24/7 to be really good at what I do. The work will always be there, so putting off play time is a mistake because then play time never comes. Draw boundaries, learn how to say no and, if you're not sure how to prioritize, ask someone for help.

I have joined networking groups and attended seminars on ways to better balance work and personal time and that has helped put things into perspective quite a bit.

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I believe more people working from home during the pandemic will have a positive impact on the industry in terms of teaching companies that employees can be more productive, happy and loyal if they have this flexibility.

I hope employers have developed an appreciation during this challenging time and continue to offer remote work.

While the pandemic has been difficult and tragic in so many ways, I have really enjoyed learning more about my co-workers through our video calls and chats, and I think it has taught us a lot about ourselves and how we manage through a crisis, both personally and professionally.



## Proud to celebrate

Top Women in Banking









We proudly support and congratulate our colleagues and friends, Lynne Ciaccia, Lisa Freeman, Beth Limpert and Laura Sankey, on being recognized as leaders in the secured finance industry.





LISA FREEMAN US Bank

isa Freeman is a senior vice president and has over 25 years of experience in the asset-based lending industry. After spending 20 years at Bank of America and its predecessors, she took a leadership position at US Bank focused on the mid-Corporate Asset Based Finance space, where she's been for almost nine years. She is currently a Team Leader located in Hartford, CT and leads a team of six portfolio managers and a credit analyst, with over \$4 billion in loan commitments and a primary focus in deal sizes ranging from \$150 million to \$500 million. As a Team Leader, she has guided her team through various aspects of corporate lending, from single-lender deals to syndicated facilities involving multiple lenders, with varying degrees of risk and complexity. Lisa's experience spreads across a multitude of industries in the ABL and retail space, working with investment-grade clients as well as struggling performers as they navigate through the ups and downs that are unique to their specific industries. She works closely with her team, customers and multiple partners throughout US Bank to formulate strategies on how to underwrite risk, expand relationships and meet customer needs.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

There's probably two pieces of advice that I would give to women just starting out in their careers. First and most importantly, always remember to be your own biggest advocate. Even with a great manager, it's very important for you to "own" the responsibility for advancing your own career. Always keep your eyes open to take on more responsibilities, actively seek out ways to add value, ask a lot of questions, build/form relationships outside of your direct working group, essentially be the best at your job that you can be, so when there is a new, bigger or better opportunity that opens up, you are a strong candidate for the job. And during that interview, you can talk about all of the additional responsibilities that you took on, how you showed leadership and took initiative well beyond your current job responsibilities that makes you the best candidate for that new role.

Secondly, I would recommend that women have a "sounding board" to talk to about any important decisions and/or interactions, before they happen. Most people call it a mentor but to me it doesn't have to be that formal of a relationship; it could be an older brother or a close friend, but definitely someone who is in the business world who can listen to the issue and give valuable feedback on how you are approaching it. Over the years, you will likely be faced with difficult decisions and/or uncomfortable conversations and, if you have that person to talk through what you're going to say or how you're going to handle it, that could make a very big difference in how the issue gets resolved and how you are perceived by your colleagues and management. We need to remember that we can't always be as good of a communicator as we want to be or that we think we are, so having that sounding board can really make a big difference.

job of balancing my work and personal time, especially since we've been working from home these past several months. One of the things I try to do is schedule myself for an hour every day - I literally block the time out of my calendar so no one can schedule a meeting during that time. During that hour, I try to leave my workspace to run an errand, sit outside and enjoy the fresh air or even meet a friend for a walk, anything to get myself away from my computer in the middle of the day. It doesn't always happen with everything that's been going on, but I do try to walk away for some period of time during the workday, which is helpful. Another thing I try to do, particularly on my vacation and on weekends, is to turn off the email notifications on my phone. When I hear that "ping", it's very tempting for me to peak at an email and then respond with a quick answer and I think that's ok, sometimes, it's part of the job, but then oftentimes I get sucked into the rest of my emails, which can really take up more time than I intended. By turning my notifications off, I can respond to emails/issues late in the day or at my convenience, without feeling like I'm sacrificing too much of my personal time.



U.S. Bank Asset Based Finance

eth Limpert is a senior vice president, leading a team of portfolio managers serving middle-market borrowers for U.S. Bank Asset Based Finance. Her career in the asset-based finance business spans 37 years, beginning as a trainee in The First National Bank of Chicago's start-up asset-based lending group. After 17 years, she joined an asset-based client – a manufacturer with 22 plants – providing financial/strategic planning and analysis. She returned to lending in 2008 at U.S. Bank and has been enjoying applying what she learned from her unique experience on the other side of the table. In addition to managing a portfolio team at U.S. Bank, Beth coordinates training for the ABF group, serves on the financial statement spreading advisory group, and is involved in several initiatives to improve operational efficiency. She founded the Women's Forum of the SFNet Twin Cities chapter and is an active member.

Beth has a bachelor's degree in piano performance from Lawrence University and an MBA from the Cornell Johnson Graduate School of Management. She is a certified public accountant, a chartered financial analyst, and is an active taekwondo practitioner with a second-degree black belt.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Attend educational and networking events, volunteer for special assignments, continuously upgrade your skills, and be honest with, but not too hard on, yourself. Seek role models and help others shine. If you see someone in a position that interests you, set up an informational interview and learn how that person prepared for their position.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

My first mentor was my manager for 17 years, a man who taught me to trust my intuition, harness my analytical abilities, and be aware that it's not what you say, it's how you say it. He showed me by his actions what a leader is, and he believed in me before I believed in myself. It was a struggle in the early days of my career to find women role models who were already established, since there were so few. However, my several women peers who started in the industry around the same time became my source of support and advice. We served as each other's sounding boards, told each other the truth, and grew together as we learned the industry. I vowed early on that I would never turn away a person who came to me for guidance, advice, and leadership. I have found that the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. Most of my experiences as a mentor have been informal - some short-lived and some lasting many years. It is always exciting to help another person discover and develop his or her strengths and leverage them to build a satisfying career.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

It's all about the people. Often when my family asks me about my day, I recount how much I enjoyed spending time with a beloved customer. There is nothing like walking through a plant with the

smell of machine oil or cardboard packaging and the sound of machinery to remind me how important our loan facilities are to our customers' employees and families. When asked what I do for work, I tell people I help provide the capital that keeps the economy running. I also enjoy the everyday interactions with my team members and colleagues.

### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

We need to spread the word that there are many interesting roles for different skill sets. Many women who have been in the industry for a long time started as trainees in operations, moved to field exam and progressed either to leadership roles in those areas, or to portfolio management, underwriting, or business development. I encourage all employees to attend SFNet or other industry networking and educational events to broaden their skill sets and get a sense of their own organization's role within the industry. It is important to give employees constructive feedback on their work and encourage skill development so they will be prepared for job openings. I encourage everyone to seek a mentor and be a mentor. Both roles lead to valuable insights into a person's own path. Finally, helping an employee to navigate a major life change, such as the birth of a child, goes a long way toward building loyalty and retention. Many women in senior roles, including me, asked for flexibility at some point in their career, and their managers were astute enough to work with them through life transitions.



U.S. Bank Asset Based Finance

aura Sankey is the senior vice president of Appraisal & Policy Administration for U.S. Bank's Asset Based Finance Division. Laura's overarching responsibilities encompass identification and mitigation of risk.

With over 25 years of asset valuation and asset-based lending experience, Laura developed and currently manages a centralized appraisal management process for the Asset Based Finance division of U.S. Bank. She works with third-party vendors and internal stakeholders to identify and mitigate collateral risk throughout the lifecycle of a loan. Laura's experience early in her career with start-up finance companies was an integral part of developing quality control and operational guidelines to ensure effective operating procedures were in place to mitigate risk. Through these experiences, Laura has developed core skills in effective communication, project management, risk mitigation, team building and mentoring.

Laura earned her B.S. in finance at Bryant University and her MBA at Babson College. She was the recipient of the "2015 US Bank Summit Award", for which recipients have demonstrated core leadership practices of Client Advocacy, Taking Balanced Risks, Innovation, and Collaboration. Laura was also a featured speaker at the Boston Women's Leadership Summit (5/2019).

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Find a mentor(s) and build your network - the value of your network can't be overstated - and don't be afraid to ask questions or try something outside of your comfort zone. What you learn in college is just the basic foundation and after that it's your journey to find happiness through various experiences. Building your network, leveraging other people's networks and working with mentors will give you a variety of perspectives. Additionally, it's important to advocate for yourself. You should be your biggest "cheerleader" and ask about advancement opportunities or projects outside of your daily responsibilities that allow you to learn more and interact with other colleagues in your company or clients. Looking back, I should have advocated for myself more often and been more confident in my abilities. Lastly, I'd recommend focusing on developing skill sets rather than the specific tasks of your day-to-day responsibilities. My career hasn't been a straight path but rather an evolution of determining what I enjoy doing. I was fortunate to find opportunities early in my career and my hard work and reputation have paved the way for ongoing opportunities.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

The favorite part of my role is working with others and problem-solving. I have a skill set that can be applied to many situations and I enjoy analyzing an opportunity or challenge and working with others to provide solutions. I love that my day-to-day priorities aren't routine and predictable. At the end of the day if, I've taught somebody something new, mentored someone, solved an issue, and continue to be value-added to what we do, that's where I get the most satisfaction. 2020 had its challenges but I found it intriguing to follow how our industry and asset valuations were evolving and adapting to rapidly changing circumstances – I love to learn. What I

like least about what I do is that I often find it challenging to balance work with "life", but I guess that's the flip side of the coin of what I enjoy most.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I think our post-pandemic work will permanently look different. Technology is always evolving and impacting our lives and we continue to adjust, but there has been nothing comparable to the short-learning curve we all experienced in 2020. I think we've found innovative ways to do our work with less in-person interactions and find that we can be just as, if not more, productive. However, I think we need to ensure we find ways to maintain a personal connection. Those connections may be through hybrid work environments, videoconferencing, etc., but maintaining the personal connection, whether it be with co-workers or customers, will be critical. Despite technological advancements, I don't think in-person interaction can be effectively replaced with technology 100% of the time.



CHRISTINA ROGERS
ROBERTSON
Winston & Strawn

hristina Rogers Robertson is an associate in Winston & Strawn's Houston office. She concentrates her practice on structuring, negotiating and documenting complex credit transactions. She has experience with various types of debt financings, including cash flow and asset-based lending transactions, senior secured first lien and second lien loan financings, and distressed lending transactions. Christina represents a broad range of clients, including banks, private equity funds, specialty lenders, and both privately held and publicly held borrowers. Her experience spans a broad range of industries, including technology, professional services, manufacturing, oil and gas, and asset-based lenders and factors. Christina has served on the Recruitment Committee for summer associates, and she currently participates in the firm's Diversity & Inclusion Associate Sponsorship Program. In addition, she has handled pro bono intake clinics with Houston Volunteer Lawyers, and she has worked with the Innocence Project and Houston Bar Association's LegalLine.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Seek constant feedback from your superiors. Over the course of my career, I have gained so much respect for the people I work for - both as attorneys and as individuals. I value their opinions immensely, and I believe I have been fortunate to learn a great deal from them, in large part because I have asked for and been open to candid feedback on a regular basis. While hearing any sort of criticism about yourself certainly is not the most enjoyable thing in the world, it is vital to your growth. I have found that having these discussions in real time, rather than waiting for a formal year-end review process, is the best way to continually evolve into a better professional. As someone just starting out, no one expects you to be an expert in your field, but that doesn't mean you're not capable of providing valuable contributions from day one. Organization, responsiveness, a good work ethic, and an overall desire to learn can get you so far in that it will garner trust from your superiors which in turn will open up doors for more opportunities.

What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

Learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable. It is incredibly easy to feel intimidated as the youngest or least experienced person in the room, but you cannot let the fear of doing something "wrong" overtake your desire to grow and gain experience. It is crucial to push yourself out of your comfort zone from the outset in order to obtain early exposure to quality, high-level work. Take ownership of your career, and do not let yourself become complacent or settle. It is important to stay proactive by constantly taking on additional responsibilities and requesting to be involved in new and challenging opportunities.

What role has mentoring played in your career?

I think it is critical to find those who are willing to take the time to share their experiences and support your growth as a professional and person. I find that it can often seem like there is only room for one "mentor," and that it must be a very formal arrangement. While that certainly can be the case, I don't think it has to be. I always have my eyes and ears open to those around me. I have endeavored to build a network of people who I respect and admire, and I soak up all the opportunities and guidance they have to offer. I think I could have very easily gotten lost in the shuffle long ago without those around me who have helped and guided me through my career thus far. Find people who want to get to know you well, who believe in you and your potential, and who can provide you with solid advice and wisdom, both on a macro level and the mundane day-to-day.



CHRISTINA M. WHEATON Winston & Strawn

hristina Wheaton is an associate in Winston & Strawn's Chicago office. She represents banks, non-bank lenders and borrowers in connection with middle-market asset-based and cash-flow credit facilities and related restructurings. Christina also represents administrative agents and collateral managers in CLOs and warehouse/leverage facilities. Christina was named Best Lawyers "Ones to Watch" for Banking and Finance Law in 2021. When Christina is not spending time on billable matters, she represents pro bono clients on a variety of legal issues. In particular, she has represented veterans who were severely injured in combat operations by assisting them in obtaining specially adapted smart homes built and provided by the Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment (R.I.S.E.) program of the Gary Sinise Foundation. In addition, Christina serves as a mentor to younger associates through the Winston & Strawn mentorship program.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Take ownership of your work and your career. Ultimately, it's your responsibility to figure out what interests you and to identify and pursue those opportunities in the work you do. Be confident in your ability to take on more challenging assignments. We don't grow from staying in our comfort zone; change comes from being challenged. Identify the areas where you would like to grow and actively seek out opportunities to challenge yourself. Ask for feedback from senior associates and partners on a regular basis and make a conscious effort to understand and then incorporate that feedback into your work. People are more likely to provide constructive feedback when it is solicited. In fact, the most valuable and constructive feedback I have received has come outside of formal evaluations. Finally, when I was first starting out, a senior associate who was leaving to go inhouse passed on a very simple piece of advice to all of the new first year associates: "Don't be lazy." There are times when being a junior associate has its challenges, but remembering that simple phrase and working hard early on pays dividends later.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

When you are just starting your career, no one expects you to be an expert in your chosen field or expects that you know everything. As long as you have a strong work ethic, take ownership of your work, and demonstrate enthusiasm, curiosity and a willingness to learn, people will be willing to help you figure out how to work towards becoming that expert or finding the right answers.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

Technology has allowed us to remain connected no matter where we are and there can be immense pressure to be plugged in 24/7.

On top of that, many of us have transitioned to a remote work environment over the past year. We're incredibly fortunate that our industry was able to make the transition to remote work, but in many ways it shifted work-life balance in favor of work. When you are working where you live, it's easy for the boundaries between personal life and work to become blurred. Although there is no perfect formula for maintaining work-life balance, I've realized it's important to set boundaries and take the time for yourself to disconnect every day. Whether that means scheduling time in my calendar for a Peloton class or just taking the time to cook dinner, it's critical to set defined boundaries around that time and take the opportunity (however brief) to disconnect and recharge.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

As a self-proclaimed "office person", transitioning to remote work was challenging for me at first. A year into the pandemic, it is abundantly clear that our industry can function effectively while working remotely. There are certainly benefits to remote work (I have serious doubts about my ability to embrace a business casual dress-code five days a week ever again), but there is no substitute for facetime with clients and colleagues. Although there are a variety of ways to stay in touch virtually, it is critical to have in-person interactions in order to form and maintain genuine and lasting connections with the people in your network. Working remotely must be particularly difficult for junior associates who are starting their career and don't have the benefit of a physical office space where they can develop relationships organically with other associates and partners. While our industry may never transition fully back to a five-day office week, I am hopeful that many will return to a hybrid workweek post-pandemic.

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ABBEY MANSFIELD RUBY
Waller

bbey Mansfield Ruby is a partner in Waller's Finance & Restructuring practice where she represents global, national and regional lenders, agents, and borrowers in finance transactions spanning a wide range of industries, with particular emphasis on healthcare and senior housing. She serves as lead counsel in structuring and closing complex financings and related transactions—including asset-based lines of credit, interim/bridge loan facilities (including bridge to HUD and other agency financings), acquisition financings, first and second lien facilities, mezzanine loans, real estate and construction financings, capital call/subscription facilities, restructurings, and workouts. Abbey's experience also includes cross-border and multi-currency facilities, as both primary and special local counsel.

Abbey chairs Waller's Business Development Advisory Committee and was recognized by M&A Advisor in 2018 with an Emerging Leader award for her work in acquisition financing and turnaround transactions. A passionate advocate for increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the legal and finance industries, Abbey is a member of Waller's Diversity Committee and Women's Leadership Council Steering Committee and was selected as a Fellow in 2018 of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity. Abbey earned her J.D. from Vanderbilt University Law School and her B.A. from Michigan State University.

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Challenge yourself! The best learning experiences were the ones where I pushed myself beyond what I already knew how to do. Seeking opportunities to work on as many types of deals for as many different clients/bosses as possible is the best way to figure out which niche of our industry you find most interesting, and it also gives you a great foundation and network for the future.

You'll also find yourself in many rooms, and on countless calls, where you'll be the only woman. Despite advances over the years, this still remains a male-dominated industry, especially at senior levels. You absolutely can be successful as your authentic, bold self without having to pretend to be "one of the guys." Look for clients, colleagues and companies/firms who will value, rather than just tolerate, your diverse perspective. And, be sure to make space to allow others who may find themselves the "only one like them" in the room to be themselves, too. Value their diverse voice as much as your own.

### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I've had some fantastic mentors, many of whom were women, and all of whom have modeled different ways to be successful in this industry. They've been wonderful teachers, sounding boards, advocates, clients and friends over the years. I think only one of them was actually an assigned mentor under a formal mentoring program. The rest of the relationships all formed organically. I've found that everyone is busy and, despite best intentions, may not remember to make time in their day to mentor you. But, if you seek out those relationships and initiate conversations, most people are more than happy to grab a coffee, offer advice and share their experiences, and over time develop into wonderful mentors and sponsors.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I love being part of the team that closes a deal, working closely with colleagues and clients to problem solve and get across the finish line. My favorite deals are ones in which the borrower and lender are both rowing in the same direction toward closing—with some good negotiation on key issues, but without hostility or unnecessary over-complication. I also like that I'm able to work on many different transactions for different clients at the same time; no two days are ever the same! My least favorite is the unpredictability of my schedule and not being able to predict when the peaks or valleys will hit.

### How do you balance work/personal time?

My balance is constantly changing based on the needs of my family, my clients and my sanity. But one constant is that I have learned to ask for and accept help, both at work and at home, so I can prioritize what's truly important and requires my attention without letting other things that still need doing (but can probably be done by someone else) fall through the cracks. I really enjoy what I do and take tremendous personal satisfaction and happiness from my work, and I think that helps things feel more in balance for me. Working remotely during the pandemic, while certainly coming with its own challenges, has also had its upsides. The added flexibility has been great, and there's nothing better than a hug from my 4-year-old in the middle of a tough work day to help me feel reinvigorated.

Waller congratulates partner Abbey Mansfield Ruby and the 2021 honorees in SFNet's

# WOMEN IN SECURED FINANCE



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NASHVILLE AUSTIN BIRMINGHAM CHATTANOOGA MEMPHIS



HANNA ABRAHAM Wells Fargo

anna Abraham is a senior vice president at Wells Fargo, with over 20 years of experience in Trade Finance. Hanna is currently part of the Global Receivables and Trade Finance group, supporting Corporate Industrial clients. She is passionate about introducing new ideas to clients to help them succeed financially. Hanna began her career at Bank of America, working as an analyst in the International group. She quickly learned the business and transitioned into trade sales supporting clients in the Southeast. In 2012, Hanna joined Wells Fargo Global Banking group in Miami, assisting middle-market and large corporate clients. She has since moved back to her hometown of Charlotte, NC.

Hanna is a first-generation American whose parents immigrated from Palestine in the '60s. She speaks fluent Arabic and has conversational knowledge of Spanish and French. Hanna holds a B.S. in international business from University of North Carolina, minor in French.

Hanna enjoys volunteering and helping charities, particularly ones that support children. She has been actively involved with fundraisers to support Classroom Central and Kids First of the Carolinas. When not at work, she is at home enjoying time with her three children and always cooking a feast, hosting family and friends!

### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Starting off in the industry can be overwhelming; do not be afraid to insert yourself and ask questions. Network, network, network.... The industry has so much to offer and a lot to learn, explore different areas till you find one that you are passionate in pursuing. Take advantage of all continued-education programs that your company offers; diversifying your knowledge base will go a long way. It is important to find a mentor early in your career as they can provide guidance, assist in your networking efforts, and help you grow.

### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

In the beginning of my career, I was not sure what I wanted to do. I should have reached out to seek a mentor to help guide me through my career path/goals. Luckily throughout my career, I had great support from managers and team leads who understood my strengths and help build my confidence. Now, I know to speak up if I have questions and be more assertive.

### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy the client interaction the most in my role. It is rewarding when I can recommend solutions that help my clients achieve their goals and succeed. The least? That would most definitely have to be excessive internal meetings and compliance training courses!

### How do you balance work/personal time?

This has to be the hardest question on the list. The truthful answer, "I don't", or at least, not well. I feel it is my responsibility to always be available for my clients and colleagues, especially since I support

both globally due to my role. The 9-5 days are most definitely in the past, however, with the advanced technology you can be available anywhere/any time. Being organized and having good time management skills is key, try scheduling time for everything on your calendar including your personal time for errands, exercise, etc. Unfortunately the personal time scheduled is usually compromised, however, I try to make time in my day. I do, however, look forward to vacations, I try to take at least one week off a year where I am 100% disconnected and no "schedule".

### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

Working remotely has been very challenging from a career and personal standpoint. Many of us have experienced our children popping up in our Zoom meetings. I've always had appreciation for our teachers, however a lot more during this pandemic; teaching a 10-year-old fractions is impossible.

From a career perspective, it's been working well for the most part. In-person meetings are obviously most effective, especially when meeting prospects; however the industry has adjusted to utilizing technology to conduct meetings remotely.

### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I do not think we will ever go back to pre-pandemic world. Many companies have realized that their employees can be as effective and productive working remotely as working in the office. It will be some time before clients are comfortable to meet in person, hence less (if any) business travel. Companies are getting more comfortable utilizing communication apps such as Zoom and Team Meetings to allow their employees to conduct business remotely and



STACY GOTTLIEB

Wells Fargo Capital Finance

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tacy Gottlieb is a senior vice president and west regional manager for Wells Fargo Capital Finance's asset-based lending group. She is responsible for a team that provides senior secured financing solutions to manufacturers, distributors and service companies.

Stacy has 27 years of banking experience with leading financial institutions in New York and Los Angeles. She works with public, private-equity, and family businesses. Stacy is responsible for developing and executing strategic priorities, and is always looking to spearhead impactful initiatives. In addition, she is a member of Wells Fargo Capital Finance's Credit Committee, where she reviews capital commitments for prospects and existing borrowers.

Stacy is an exceptional leader and is key to the success of Wells Fargo's asset-based lending platform. She is recognized for her integrity and her ability to execute and is regarded as a thoughtful mentor and an advocate for young and diverse colleagues. Stacy is a member of the Credit College Advisory Board within Wells Fargo, which is responsible for providing continuing education for employees across the company. Stacy is based in Los Angeles and sits on the board of the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club. Stacy enjoys spending time with her family, reading, traveling and riding her Peloton. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester and her MBA from Rutgers University.

#### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

I always suggest the following: find a mentor in the organization, demonstrate intellectual curiosity about everything you are exposed to and don't be afraid to make mistakes. I also suggest researching the company you are interested in working for to determine if it is welcoming for women and if it has a strong DE&I focus. Are there leaders in the organization who look like you and if not, are you willing to fight a little harder for recognition and advancement?

#### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I am a huge crossword and jigsaw puzzle fan. I enjoy putting pieces together and solving complicated problems to help our clients and the organization succeed. I also enjoy the time I spend mentoring young and diverse co-workers. No matter how busy I am, I always make time for a coffee, lunch or walk to discuss what people have on their minds and to offer advice based on my own experiences.

The part I like least is dealing with the demanding regulatory environment, which at times makes it hard to be nimble.

#### How do you balance work/personal time?

Admittedly, I don't always do the best job with work/life balance; however, I try to be present for my husband and daughter and make sure my family comes first no matter how busy my schedule is. I also try to find time to read and exercise even if that means taking a break in the afternoon and then going back online later in the evening. I have never been worried about turning down a work-related dinner or networking event when I have a family commitment. When I travel for business, I do my best to minimize my time away from home.

#### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

When I think about why my participation has been limited during recent years, it's primarily because most events take place in the evening. As a working mom, I have passed up opportunities to attend events, so I can be home with my daughter. The pandemic has made it easier for working moms to participate, since everything is virtual. This could create a model for the future. Also, having events during the day and making sure there are women on the boards of these organizations could bolster participation.

#### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I expect most organizations will provide for a hybrid work environment where employees will work remote a couple of days. We have already discussed this at Wells Fargo, and we believe it's important to have people in the office to maintain our culture and to train our young or new employees. While we have successfully worked from home the past year, there has been less opportunity for ad hoc collaboration. Also, while Zoom is a great tool, it's not the same as walking through a client's manufacturing facility, so they can proudly show you the new equipment you helped finance or sitting down for a meal and a conversation. I anticipate traveling a bit less for work, but I still believe the time I spend with clients, my team in other cities and business associates to build relationships is invaluable.



LINDSAY GRAY
Wells Fargo Capital Finance

indsay Gray is a managing director within Wells Fargo Capital Finance responsible for covering private equity and investment banking relationships and executing new financing transactions with public and private companies. A financial services veteran, she has served in various roles throughout her career in investment banking, credit management, underwriting and business development. She began her career at Wachovia Securities as an analyst in the Investment Bank. Prior to joining Wells Fargo, Lindsay was a senior vice president at Bank of America and worked in several areas including commercial real estate, asset-based lending, and commercial banking. She also served as a member of the Midwest Executive Council for Global Commercial Banking, acting in an advisory role to senior leadership.

Lindsay attended Indiana University, where she received her undergraduate degree in marketing, management and international business from the Kelley School of Business. She is a board member of the Middle Market Open, which benefits the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois and a member of the Women's Leadership Committee for the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

#### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Ask questions and build relationships. This holds true for everyone at the beginning of their careers.

I see too many people who are concerned about asking necessary questions because they don't want leaders to have a lesser opinion of them. I am impressed by those who ask the right questions, no matter how many. Each deal has its own nuances and each business has its own unique characteristics. You see something new with every transaction. Everyone has more to learn in this industry.

Building relationships is an extremely important aspect of our business. It's important to remember that relationship building internally is just as important externally. Within your firm, there are individuals that can help you learn the business and can advocate for you when opportunities for growth become available. External relationships can help you with referrals, put the right capital structure together, and connect you with others that can get a deal over the finish line.

#### What role has mentoring played in your career?

Mentoring has played a very big role in my career. For the initial 10 years of my career, I worked in and around commercial real estate. I made a switch to ABL, and needed to learn an entirely different set of skills. Mentors of all experience levels helped me do that. Whether it was an analyst in the group or senior leadership, the group helped me get up to speed quickly and entertained my constant questions. Mentors have also advocated for me in different roles and have helped me continually improve with great advice and constructive feedback throughout my career.

#### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I truly enjoy getting to know others and building relationships. It turns out that there are a lot of very interesting people that work in this industry and a lot of really fascinating business owners. I also enjoy the problem-solving aspect of my role. Learning how a company operates and how they want to grow or change, and helping them put together the right capital structure to effectuate their goals is very rewarding.

The aspect that I enjoy least is losing. Losing a deal doesn't go well with my competitive nature.

#### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

I think attracting more women starts with recruiting, especially at the university level. Larger firms can also leverage talent within their organization that may be in other divisions. I started my career in investment banking and continued with a focus on real estate and a manager in the ABL group took a chance on hiring me, and I am very appreciative of the opportunity that was afforded to me.

With regard to retaining women, we all need to do a better job of making ourselves available to young talent via mentoring. I make it a point to check in on our younger associates to let them know I am available to them at any time as a sounding board, to discuss career progression, etc. The more senior leaders that make themselves available to individuals earlier in their careers, the more connected talent will feel to our industry and their respective firms. In turn, those individuals can ultimately be a part of the next generation of leadership within our industry.



LINDSAY OFFUTT
Wells Fargo Capital Finance

indsay Offutt is a managing director in Wells Fargo Capital Finance's Loan Sales and Syndications group. She is responsible for the syndication of asset-based transactions, supplier finance programs, and channel finance facilities. Prior to joining Wells Fargo Capital Finance in 2019, Lindsay spent 15 years with Wells Fargo Securities. In the Investment Grade Loan Syndications group, she was responsible for the origination, structuring, and distribution of senior revolving credit, term loan, and bridge facilities for industrial companies. Lindsay began her career as an analyst in the Defense, Aerospace, and Technology Services Investment Banking group. She joined a Wells Fargo predecessor in 2004.

Lindsay currently sits on the SFNet Foundation's Board of Directors.

Lindsay earned a bachelor of arts degree magna cum laude in French from Davidson College. She is based in Charlotte, NC, where she lives with her husband and young daughter.

#### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Work hard and surround yourself with people you enjoy and respect. You will spend a lot of time at work and life is too short to work for or with disagreeable people.

#### What do you know now that you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I was late to realize the importance of networking. In retrospect, I should have started networking many, many years ago.

#### How do you balance work/personal time?

I struggle with this, given my workload and the technology we now have that lets us be plugged in to work at all times. I am a work-in-progress though and am focusing on being present, regardless of what I am doing. I have realized over the years that I am not a good multi-tasker and do get better results when I focus on one thing at a time.

#### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Women want to work at firms and in roles where they know women can be successful. So, it is really key to engage, mentor, and retain the existing women in our firms as these veterans will attract younger women.

## What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I think we have all done a remarkable job working remotely. I know many organizations have been amazed at how smooth

of a transition it was and how effective work from home is. Among the many challenges of this new environment is that there is no longer even a semblance of separation of work and home life. While we are all saving time getting ready in the morning, commuting, and seeking out lunch/coffee throughout the day, work seems to have expanded to take up a larger part of each day, not least because it is so easy to log back in at all times. Another challenge a lot of people are dealing with is increased home responsibilities as schools and daycares open and close more frequently than we would like. None of us planned to be assistant teachers while also being bankers, so multi-tasking is at an all-time high.

#### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I am hopeful that we will get back to our "new normal" at some point this year. I do think work will look a lot different as fewer people actually go into the office each day and some may permanently work from home. We have all learned to use platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. during the pandemic and I think those trends will continue. My prediction is that business travel will not rebound to previous levels for a long time, if ever, as management teams now know that a lot can be accomplished virtually for a fraction of the cost.



TERESA CHAN
White Oak
Commercial Finance

eresa Chan is vice president of underwriting at White Oak Commercial Finance (WOCF) where she is responsible for managing and servicing its portfolio clients. Teresa has been with the firm since 2011 and previously served in various departments of its factoring division where she learned all facets of asset-based lending before becoming a relationship manager in 2014. Teresa is dedicated to establishing strong and lasting partnerships to help businesses overcome complex challenges and her position has expanded to include sourcing and closing new deals, and she frequently contributes to White Oak's marketing efforts. Her expertise includes such diverse areas as apparel, home goods, electronics as well all areas of E-comm business, a rapidly expanding area of focus for White Oak. She also serves as a role model and mentor for many of the younger associates at White Oak. She is widely respected not only for her lending expertise, but also for her team-first attitude. Teresa began her career at Doctors Without Borders where she served as a finance associate for six years. She earned her B.B.A in finance from Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College.

#### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Don't be afraid to ask questions when you don't have the answers and keep asking until you understand. It is also good to get the perspectives of different colleagues, as they have unique views that you can gain from. Women also need to learn to walk the fine line between standing up for themselves while not being viewed as overly aggressive. Stand by your decisions when you think you are right, while maintaining an open mind to others' thoughts and ideas.

#### What role has mentoring played in your career?

I am very fortunate to have two great mentors during my career at White Oak Commercial Finance, namely Robert Grbic and Charles Sharf. Their doors are always open, and they take time to provide guidance based on their own knowledge and experiences. It is very important to have someone you can ask questions to privately who will take the time to explain in detail. I strive to follow in their footsteps to help future team members.

#### What do you enjoy most about your role? Least?

I enjoy being able to interact with clients on a daily basis and being able to help them in all areas of their business. The most satisfying moments are when a company has grown substantially, or turned around from a difficult situation, and they credit White Oak with being part of that success. It is a great feeling when you feel you have contributed to the success of others. The least favorite part of my job is probably the final stages of getting a deal across the finish line, but we have a great operating team to support us at every step and it is always satisfying when completed.

#### How do you balance work/personal time?

I work hard and will work later hours to meet deadlines or to complete time-sensitive projects, but I always make the time to take at least 1-2 international trips a year. It is important to "get away from the computer" and ensure that you have personal time, especially on the weekends. I think it is very helpful if you like where you work; White Oak has a very social culture and I consider many of my colleagues also my friends, and several of my best friends I have met through the industry.

#### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

The most challenging thing for me working remotely is the absence of in-person interactions, whether it is with my peers or clients. Without the ability to engage face-to-face, we must settle with phone or Zoom calls, which has been working well under the circumstances.

#### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

I think a lot of companies will move toward a hybrid workweek, at least to start when the world reopens. It will take a more time for the majority of people to be comfortable commuting to work after over a year of working remotely. By starting with a hybrid workweek, they will have the chance to ease back into it.



#### Congratulates



**Laquanda N. Franklin**Vice President of Underwriting



**Teresa Chan**Vice President of Underwriting

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LAQUANDA N. FRANKLIN
White Oak
Commercial Finance

aquanda Franklin is a vice president of underwriting in ABL and factoring with White Oak Commercial Finance LLC where she has been for just over 12 years. Laquanda's primary focus is managing client relationships and servicing WOCF portfolio loans. Her career at White Oak Commercial Finance started through a training program which allowed her to work and learn from various departments in the business.

Laquanda's skillset plus her willingness to take on additional/new responsibilities has made Laquanda a valuable member of the White Oak team. Her methodical approach and ability to ask probing questions has allowed her to take on more complex credits, all the while maintaining a rapport with senior executives that allow them to feel Laquanda has their best interest at heart.

Laquanda earned a B.S. in finance from Seton Hall University. Previously, she worked at GMAC Commercial Finance as a team leader in Client Accounting. She also serves as the secretary for the Commercial Finance League.

#### What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

You have to recognize that you are going to need to step out of your comfort zone, and in doing so, the gains can be tremendous. Some of us can have the tendency to want to know everything, without question, before venturing into something new. This can lead to a hesitancy to seek out opportunities that you might feel you are not "qualified" for. It's important to take those opportunities (and the challenges that go along with them) and learn something new. The saying goes, you'll never learn until you try. Sometimes, you may not realize how good you are at something until you try it. Oftentimes, the situations that can make you the most uncomfortable are what you learn the most from.

#### How can commercial finance organizations attract and retain more women?

Personally, I can say that I have been blessed with some great mentors in this field. There is something to be said for allowing a person to be themselves while also teaching and pushing them to grow, and I have certainly had that. I can also say that I have been in many a room where I was the only woman. Being the only woman in the room really opens your eyes to the different ways that men and women communicate. Building off that, there needs to be a realization and knowledge that these differences exist. It's not enough to hire women and expect them to fall in line, per se. These differences need to be acknowledged and fostered. Mentoring really shouldn't be a one size fits all. What works for men doesn't necessarily work for women, and vice versa. Once this approach is more readily taken in the industry, I think you will certainly see an uptick in the number of women that are not only interested in considering the field but in staying in the field as well.

#### What effect, if any, has working remotely had on your career and/ or your industry? What have been the challenges and how have you worked to overcome them?

I would say that it has had a positive impact industry-wise in that it has shown that the work itself, as well as the client relationships, can still be tackled and managed successfully. I think that, when everything started, there was an underlying thought that things have not been done this way on a large scale before and maybe some things would slip through the cracks. A year into this, it's clear that was not the case.

The biggest challenge for me personally has been that I have missed the collaborative nature of being in the office with everyone. I'm always learning every day and there is something to be said for hearing a conversation between a colleague and an attorney/client, etc. discussing ideas and approaches to situations that you have not necessarily thought of before. That experience is certainly missed in the remote environment, but I think that, if you have a good team, you pick up the phone and talk. It might spark things to a different extent, but the value is still there.

#### What do you think work will look like in the post-pandemic world?

Building from my earlier point, I do think that we could see hybrid workweeks in the future. Things are still getting done and they are getting done well. Taking out the element of these longer commutes that some people deal with could really be helpful for some. I certainly think it's something to consider. However, I don't foresee much change with business travel. There's something to be said for those face-to-face meetings when you are trying to really to get to know your clients/prospects and their businesses. Video calls do help, but in person is always better in my opinion.



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SFNet Created (as The National Conference of Accounts Receivable Companies, Inc.): 1944

Debbie Monosson Becomes First Female President: 2008

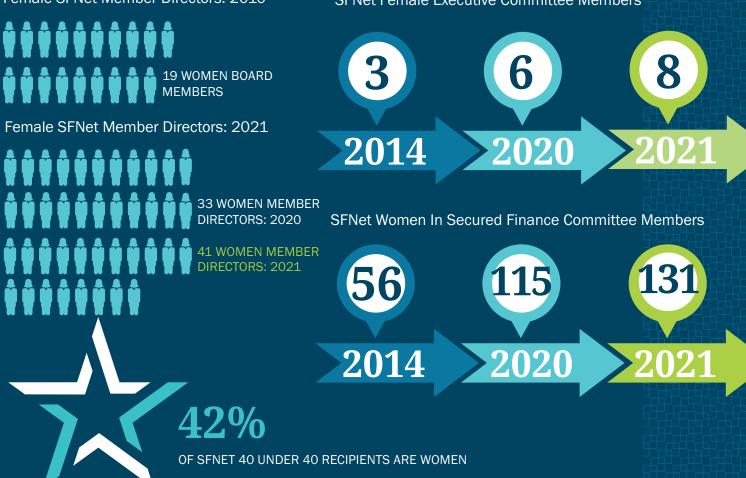
SFNet's WISF Committee Founded: 2013

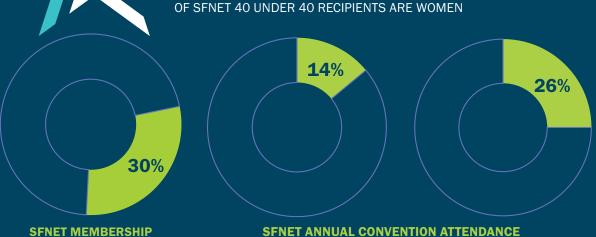
Andrea Petro Becomes Second Female President: 2017

Bobbi Acord Noland Becomes First Female Co-General Counsel: 2021

Female SFNet Member Directors: 2010

SFNet Female Executive Committee Members





3,384

SFNET MEMBERS ARE WOMEN

144

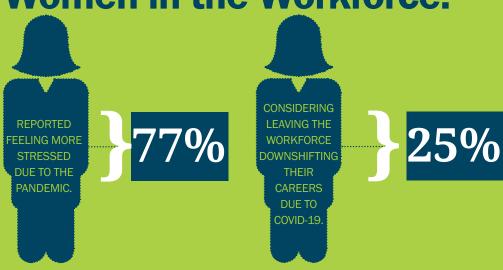
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2010 WOMEN ATTENDEES

2020 WOMEN ATTENDEES

## The Pandemic's Effect on Women in the Workforce:



## In December 2020, women accounted for all of the net job losses, while men achieved some job gains

According to the McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org annual Women in the Workplace report, after six years of slow but measurable progress in the representation of women in corporate America, 1 in 4 women are now considering leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers due to Covid-19.

"Before COVID-19 hit, women on average spent six more hours than men on unpaid childcare every week (according to research by UN Women). During COVID-19, women have taken on an even greater share and now spend 7.7 more hours per week on unpaid childcare than men - this 'second shift' equates to 31.5 hours per week; almost as much an extra full-time job." PWC Women in Work

According to a survey by Chief (a private club for senior-level women), 77% of their members reported feeling more stressed due to the pandemic. Those effects were exacerbated for women of color at the executive level, in particular, who were more likely to say they were "much more stressed."

During COVID-19, women now spend 7.7 more hours per week on unpaid childcare than men

## What has SFNet's WISF Done?

Inaugural WISF Issue of *The Secured Lender* June 2013



Profiling and Promoting the Achievements of Women in Secured Finance

Inaugural WISF Standalone Conference, Sept 2016:

#### **203 Attendees**

WISF Conference, Sept 2017:

#### **222 Attendees**

WISF Conference March 2019. Sold Out:

#### 232 Attendees

WISF Conference July 2020:

#### 368 Attendees

# Interview with Valerie Mason and Nneoma Maduike, Co-Chairs of Otterbourg's Lender Finance Practice Group

#### BY MICHELE OCEJO

In February, Otterbourg P.C. announced that Valerie S. Mason and Nneoma A. Maduike had been named co-chairs of the firm's Lender Finance Practice Group.

Otterbourg's experienced Lender Finance team advises and represents the largest U.S. and global institutional lenders and regional banks, as lenders and mature lenders, sponsor-supported companies, and strategics, ranging from start-ups to mature traditional lenders and funds, merchant cash advance companies, asset-based lenders, factors and fintech lenders, as borrowers, in "lender to lender" secured revolving credit and term loan facilities.





Maduike and Mason are also members of Otterbourg's Finance practice, which encompasses acquisition finance, asset-based lending, structured finance, bankruptcy financing, international and syndicated lending, among other specialized areas. The newly formed Lender Finance practice group reflects a formal acknowledgment of Otterbourg's long term growth and expansion of lender finance transactions as part of that practice and our ability to help lenders limit and manage their risk while developing positive relationships with borrowers.

Maduike represents banks, hedge funds, private equity funds, commercial finance companies and other institutional lenders on structuring and documentation of lease and loan transactions, including asset-based, cash flow and structured finance transactions, as well as loan workouts and restructurings and portfolio acquisitions and dispositions. She has advised on numerous financing transactions confronting a wide range of legal issues raised by federal, state and international law.

Maduike has been recognized by Best Lawyers in America as one of the top 15 Women of Influence in America, is a winner of the 2017 Secured Finance Network 40 under 40 Awards, and was recognized as one of the 2018 Top 50 Women in Commercial Finance. She was also selected to Super Lawyers for 2020. She is an active member of several organizations, including the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law, the Secured Finance Network, and New York City FinTech Women. She is a board member of the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law and the vice-chair of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee of the Secured Finance Network.

Mason is a leading banking and finance attorney who advises some of the nation's largest financial institutions, commercial finance companies and hedge funds in the structuring and restructuring of financing transactions. These include revolving credit facilities and terms loans for acquisitions and general working capital needs, workout arrangements, lender finance transactions, cross-border financings, and Chapter 11 debtor-in-possession and "exit" financing facilities.

Mason is Otterbourg's liaison to the SEO Law Fellowship Program and is an active member of the Women in Secured Finance Committee of the Secured Finance Network. 2021 marks the twelfth consecutive year, Valerie has been selected a SuperLawyer. She is involved in criminal justice reform, helping women in the criminal justice system through her service on the board of the Women's Prison Association & Home, Inc., including as board president. She currently serves as the Second Vice-Chair of New York City's Community Board 8 in Manhattan, as well as the Co-Chair of CB 8's Small Business Committee. In 2017, she was named a "Woman of Distinction" by the New York State Assembly and in 2019 received an "OTTY (Our Town Thanks You Award) by Straus News for her community advocacy.

#### You've been named co-chairs of the newly formed Lender Finance Practice Groups. Why did the firm create this group?

Mason: The creation of the "group" is really giving formal recognition

to what we have been doing within Otterbourg's Finance department for quite a number of years. We enjoy a nationally recognized expertise when it comes to financing transactions of all types, secured and unsecured, and we represent lenders of all kinds, including large financial institutions and specialty finance companies and we have for decades. As a result, lender finance was a natural development of our practice. Many years ago, our bank clients began coming to us for advice on structuring and documenting their lender finance transactions, sometimes referred to then more commonly as "warehouse lending" transactions. And, in addition, since we already represented a number of commercial finance and specialty finance companies in their direct-lending activities, we had their confidence to represent them as borrowers; it was just a natural evolution of the practice.

**Maduike:** As Valerie said, lender finance is not really a new area of practice to Otterbourg, but an organic offshoot of Otterbourg's robust lending practice. Otterbourg represents a significant number of financial institutions and lenders, including a number of specialty finance companies. We have all seen a significant increase in finance companies that are strategically placed to make capital even more accessible and this has led to increased calls for warehouse lines.

Valerie and I, through our asset-based lending practice, have a unique understanding of both the lender finance practice generally as well as the market trends. Part of Otterbourg's philosophy is that we are more than just lawyers for our clients; we pride ourselves on being advisers and we pride ourselves on playing crucial strategic roles as our clients grow and expand. As a result, we frequently work with our clients as they expand or seek out warehouse financing from connecting them to financing solutions to helping them navigate their options. We don't just "lawyer" but aim to understand, to the extent possible, the intricacies of our clients' businesses. It was only the natural next step for Otterbourg to carve out the lender finance practice group from its banking and finance practice with a dedicated team and dedicated resources to give attention to a rapidly expanding area of industry and to continue to highlight Otterbourg's commitment to being a partner for its clients.

#### What are your short- and long-term goals for the group?

**Maduike:** In the short term, we aim to continue to provide top-of-the-line legal service representation to our clients. In the long term, we recognize that our goals will change and evolve over time, but we intend to continue to help our clients with their businesses and, with respect to the lender finance practice, to continue to build relationships within the lender finance industry in hopes that we become the go-to partner for such representation. For certain clients and key industry players, we are already the go-to partners; however, we want to ensure that we maintain that foothold and continue our expansion.

**Mason:** The short answer is the goal, both short and long term, is always success for our clients; as part of that objective, we will continue to provide them with timely platinum quality legal services,

whether in their capacity as a borrower or a lender – that is what makes Otterbourg who we are in the lender finance space as well as every other aspect of our finance practice.

#### What are some of the biggest challenges this year facing institutions that engage in lender finance?

Mason: Competition, competition, competition! There is a lot of money out there and everyone wants to get into the game; so from the lender side, it is the same challenge in lender finance as in all other types of financing, pricing—and I am only half-joking. Since there are many start-ups entering the lending market, the additional challenge for the lender in a lender finance transaction is having the confidence in the borrower/lender and its management team and being able to sell the plan of your borrower to your team—which is not always a slam dunk. If you are the borrower/lender, you want to have great underwriting and pick and choose your clients wisely; essentially, the same challenges face both parties in a lender finance transaction, and our clients choose us because they know Otterbourg is entirely familiar with those issues and, most importantly, solutions for them.

## How did you each become involved in commercial finance law? Tell us a bit about your career trajectories.

Mason: I don't think anyone starts law school thinking that they are going to be a commercial finance lawyer. For me, it all began in the Otterbourg summer program. I knew I did not want to be a litigator (mainly because I preferred working towards a common goal rather than always being involved in a dispute, potential or actual). I really enjoyed the people in the Finance practice at Otterbourg, both the attorneys and clients that I was working with, and to me that was the most important factor in my decision; since work is the place where you spend most of your time, outside of family life, it was really important to be around people that I was going to enjoy spending a lot of time with. At Otterbourg, that has been the case, as to both attorneys and clients, especially in the finance world. We enjoy an incredible number of long-term relationships with our clients, both on an institutional level, as well as with the individual bankers at those institutions and, when they move on to other endeavors, they typically remain with us and that is an accomplishment we are very proud of; it always reinforces my decision to have chosen commercial finance law as a specialty.

**Maduike:** I ended up a commercial finance attorney because, believe it or not, I finally got the chance to work with people who were generally more invested in my career and my growth as a lawyer and knew my worth as an attorney. By way of relation, I began my career in the field of corporate transactions — specifically, mergers and acquisitions and investment management. As a young woman and a woman of color in a field where few people look like you, teachers were a rarity and true mentors were unicorns. It was not until my third year of practice that I switched to a company with a full finance practice area where I met people willing to teach me and mentor me as well. It was a no brainer for me to switch my practice areas as a result. This switch to

commercial finance and my subsequent transition to Otterbourg still remain the best career decisions I have ever made.

#### Nneoma, you're involved with SFNet's DEI Committee; could you tell us a bit about that?

Maduike: The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Secured Finance Network has made it its mission to build diversity, equality, and inclusion within the secured finance industry. I have had the honor of being vice chair of a committee that consists of members who are passionately dedicated to getting the secured finance industry to a point where diversity within the industry is more accurately represented. The Committee seeks to identify the issues and create awareness around the topic of diversity, provide resources for improvements, and demonstrate sustained measurable positive outcomes from adopting DEI measures. This is arguably a lofty goal, but diversity is incredibly important. Adopting tried and true diversity, equity and inclusivity measures (versus falling back on tokenism) will guarantee that our industry remains at the top and continues to boom because of the undeniable boost that diversity brings to productivity and innovation.

The secured finance industry will benefit from a commitment to focus on creating and maintaining a diverse and inclusive industry that, at the end, knows, without prompt, the value in being representative of people with different ideas and of different races, ages, genders, and beliefs.

## Valerie, you volunteer with The Women's Prison Association; could you tell us about the organization and your involvement?

Mason: It would be my pleasure. The Women's Prison Assn & Home, Inc., formed just over 175 years ago, was the nation's first organization focused on women impacted by incarceration. WPA is based in New York City and partners with women to provide solutions that will positively impact women, their families and society at large. I have been involved with the organization for more than 25 years, serving on its Board of Directors. I am currently the chair of the Development Committee and a member of the Audit Committee: I am also a pastpresident of the Board. Early in my career, in addition to my legal work, I taught a weekly class on money addiction at the Bayview Correctional Facility, helping women learn about money management, budgets and other fiscal fundamentals, and that brought me to WPA. WPA works together with women to reunify families, develop workplace skills and careers, and achieve stability for women when they are released from the system, with the ultimate goal being to help them avoid additional involvement in the criminal justice system. We have found that family reunification is a key to reducing recidivism and increasing a woman's chance of success. Every mother wants her child to be proud of her. and every child loves their mother, no matter what they they've done. It is often very challenging, but very rewarding at the same time.  $\blacksquare$ 

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Michele Ocejo is director of communications for SFNet and editor-in-chief of The Secured Lender.

## Interview with Bobbi Acord Noland, SFNet's New Co-General Counsel

#### BY MICHELE OCEJO

Bobbi Acord Noland is a partner at Parker Hudson Rainer & Dobbs LLP in Atlanta, Georgia. As head of the Commercial Finance practice, Bobbi guides global banks, regional banks and finance companies through domestic and cross-border transactions ranging from \$5 million to more than \$1 billion. She has handled practically every aspect of commercial lending, from single-lender deals to syndicated facilities involving multiple lenders, borrowers, creditors and multi-tiered debt tranches. In addition, Bobbi frequently advises her clients on workouts and restructurings.



B

obbi is a Fellow of the
American College of
Commercial Finance
Attorneys and was
recognized by The Secured
Lender as one of the 50
Women in Commercial
Finance. She also is listed
in Band 1 of Chambers USA:
America's Leading Lawyers
for Business for Banking and
Finance and was selected by



Parker Hudson
Rainer & Dobbs LLP

The Best Lawyers in America© as the 2018 Lawyer of the Year in Georgia in the practice area of Banking and Finance Law.

Bobbi also was recently selected to serve as Co-General Counsel for the Secured Finance Network. She has served as an adjunct professor at Emory University Law School in Atlanta. Bobbi is also the past Chair of the Business Law Section, UCC Committee of the Georgia State Bar and the Business and Finance Section of the Atlanta Bar. Bobbi is a 1986 graduate of Wake Forest University and was Phi Beta Kappa. She graduated from Wake Forest Law School in 1989 and was Editor-in-Chief of the Wake Forest Law Review.

#### Please tell us about your career trajectory.

I started my practice after law school at King & Spalding in Atlanta in the commercial finance area. I was attracted to a transactional practice with sophisticated clients and enjoyed the business aspects of this type of practice also. I joined Parker Hudson Rainer & Dobbs almost 30 years ago, and I still enjoy so many of the same aspects of my practice that have made it interesting over the years – i.e., the challenge of each new deal, the structuring and analysis of issues, the exposure to different types of businesses and industries and the ability to interact with a vast array of people to achieve a common goal.

## You recently became the first female co-general counsel for SFNet. Please tell us why this role appealed to you and a bit about your responsibilities as co-general counsel.

I have been involved with SFNet for many years in various ways and always have enjoyed the networking, educational programs, and market knowledge that SFNet offers to its members. I was honored when Rich Gumbrecht and Jon Helfat reached out to me about the position and thought that it was a great opportunity to expand my contributions

to the organization and help promote new initiatives while supporting SFNet's on-going programs. I think that there has been an increased level of energy and engagement over the past several years, in particular with the 40 Under 40 awards, the Women in Secured Finance initiatives and the focus on cultivating the next generation of leaders in our industry. As co-general counsel, I work closely with Jon Helfat and Rich Gumbrecht and the various leadership committees in providing legal guidance and analysis on various issues and also assist with strategic initiatives. The co-general counsels are engaged in important advocacy projects on behalf of the organization and also serve as a sounding board with respect to issues that confront our industry. We also gave the annual general counsel report at the virtual convention last November and look forward to providing our report at this year's convention in Arizona.

## What are a few of the most pressing legal issues facing secured finance professionals in 2021?

The challenges of 2020 arising from the pandemic continue to confront our industry in early 2021. From a legal perspective, one issue that causes concern is the level of distress that may exist in certain companies and whether the level of support received by those companies in 2020 has delayed a pending liquidity crisis for them. We also have the pending cessation of LIBOR that is going to continue to challenge lenders as the practical aspects of that continue to unfold. The regulatory landscape may change also with the new administration, and we will have to carefully track proposed legislation and regulations and the effect that these changes may have on our industry. From a global standpoint, we will continue to monitor the post-Brexit challenges for the United Kingdom and the European Union also and the effect on cross-border lending.

## You're a member of SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Committee. Why is it important for you to be engaged with this committee?

As the first female co-general counsel, it is especially important to support the mission of the Committee. I think that the Committee has made great inroads in engaging more and more young women in our industry. The virtual WISF Conference last year was excellent, and I also enjoyed the in-person conference in New York a few years ago. When I looked around the room, I was amazed at how many young women were at the conference and how engaged they were. Relationships in our industry are so important and rewarding, and the Committee provides a great forum for networking among women in different organizations with varying levels of expertise and interests. The Committee also sponsors substantive programs that provide real-world guidance on career advancement and leadership.



## With so many of us working remotely and not seeing each other face-to-face, how do you ensure you are engaged with your team and clients?

We have weekly video meetings as a team and also constantly interact with each other by phone and email. We have such a great team and everyone has pitched in to make sure that we continue to provide excellent legal services to our clients while supporting each other personally during this challenging

time. I also have enjoyed reaching out to clients whether by video or phone and understanding how they are doing from a personal standpoint and the changes and challenges that they are seeing in the secured finance industry. We also have provided presentations to clients on key topics of interest and some virtual social events also.



#### When you step away from the office, how do you spend your free time?

My husband and I like to play golf. I made a hole-in-one a couple of years ago and everyone was shocked—I really am a bad, but lucky golfer! I also love cycling and reading and being with my friends and family – hopefully more in 2021 post-vaccine. We also love to travel and look forward to continuing our travels to new,

We have weekly video meetings as a team and also constantly interact with each other by phone and email. We have such a great team and everyone has pitched in to make sure that we continue to provide excellent legal services to our clients while supporting each other personally during this challenging time. I also have enjoyed reaching out to clients whether by video or phone and understanding how they are doing from a personal standpoint and the changes and challenges that they are seeing in the secured finance industry.

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interesting places in the future.  $\ \ \blacksquare$ 

Michele Ocejo is director of communications for SFNet and the staff liaison to the Women in Secured Finance Committee.





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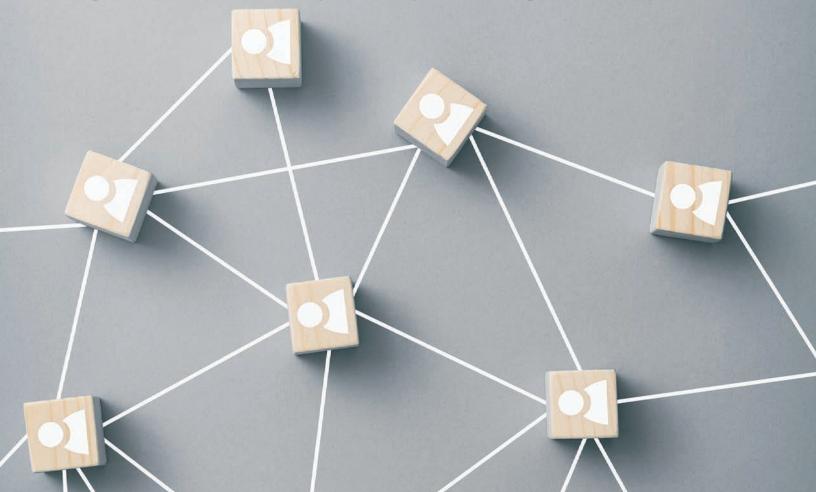


gerberfinance.com

## Where Are They Now?

#### BY MICHELE OCEJO

This is the sixth Women in Secured Finance issue published by The Secured Lender. Close to 300 women have been profiled since we launched the first WISF issue. Here, we catch up with some of the women profiled over the last few years to get an update on their careers and get their thoughts on how the pandemic could change the way we work permanently.



he women featured are: Elizabeth R. Khoury Ali, partner, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP; Robyn Barrett, managing member, FSW Funding; Andrea Bernard, managing director, Wells Fargo Capital Finance; Paula Currie, senior vice president, internal controls director, PNC Business Credit; Betty Hernandez, executive vice president, chief credit officer, SLR Business Credit; Janet Jarrett,

head of asset finance, Truist; Dorothy Killeen, managing director, Wells Fargo Capital Finance; Yvonne Kizner, senior vice president, asset-based lending, Cambridge Savings Bank; Kathleen Z. Lepak, asset-based lending business director, People's United Business Capital; Jennifer Palmer, CEO, Gerber Finance; Gen Merritt-Parikh, president, Haversine Funding and Jennifer Sheasgreen, president, Siena Healthcare Finance.

#### What significant changes have you experienced in your career since being profiled?

**Paula Currie:** Since being profiled in 2019, I have had the pleasure of serving as chairperson of SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Committee and as a member of SFNet's Executive Committee for the past two years. Serving in both capacities has afforded me the opportunity to engage and network with some of the top leaders in the secured finance industry.

Jennifer Palmer: Since my interview last year, I am even more confident in my role as CEO at Gerber Finance - and what a year it has been! In addition to weathering the pandemic, we've grown a lot as a company this past year, launching two new divisions: Naturally Gerber Finance, using our deep experience to support growth in the natural products industry, and Gerber+, extending our reach to companies seeking larger lines of credit. We also opened a West Coast office in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2021, we kicked off the year with three deals under Naturally Gerber Finance and one under Gerber+. Additionally, we're formalizing our focus on supporting women by committing to 51% of our portfolio being women-owned and -led businesses. I've been extremely proud of how our team has pivoted and supported clients this past year. We leaned even further into the power of partnership and learned how we can help our clients navigate various situations working hand-in-hand.

I've also joined the SFNet Management Committee and I'm thrilled to be working with my fellow MC members and the SFNet staff to guide the association's future.

Andrea Bernard: When I was profiled in 2018, I was managing a portfolio team within our Technology Finance business and have since moved into a Loan Syndications and Capital Markets role. It was a big change, as I had spent 11 years in Technology Finance where I was focused on providing cash-flow financing to software companies, and now I'm predominantly focused on the structuring and execution of asset-based loans. It's been exciting to take on this new challenge and develop new relationships.



ELIZABETH R. KHOURY ALI Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP



■ ROBYN BARRETT FSW Funding



ANDREA BERNARD Wells Fargo Capital Finance

#### **Elizabeth Khoury Ali:**

Since being profiled, I was promoted to partner in our firm's Transactional Finance group and am hiring partner of our Houston office. In my new role, I am responsible for managing junior attorneys and my finance and restructuring practice. As hiring partner, I am responsible for recruiting and retaining diverse talent at our firm. Being profiled in The Secured Lender has helped raise my visibility both within the firm and externally with clients and our finance industry.

Janet Jarrett: There has been a considerable amount of change since I was profiled. In 2019, SunTrust entered into a merger of equals with BB&T to form Truist, effectively doubling the size of the company and forming the sixth-largest U.S. bank. At the time of the merger announcement, I was leading the assetbased lending and supply chain finance products for SunTrust.

In mid-2019, I was given the opportunity to run the Asset Finance Group (AFG) for Truist. AFG is comprised of seven different product groups that are primarily reliant on asset characteristics to drive structure and repayment. These products are assetbased lending, asset securitization, equipment finance, government finance, project finance, supply chain finance and structured real estate.

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While I am still a deal junkie at heart, I spend most of my time on product strategy and alignment as well as merger integration.

#### FEATURE STORY

Dorothy Killeen: Since being profiled in 2017, I've experienced a number of important changes in my career. Later in 2017, I was asked to serve as co-chair of the Wells Fargo Capital Finance management committee, which gave me an opportunity to build my leadership and communication skills and to drive organizational and cultural change. Drawing on this experience, I moved into a one-year professional assignment in 2019 as the Transformation Leader for Wells Fargo Commercial Capital, where I evaluated and evolved our business model. Then I focused on finding a client-facing leadership role and, in 2020, was selected to build out a new origination organization to drive growth across Commercial Capital. This new role has created opportunities for me to work with more of Commercial Capital's products and services - which include asset-based lending, equipment finance, inventory finance/floor-planning, vendor finance, technology channel finance, and supply chain finance — and better position us to provide creative lending solutions within these areas.

Betty Hernandez: Since being profiled early in 2017, I've experienced many changes professionally. In October of 2017, our company was sold to Solar Capital SLR Capital Partners. I had been one of the founding partners of North Mill Capital, renamed SLR Business Credit (SLRBC). Our parent company's financial strength has provided us the ability to not only close larger deals. but also to acquire other portfolios and continue to grow. As a result, in 2019 we purchased Summit Financial Resources, a formidable competitor headquartered in Salt Lake City, UT where I led the due diligence team. Acquisitions are a great way to grow the portfolio in one fell swoop. It also entails careful review of each portfolio account and understanding what exactly it is that we are acquiring. It is both challenging and rewarding. As a result of the increased geographically diverse portfolio, I was traveling quite a bit to meet with our team members as well as to visit our newly acquired and existing portfolio accounts.

In 2019 I was selected to be the chair of the SFNet Chapter Committee. Prior to this I had been the vice chair and had the opportunity to meet with most of the Chapter leaders. I continue to be involved in the SFNet as in 2020 I was selected to be the chair of the newly formed Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness Committee. Being a new committee, this afforded me new challenges. We started off by assembling a group of volunteers and establishing a mission statement, longer- term and shorter-term goals. Within the last five months we have assembled two panels showcased in both the SFNet Annual Convention as well as the recent ABCC Conference. I'm excited to be a part of this Committee and to change the status quo. Our committee is working on many exciting goals. One of our subcommittees has established a repository of information on the SFNet website to provide information on Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness including best practices, and solid business cases for why companies should endeavor to hire, cultivate and retain a diverse talent pool and to make them feel equal and included in decision making. Our efforts are simply the beginning of the conversations that need to take place in our SFNet community.



PAULA CURRIE PNC Business Credit



BETTY HERNANDEZ
SLR Business Credit



JANET JARRETT Truist

Gen Merritt-Parikh: Well... a lot has changed! In the middle of the pandemic, I decided to try something new, joining Stan Vukmer to lead and grow Haversine Funding, where we help specialty finance companies fill funding gaps. We've continued to grow rapidly, adding new product offerings onto our commercial platform. What started as participations with factors, inventory lenders and purchase order finance companies has grown into adding lender finance options as well as growth capital for these factors and lenders. We also focus on additional collateral types, including equipment and real estate lenders.

Our fast growth with our limited team has been challenging, but definitely fun. I'm always up for a challenge though. From focusing on marketing, originations, underwriting, portfolio management, investor relations and more... it's been a balancing act for sure. And, for those that know me, I am sure they can envision squirrels running around right now.

I love that we are building something the way we want to build it. And I especially enjoy that we can help people we know in our industry, and that our funding ultimately will be used to help small and mid-sized enterprises grow. We are now adding onto our team so that will be another adventure as you can

imagine, upgrading and expanding our processes, policies, and internal operations, while creating a new, fun team culture as we launch our Dallas office.

It does make you wonder... what else will change in a year? Guess we will see; it's exciting!

Jennifer Sheasgreen: When I was profiled in 2017 in the Women in Secured Finance issue, I was president of Triumph Healthcare Finance, part of a publicly traded bank. Our healthcare team built the division from the ground up into a profitable, bank-regulated, healthcare ABL portfolio. In 2018, we were acquired by a nonbank, healthcare, ABL competitor, and then in 2019 I left that company for Siena Lending Group, to build a new healthcare, ABL group from the ground up. I've had the experience of working for several financial systems in my career, but it's been a new and interesting journey building a portfolio in a non-bank environment. I've enjoyed the flexibility and fast-paced nature of such an entrepreneurial organization as Siena Lending Group. The reflections I have on the past several years are that change is inevitable, transparent relationships matter, and working with people you trust and respect outweighs anything else.

**Robyn Barrett:** The opportunity to be profiled was a great way to expand my network and to help me get more involved in SFNet. The profile also created interest in FSW and what we could do as a lender. Overall, the experience was positive both personally and professionally.

Kate Lepak: The most significant changes in my career have been driven by the impact of COVID-19. I've had to re-imagine how to run our business remotely, and without the opportunity to be present with my team, our customers and prospects, our finance community, and the market in general. The challenges of a nocontact business environment are immense. Our business relies on building key relationships with all constituencies – difficult to do when you can't connect in person. The change in 2020 was immediate, without warning as to the scope of our isolation, and is an environment I've never encountered in my long career before. I've learned the value of using technology to connect, and the importance of an information-based business strategy, leveraging digital media and planned outreach to everyone in our world.

Yvonne Kizner: I was with Blue Hills Bank when the previous profile came out, where we had just established the asset-based lending group. In the fall of 2018, Rockland Trust announced they were acquiring Blue Hills, which already had their own ABL team, so it was clear that a decision had to be made: did my partner Keith Broyles and I want to try this again, starting an ABL group from the ground up at another institution, or go our separate ways? While we both had many options, we jointly decided it was such a good experience at Blue Hills, and with all the lessons learned we just had to give this another shot. Once you get a chance to run your own show it's difficult to go back to a traditional role within a group that has their own leadership vision. The tricky part is finding an institution large enough to do the types of deals we were targeting (lower end of the middle market), but hadn't already established



DOROTHY KILLEEN Wells Fargo Capital Finance



YVONNE KIZNER
Cambridge Savings Bank



KATHLEEN Z. LEPAK People's United Business Capital

an ABL group. This time around we were fortunate to have the support of Blue Hill's CEO at the time, who provided the introduction to Cambridge Savings Bank (CSB). Now a \$5B plus mutual bank by asset size, they were slightly smaller in late 2018 when we first got to know the executive management team. They were at the right time in their evolution - while CSB has been around since 1834, their commercial team was relatively young, with that team really getting off the ground in the early 2000s. With our business plan in hand, we pitched our vision of an ABL team, spending time with members of the Board of Directors, as well as the CEO and other senior members of the Executive team. Some were less familiar with ABL or had the common misconception that our deals were inherently riskier, so we spent a lot of time talking about our history at Blue Hills, and our previous ABL shops, and how that would translate to what we could do at CSB. The good news is we started in April of 2019, with Keith leading the team and me in charge of operations and business development. We both wear many hats and mind the existing portfolio together. We have built our team out, with what we consider great success, having closed over 13 deals to date, with commitments approaching \$175MM. Being part of a mutual bank, which cares

deeply about the community it serves as well as its employees, while keeping its customers at the center of all we do, has been

#### FEATURE STORY

particularly refreshing. So, while I was very satisfied with where my career was headed when I was last profiled, it's hard to believe that it could improve so much over the course of a few years.

Everyone is struggling with the challenge of standing out at work while working remotely. What advice would you give on increasing your visibility both in person and virtually?

**Sheasgreen:** Establish and then build out your personal brand as if it's your business. Your personal brand matters and building upon it comes down to how you present and promote yourself at work. This isn't always easy for women who sometimes feel hesitant to focus on their accomplishments. Determine what makes you unique and communicate your vision both internally and externally. Your brand will evolve as you do. You can do this by establishing yourself as an expert in your job or your field, being reliable and trustworthy, returning calls, following through with deadlines, and consistently reinforcing to others who you are at work and in life.

**Bernard:** I agree that the most important thing you can do to increase your visibility is to build a strong personal brand. This applies whether you're in the office or working remotely. You will get noticed if you are someone who adds value to a working group by contributing good ideas (be sure to speak up if you have them!), taking on special projects, being easy to work with, communicating clearly and thoughtfully, and producing high quality work. Ask for feedback if you want to know if you're doing well, and accept constructive criticism on ways you can improve.

Khoury Ali: It is certainly more challenging to gain career momentum and stand out in the workplace while working remotely. Try to be as visible as possible. Always offer to help on new projects or take on a work/business initiative where you get to present to internal or external clients. Although many of us are getting Zoom fatigue, try to keep your camera on during virtual meetings, attend virtual social hours, etc. As things begin to get back to normal, try to continue to network and attend trade events, like SFNet conferences or seminars. I also find publishing an article an easy way to gain visibility in your area.

Barrett: Stay connected! When COVID hit and all of the sudden conferences and networking events were cancelled, I knew I couldn't live under a rock. I reached out to fellow lenders to see what was going on in their portfolios, work environment and personal life. It was nice to reach out and hear what others were experiencing and how they were dealing with issues of remote working, decreases in portfolios and balancing work/ life issues that were now blurred together. I also worked with an industry association to create Zoom webinar content to keep the conversation going among factors. Now that we are seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, I am glad I stayed connected and actually got to know my peers a little bit better.



■ JENNIFER PALMER
Gerber Finance



■ GEN MERRITT-PARIKH
Haversine Funding



■ **JENNIFER SHEASGREEN**Siena Healthcare Finance

Lepak: I would encourage professionals to master virtual selling, to employ digital media to reinforce industry visibility. This could be a healthy LinkedIn presence, or the use of sophisticated email marketing programs through a CRM. Attending virtual conferences is key to maintaining visibility as well as staying current with other industry contacts attending as well. We should be able to meet in person as we move into the second half of 2021

Killeen: My advice on standing out has not changed since 2017: be great at your job. The benefits of mentorship, sponsorship, special assignments, or programs unique to your organization are often directed to high performing employees. There is no substitute for hard work, attention to detail, building relationships, and learning from your mistakes. Operating in an environment that is partially or fully virtual requires more thoughtful and consistent communication with your team and can often require you to raise your hand more often to be included in calls or Zooms

Palmer: Consistent communication is extremely important in the workplace – in-person, but especially virtually. Because a lot of us are still working from home, it's vital to keep your team in the loop. Over-

communication is infinitely better than lack of communication. If you feel like you're bugging your coworkers with status updates

and important questions, don't worry, you're not. If we were back in the office, those conversations would happen all the time. While Zoom fatigue is, unfortunately, very real, it doesn't hurt to make time on your calendar and have frequent checkpoints with the various members of your team to try and replicate the feeling of being in an office again and casually chatting. What I miss the most is random one-to-one time with the people I don't always work super closely with on a day-to-day basis, so I find it helpful to randomly check in once in a while to feel seen as well as make them feel seen.

Currie: It is important to find ways to connect proactively with coworkers, customers, and leaders in your organization. I suggest not relying on email as your primary source of communication. When warranted, pick up the phone to discuss business topics. If at all possible, you should utilize a live video platform such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Skype when participating in meetings. Being able to see each other during the call makes the meeting much more personable, especially when meeting with a small number of participants. Join the call 5 to 10 minutes prior to the meeting start time to connect with those individuals who also joined early or to introduce yourself to those you may not have met previously. While the dress code has become more relaxed for those working from home, it is best to look presentable and professional. It is critical to stay actively engaged on the call, so avoid multitasking and limit the possibility of home/life distractions. Also be mindful of your body language and facial expressions.

Jarrett: Although it seems basic, just using the phone for individual conversations vs. email or group teleconferences is a great way to develop and share more complex ideas, which builds credibility with internal and external constituents. It's also important to consistently convey your contributions in a manner that works for you and your manager. This could be weekly project updates, pipelines, one-on-one meetings or summary dashboards. Interactions that were informal prior to COVID-19 now need to be more intentional.

**Kizner:** Get involved both within your organization as well as outside your organization, through networking groups, charities you care about, etc. It's easy to disappear from the radar screen of senior management, so participating in any task force or strategic planning projects is a good way to maintain a higher profile. Taking on a leadership role within your networking groups is another way to get to know your colleagues on a more personal level, taking part in committees and doing the work behind the scenes. Being on the Advocacy Committee for the SFNet was particularly rewarding for me, as I was able to speak directly to the Fed last spring as they were structuring the Main Street Lending Program, and being able to report back to SFNet on various initiatives we were jointly lobbying for was a great experience in addition to meeting many new contacts.

#### What workplace changes from the last year do you think will become permanent?

Bernard: Before the pandemic, many companies were already transitioning to less office space with more remote work and shared or hoteling options for employees to schedule workspace when coming into the office. The pandemic has proven that we are all capable of working remotely, so I would expect this trend to continue once we're back in the office. We've determined that virtual platforms like Teams and Zoom work perfectly well for both internal and external meetings. I think this will mean that we won't have groups of people getting on airplanes to fly 2,000-plus miles for short client meetings. Instead, we will host on Zoom and save a lot of time and money in the process, while also improving the quality of life for our employees. However, it will be important to travel at times for in-person client visits and other networking events. I don't think you can build true relationships over a computer screen, so there will be a balance as we adjust to the new normal.

**Killeen:** As we evaluate the opportunity to return to offices and get back on the road to visit customers, we're influenced by our new toolkit. Many of us have a greater degree of comfort with Zoom, more fulsome home offices, and better tools for remote interactions with our teams and customers. We also have better data on which roles and activities can be performed efficiently in a virtual environment and where we'll benefit from renewed inperson collaboration. I don't envision any changes as permanent; instead, we'll be evaluating a broader spectrum of opportunities for how we work with our teams and our customers.

Khoury Ali: There will definitely be changes to the workplace as we have adapted quite successfully to the current virtual environment. I expect most companies will be more flexible and allow employees to work remotely at least a few times a week, if not more. That said, I can say that most of us are looking forward to some normalcy back in place and the opportunity to convene in-person (at least part time!). Face-to-face contact is much more conducive to organic interaction. So, while more meetings or conferences may be over Zoom, I don't believe we will lose sight of in-person events completely.

**Currie:** People, as well as the companies they work for, have learned that they can be successful working virtually. Because of this, I believe that a large number of companies will either require or make it an option for certain employees to work from home partor full-time in order to eliminate the expenses of having a physical workplace. A hybrid office-home model will allow both the employee and employer to benefit from efficiencies gained by remote work, such as reducing commuting time and creating better work-life balance, with the benefits of social interaction which result in increased employee engagement, collaboration and loyalty. Those companies that do promote returning to an office location likely will convert their office to include more flexible coworking and hoteling



space instead of assigned offices or cubicles. Additionally, going forward, I think the majority of conference calls will be video calls, and there generally will be more reliance on technology.

**Lepak:** The need for commercial office space will decline significantly, as certain jobs will remain remote. The challenge with this change is how to build a healthy community for your team, and how to manage face-to-face interaction with colleagues, customers, prospects, and the market. There could be less travel, as we've become effective at virtual meetings for many purposes. I think there will be a return to in-person conferences, as connectivity at these events is critical to maintaining networks, and healthy relationships.

Hernandez: Naturally, COVID has impacted all of us in one way or another. Obviously, my travel days have been curtailed for the last year. I'm hoping that, after more folks obtain the vaccine, that we can resume somewhat of our normal routines. Notwithstanding this, I do agree that permanent workplace changes will occur as a result. I believe some degree of working remotely will continue. That is not to say that we at SLRBC will be 100% remote because that will not happen, but rather possibly some form of hybrid work from home and in the office schedule may be the new norm. I still think it is important for colleagues to be in the same workplace. One of my largest concerns is the continued training of less experienced team members and the lack of "water cooler" talk. Each lending situation is unique and without proper training, some of the less experienced lenders' careers may be slower to develop as a result of not being in the office. I think one way for a lessexperienced person to "stand out" at work during these COVID times is to connect with senior management. We have one team member who contacts me or I contact her periodically to "check in on her." She'll ask questions such as "how am I doing?" I think it's terrific. She wants feedback and doesn't want to wait for the usual customary methods of a review. Sometimes managers get busy and caught up in the day-to-day and unfortunately "out of sight out of mind" sets in. If you want to be noticed, you should volunteer for projects, reach out to colleagues at all levels, voice your opinions during virtual meetings, and look interested during Zoom calls. Each time there is a virtual meeting, it is a point of contact with your colleagues. You may not be in the same office, but that interaction does make an impression nonetheless.

Palmer: Working from home is here to stay. Many people are realizing how convenient it has become to work remotely (cutting down on food costs, commute time, gas, etc.), so I very much believe this will become a staple of workplace culture moving forward. This was already starting to ramp up as more jobs became doable digitally; however COVID-19 was the tipping point that I believe will leave a lasting impact for years to come. Many organizations will likely develop a hybrid working environment, allowing their employees to come in on a part-time basis – especially while health and safety is still a big concern for many.

This type of flexibility enables working parents to do their jobs and manage kids' schedules more easily. I think we'll start to see business travel pick up soon because people are ready to leave their homes and get out there, but I can't see it coming back in full-force like it once was – many businesses are concluding that Zoom conferences can be just as effective as in-person meetings (depending on the industry, of course), and I think this trend will stick around for a while. On the same note, I think webinars aren't going away any time soon.

Barrett: I think remote work will have staying power. FSW Funding worked remotely in April to mid-May 2020 and then we all came back to the office. My staff and I feel working together creates more of a team environment and works best for us. I have talked to other lenders who feel the opposite and are going to adopt some form of remote work option. The virtual conferences were a great work-around, but for networking seeing people in person can't be beat. Also, I think most of us are pretty done with Zoom calls! I do think hybrid conferences will continue, as having the option of attending virtually is good for more participation at an economical cost. This is especially important as we look to the next generation of leaders. The virtual option is a great way for junior members of an organization to start getting involved in the commercial finance industry.

Kizner: Likely most of us will have the flexibility of working from home more often. I know some offices were moving towards a hoteling system before COVID, and now that we've all adjusted our home space to accommodate our work needs, I see less people commuting five days a week to the office. We've proven we can be effective from home, even in roles traditionally thought to be "inflexible" to working outside the office, such as operations and accounting. However, most of us are social beings, and conducting conferences virtually from now on is a trend I hope doesn't stick. I personally can't wait to see colleagues in person and, of course, meeting prospects in person will never be replaced by a Zoom call for me.

Michele Ocejo is director of communications for the Secured Finance Network and editor-in-chief of The Secured Lender.

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## SFNet Members Roundtable: Effects of the Pandemic on Working Mothers

#### **BY NNEOMA MADUIKE**

It's clear that the pandemic has had a profound effect on working mothers who were suddenly juggling children who were learning remotely while also working from home themselves. Nneoma Maduike of Otterbourg P.C. gathered several working mothers from the SFNet community to speak about their experiences.



n March of 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic changed the face of the American workplace, leading to a workforce that remains over 71% remote. The first few months of the pandemic saw the vast majority of companies quickly and efficiently adopt processes to make the shift to a remote workplace and to support their employees suddenly working from home. A year later, however, as the pandemic wears on, schools are still primarily remote or operating on a hybrid model and work demands are constantly changing or increasing, offering little or no opportunities for escape. Of course, parents aren't the only ones suffering through the challenges of this past year, but the spotlight is now back on companies to once more provide additional accommodations to parents, considering that the demands put on them are increasing as the pandemic continues. Many parents will freely admit that it is a constant balancing act between career and maintaining a functioning home life, oftentimes feeling as though working virtually puts them in the unenviable position of constantly having to readjust to stay ahead of demands from both their home and professional life. While this is a phenomenon

that all working parents can



**MEREDITH CARTER** Context Business Lending



**BECKY GOLDFARB** Gordon Brothers



**CANDICE HUBERT** Republic Business Credit

relate to, it is becoming increasingly clear in our second year of the pandemic that the main subset of parents experiencing this are



**MIIN CHEN** Siena Lending Group



**SHARI HEYEN** Greenberg Traurig



**JENNIFER PALMER** Gerber Finance

better resources to parents.

these issues must be addressed sooner rather than later, putting the

onus on companies and our society as a whole to step up and provide

mothers.

Despite the fact that over 70% of working mothers are employed full-time, women are still overwhelmingly considered the "homemakers" of the family and are routinely expected to not only balance a career but also take care of children and the home. On average, the workload these mothers are tackling remains the same- if not more- as before the pandemic, when childcare and office work was still possible. This makes for a troubling dichotomy of expecting working mothers to keep the same standard of achievement at both work and home while drastically changing the landscape in which they are able to do so. While some women do report positive changes due to the pandemic, the general consensus remains that virtual working while trying to care for children and homes is challenging in the least. The pandemic has served to illuminate the disparities between various members of society, and one of the most glaring ones remains the differences of expectations placed on working mothers versus others in the workforce. The New York Times launched a series of articles entitled "The Primal Scream", focused on the pandemic's adverse effects on working mothers. And while we may be overcoming the worst of the Coronavirus, very few doubt that remote work will become a staple of the way the American workplace operates, and that

#### FEATURE STORY

The women featured in this article candidly discuss their experiences in the past year, and what unique challenges and expectations are put on them as women and mothers in the workforce.

my professional network and referral sources in innovative ways around topics that personally mattered to me. In May, I launched my first event: "Women Leading With Purpose." The event was uplifting during a time that seemed very dismal. I continued to develop relative topics of discussions and hosted additional events throughout the year

that have carried on into 2021

## Candice Hubert, Senior Vice President, Business Development, Republic Business Credit

What has been the overall impact of the pandemic on you? Specifically, in what areas have you been able to thrive during this time? What areas have been challenging for you?

Like many other professional women and men, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on my life. Balancing travel schedules, late nights and networking continuously was my normal. I simultaneously attended my children's soccer, gymnastics and swim lessons. I nurtured my children through late

Like many other professional women and men, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on my life. Balancing travel schedules, late nights and networking continuously was my normal. I simultaneously attended my children's soccer, gymnastics and swim lessons. I nurtured my children through late night flu and fevers. I oftentimes thrived on four hours of sleep and managed to work out early in the morning or in the evening.

night flu and fevers. I oftentimes thrived on four hours of sleep and managed to work out early in the morning or in the evening. Suddenly, the pandemic happened. This was the first time that I felt completely discombobulated. I thought about my job stability as my husband had started his own business three years prior and was still considered a start-up business. Schools shut down, my kids were home, and I had to work. We adapted quickly. My kids began to learn remotely while I wore the hat of mom and teacher. Eventually schools opened in our county; however,I chose to keep my children home for most of the school year. My husband split his time between going to the office and working from home in order to assist with the kids and my schedule. Over the course of the year, I discovered inner strength that I honestly didn't think existed. As months passed, I took time to think introspectively. I no longer needed to whisk off to several in-person meetings throughout the day. The elimination of mandatory tasks invited the comfort of time. Thus, I began to creatively think about how to engage



## Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

Impressions are extremely important. I have desired to reflect an image that is dependable and reliable. I am not sure if my pride has stood in the way, but somehow, I had created a false perception that sickness may appear capricious. I am sure many women and mothers can relate to this type of attitude towards working. In the past, I have traveled to company meetings while sick in order to appear committed. Earlier this year, I had to make the choice to miss a major company meeting in which I was asked to present. Although the meeting was virtual, it was an important

and mandatory meeting. My family and I had contracted COVID a few days before the meeting. I was unsure on how we had contracted the virus, as we were following all social distancing recommendations. I felt a heavy level of guilt as if I had purposely taken sick. Over a course of a few days, my husband became progressively sick and was admitted to the hospital. I was overwhelmed with talking to doctors and trying to keep my children calm. I somehow felt like I needed to attend our company meeting in order impress my team and my boss. I wanted to appear as if I had everything under control. However, I was completely overwhelmed. My family and close friends, convinced me to tell my boss and team that I could not make the meeting. After I talked to my team, of course, they were more than understanding and extremely helpful. I was given time off to fully tend to my family. Thankfully, my husband pulled through and gained his health back. As I reflect on my thoughts and experiences during that time, it made me contemplate how important it is to take our health seriously, give ourselves credit,

and trust that we are valued and valuable to our team even when we fall sick. We are women and not robots. We owe it to ourselves to be vulnerable.

## What should companies focus on to address and continue to improve the working mother's experience?

Working mothers and families have been challenged in unprecedented ways. Many women in leadership roles have had to make tough decisions, forcing some to leave the workforce in order to care for their families. Employers should continue to find ways to create flexible working schedules and consider compensation plans to assist employees with childcare services. Many women have been forced to make difficult decisions to stay home. In certain parts of the country, schools and municipalities are still shut down, making it extremely hard to find a solution to locate care for their children. Hybrid working schedules could allow for mothers and families to manage through closures and disruptions that are having an impact on many cities across the country. Employers

should lead with a people-first approach, as many women who are leaving the workforce are not only in leadership, they are in front-line roles and are needed. Employers should consider creating safe and adaptable environments. Companies should take time to evaluate HR policies and procedures related to flex-based schedules. Additionally, corporations should take this time to define sick time and leave-of-absence policies while considering the necessity for some employees to work more autonomously.

## What do you envision the return to "normalcy" will look like? For instance, do you believe the pandemic will lead to more family-friendly workspaces?

I believe companies will begin to initiate collaboration amongst their teams and incorporate boards that will assist in defining a hybrid work environment. Firms will eventually dedicate more time to understanding the needs of their employees from a work-life balance aspect. In the near future, companies may consider more flexible work schedules, and will begin to consider compensation for childcare. Working in a dedicated office space may not be required for all corporations. I believe that corporations will begin to consider

In the past, many companies perceived people who work from home, work part-time or ask for flexible schedules as somehow less serious about their jobs. That misperception often resulted in those who had these arrangements working just as many hours as if they were in the office (or more) to mitigate the stigma, but getting paid less. Choosing one of these flexible work options often openly or subconsciously disqualified workers from various promotion "tracks."

innovative ways to keep staff safe. Employers may convert workspace into childcare space. Innovation will happen as top talent is needed and solutions are necessary for the new normal in which we are currently living.

Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

My roles as a professional and mother have definitely been challenged over the course of the year. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, routines and extracurricular activities allowed for space, preplanning, and simply breaks intermittently throughout the week for my family. My children were quite

active in extracurricular activities and, in a blink of an eye, all of the activities in which they participated were shut down. I have a sixyear-old boy who is full of energy. Never did I expect to become the primary resource in helping him to navigate his online kindergarten class, while balancing my job and conducting intermittent Zoom calls. There have been moments where I have sat beside my son while hosting a meeting with a prospective client. Periodically, my daughter has poked her head into my room, frantic that her Zoom class crashed, while I walk through financial forecasts with clients, thus leading to a request to step away for a few minutes to assist my child with a minor computer issue. Due to interruptions and sometimes chaotic days, I have found that adjusting my schedule has helped. I find myself working through the evening to catch up on deadlines and ancillary tasks. Currently, I have elected to send my children back to school. However, due to intermittent shutdowns by the school, I have remained open to abrupt changes, and the need to pivot

#### FEATURE STORY

back to a home-based learning environment

The pandemic has been eye opening, scary, and a bridge to discovering my own personal strengths all in one. I can remember having my first child and exiting the hospital on the third day. I sat in the backseat with my newborn, as my husband drove home. We were both in utter disbelief that the hospital would discharge two novice early 30-somethings without a map or guide on how to raise a child. Now, that was scary! I was so resilient that I took on a new job shortly thereafter and decided to take on a broader challenge to propel my career. I now have two children and have achieved more than I could

imagine. Prior to 2020, we had life mapped out and understood how to manage through the chaos. Then, the pandemic happened. Our entire world flipped upside down. There wasn't a roadmap on how to manage a job and children through a pandemic. I worried more than I ever had about my job, stability, the wellbeing of my children, my extended family and friends, and all of our mental states in one single year. Before the pandemic, I worried about these things, but I always felt like I had time to plan. Last, year, time felt compressed. My thoughts were compressed and my mind was in overdrive. I have discovered inner strength that I honestly didn't think existed. During the onset of the pandemic, I had just taken on a new project with my firm. I wrote a new marketing and

business plan to expand our market presence in a certain industry that historically had proven to be lucrative for our firm. I was broadening our territory and presence in the lending market, and, being a Texas native for over 20 years, I was going to venture into other markets and take on more tasks to strategically gain more lending opportunities and market presence. My first date of travel was scheduled for March 3, 2020. However, the country went into complete shutdown. My professional plans came to a halt. Like many mothers, caregivers, working women, and families in general, I had to first think of how to keep my children safe, myself safe, while working and managing through caregiving options including school and education. While I am blessed to have an amazing husband who was completely onboard with executing a plan that worked for our home and our children, my greatest challenge was operating in constant fear of the unknown, but we have evolved tremendously as we discover

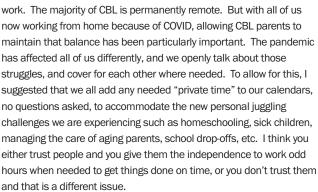
more and more about the COVID-19 virus.

#### Meredith Carter, President and Chief Executive Officer of Context Business Lending, LLC

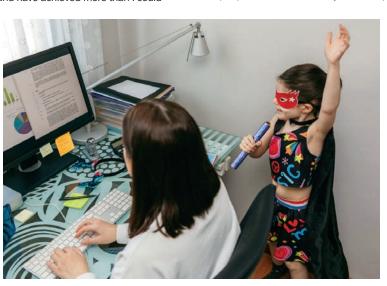
Most companies immediately sprang to action to address employees needs at the start of the pandemic. What are some things your company has done or continues to do to support its employees and particularly working mothers?

Even pre-pandemic, it has always been important to me that the

members of my team are able to be there for the things that matter to their families. Doctor appointments, baseball games, school plays, parent-teacher conferences - these are all things parents should be able to be there for if they choose. These events do not occur often, but often matter so much to children and families when parents can attend. It never made sense to me why all companies are not supportive of their team being able to responsibly fill parental responsibilities as well. Childhood is fleeting. Many of us at CBL, myself included, are parents of young children. We talk about our kids openly, sometimes share parenting advice, and we don't hide the fact that we have a life beyond



Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the



Working mothers must choose between our

roles as mothers and professionals every day

- there is no such thing as a perfect balance.

switch between their Zoom classes or remain-

With the pandemic, I often had to choose

ing on a shareholder call.

between, for example, helping my children

#### pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

In some ways it has made things easier. Thanks to working from home, I now have an extra hour with my children every day, being able to walk downstairs after the workday is done rather than spending the extra time commuting in both directions. In many ways it has made things harder. The flip side of having no commute is that there is no time to decompress from work and "switch hats" to my mom hat. I'm often initially distracted when I join my kids at the end of the day, and I have to work hard to be present. It is also very difficult to stop working when my office is always there. Also, like all children, my children had virtual school for a period of time. It was nearly impossible for our family to give our full attention to homeschooling a six-year-old and four-year-old while both working ourselves. It felt terrible not to give them my all. In addition, my children were used to me being available to them whenever I was home. It feels awful to say "I can't" when my six-year-old son asks me to play with him if I stop downstairs between meetings.

## Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

Instead of being afraid of the impression being made on my colleagues when I spend more time with my children, I reframed this situation as an opportunity to show my team that it is ok to build in time with their families without fear of a negative perception at work. It is important to me that every member of my team understands that it is safe to talk about their work/children conflicts. When employees are forthcoming about their personal struggles, it puts their managers in the best position to support them and help come up with workarounds that address their individual challenges. Sharing our struggles during this difficult time have brought us closer as a team.

#### What should companies focus on to address and continue to improve the working mother's experience?

I think that the answer to this question should apply to both the working mothers and fathers of school-aged children. Solely focusing on mothers could perpetuate the historical societal expectation that it is mothers who should bear the majority of responsibilities related to their children. Working fathers have many of the same challenges. If employers instead focus on providing working fathers more schedule flexibility, fathers would be able to take on more childrearing responsibilities, thus freeing up time for the mothers in a dual-working household. Supporting fathers in this choice would be a good step toward reversing societal norms, bringing fathers closer to their children, and moving to a society where it is truly equally as socially acceptable for mother or father to assume primary responsibility for their children.

#### Can you think of any ways that the pandemic may have helped working mothers?

Very much so. In the past, many companies perceived people who

work from home, work part-time or ask for flexible schedules as somehow less serious about their jobs. That misperception often resulted in those who had these arrangements working just as many hours as if they were in the office (or more) to mitigate the stigma, but getting paid less. Choosing one of these flexible work options often openly or subconsciously disqualified workers from various promotion "tracks." And statistically, it was mostly women worked from home or had these other arrangements. Now, virtually everyone has worked from home. Now that most people have had the personal experience, they have seen for themselves that people can actually be fully productive at home. Many people, (studies show, men especially) have to actually go through something themselves to find empathy. For this reason, I think the pandemic will pave the way for managers to be more accommodating of post-pandemic work-from-home requests and diffuse the stigma of being less dedicated.

### Jennifer Palmer, CEO, Gerber Finance

#### What has been the overall impact of the pandemic on you? Specifically, in what areas have you been able to thrive during this time? What areas have been challenging for you?

To start with the personal silver linings, I am so grateful to have had the time with my four daughters. I've been able to bring them to school and get a peek into their days when they were remote learning at home. On the flip side, it wasn't easy to be a full-time parent while my husband, who is a NYC firefighter, was at work, and I wasn't able to have the help of family or friends. Changing diapers and homeschooling while on video calls were not things I thought I'd do in my first months as CEO, that's for sure! It wasn't easy professionally either – seeing clients is so essential for the service we aim to provide, so it was incredibly challenging not to travel. As a new CEO, it was also difficult to completely pivot and put many of my goals on hold. However, some positives were to have time to reflect and execute on things I likely would have put off pre-pandemic. We launched two new divisions in the past year – Naturally Gerber Finance, focusing on the natural products industry, and Gerber+, for companies needing more funding.

## Most companies immediately sprang to action to address employees needs at the start of the pandemic. What are some things your company has done or continues to do to support its employees and particularly working mothers?

As a working mom, supporting parents is a huge priority for me in the best of times, so when the pandemic hit, we immediately sprang into action. First, we announced in April 2020 that we would be working remotely for a year – this was a bold move at the time, but we knew working parents needed a realistic timeframe to plan around. We also changed working hours to allow flex time. Within a week we had created two unique programs: Gerber Storytime, where employees would read to each other's children to give their colleagues a break, and Gerber Academy, where employees would give PowerPoint presentations on different topics to kids.

#### FEATURE STORY

Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

Working mothers must choose between our roles as mothers and professionals every day – there is no such thing as a perfect balance. With the pandemic, I often had to choose between, for example, helping my children switch between their Zoom classes or remaining on a shareholder call. Work usually came first because there were always immediate needs. Like many, I have been working longer hours

than ever before because of the blurred line between work and home.

## What have been the biggest changes between your work and home schedule? What has been the most challenging?

On the positive side, not having a three-plus hour commute each day has been a huge time saver, and not traveling a week each month has meant much more time with my family. It's also given me a perspective that my working mom has always told me - it's not quantity of time, but quality of time with kids. That's something I'll take with me from this experience. The most challenging thing has been the flip side of not having that commute - I don't have a buffer between work stress and my kids. Before, if I had a bad day, I had 90

minutes to decompress before seeing them. Now, I sometimes get off a bad call and they are right next to me asking for a cookie!

### Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

Absolutely. With four active children, I received a fair number of calls before COVID regarding stitches, broken bones etc. Naturally, those calls only happen during important meetings with clients or shareholders! Even with advances in flexibility for working parents, I am still so aware of giving the impression I am always available, and my family doesn't impact my work. However, during the pandemic I have been taking my girls to all their doctor's appointments – and I think it's important for my team to see that I take time out for the types of responsibilities we all have so that they feel comfortable doing that as

well. We've come a long way, but still have a long way to go in terms of perception.

#### What should companies focus on to address and continue to improve the working mother's experience?

The best workers are those you work with to give them what they need. Asking is the first step; ask for feedback and then really listen and implement where you can. Moms have a lot of good ideas that might improve efficiency and balance for others. I believe if you give a working mom what she is asking for in terms of flexibility, she will work harder,

be more loyal and you will get 100x return on your investment in her.

## Are there public policy initiatives that you think would improve the experience of working mothers?

We should look at what is working in other countries like standardized paid parental leave and fourday work weeks. There is a lot we can learn from other cultures that could improve the experience for working mothers here.

What do you envision the return to "normalcy" will look like? For instance, do you believe the pandemic will lead to more family-friendly workspaces?

I think that the pandemic

will lead to more family-friendly workplaces – we've learned over the last year that workers can contribute and take care of their families at the same time. But we've also learned flexibility is key. Companies need to realize that the return to work can't be one size fits all. Talk to working parents and ask what will work for them. For instance, before the pandemic, I brought my baby to work every day – she mostly slept and brought joy to the office when she was awake. That could be a great solution for a lot of moms and companies.

## Allison Adornato, Managing Director, Wingspire Capital

What has been the overall impact of the pandemic on you? Specifically, in what areas have you been able to thrive during this time? What areas have been challenging for you?



ing from home full time. I gained three hours a day that I had previously spent commuting. The biggest challenge was not to allow myself to spend those hours working more. It was a pleasure to be home in time to watch my kids' games or help them with their homework.

As a result of the pandemic, I switched to work-

I actually switched jobs during the pandemic. I found myself having to network and interview virtually. I was fortunate enough to start my new position in September. The biggest challenge is that I have not met my colleagues in person.

Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

I don't think the pandemic put me in a position to choose between my role as a mother and working professional. I believe this "conflict" existed before the pandemic started. My dominant role changes daily or even by the minute depending on the issue at hand. When things are busy at work, that is my focus. If something is going on with one of my children, that becomes the focus. It's about being flexible and adaptable as situations around you evolve.

#### What have been the biggest changes between your work and home schedule? What has been the most challenging?

As a result of the pandemic, I switched to working from home full time. I gained three hours a day that I had previously spent commuting. The biggest challenge was not to allow myself to spend those hours working more. It was a pleasure to be home in time to watch my kids' games or help them with their homework. Another challenge has been a lack of childcare when my family or babysitter have had to quarantine due to exposure.

## Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

No. My colleagues have been nothing but supportive and everyone is dealing with the challenges of the pandemic in their own way.

#### What should companies focus on to address and continue to improve the working mother's experience?

I believe it is important for women to have role models and people to discuss their issues with. Internal women's groups or social gatherings for women to meet each other and share their experiences are helpful.

#### Miin Chen, CFO, Siena Lending Group

Most companies immediately sprang to action to address employees needs at the start of the pandemic. What are some things your company has done or continues to do to support its employees and particularly working mothers?

I think our company has always been very flexible with employees and working mothers – understanding the needs of moms and that a lot of the time, the needs are not planned and there needs to be some level of flexibility to be able to address those unplanned and sometimes unknown needs. This is pretty much what we held onto throughout the pandemic to help address the needs of our employees. Allowing them the ability to work remotely and, if that didn't work for them, to come into an office in a safe manner.

Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

In my personal situation, no; however, I can definitely see it being an issue for a variety of reasons for others.

#### What have been the biggest changes between your work and home schedule? What has been the most challenging?

During the height of the pandemic when we were all at home and quarantined, the work and home schedule did a 180. Working and motherhood are both full-time jobs and overnight it was as if you had to work both full-time jobs at the same time. Juggling the two during the same approximate hours of 9-5 was unmanageable. The most challenging for me was to be able to find a schedule that worked for both my family and for work and the tasks at hand. A lot of the day would be spent on things that may have been short in nature, but demanded immediate attention and then early mornings and nights were dedicated to longer projects. I found the days to be a lot longer and finding a way to juggle everything and get into a new, sustainable, rhythm was the most challenging.

## Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

Definitely. I tried to erase those by setting expectations or letting them know exactly what was going on at the house during that moment. I found that, if I was upfront about the struggle, the less I felt the need of upholding a certain impression or image.

### What do you envision the return to "normalcy" will look like? For instance, do you believe the pandemic will lead to more family friendly workspaces?

I think the pandemic forced a lot of companies to do something that they never thought they would be okay with and that is to have remote work incorporated into a daily routine. I think that normalcy after the pandemic will incorporate some level of additional flexibility, but it also may be very much job/position-dependent.

## Becky Goldfarb, Managing Director, Retail Valuations, Gordon Brothers

What has been the overall impact of the pandemic on you?

#### **FEATURE STORY**

#### Specifically, in what areas have you been able to thrive during this time? What areas have been challenging for you?

Looking back at the last year, I don't know if I realized exactly how hard it was as I was living through it. Like many of the working moms I know, I just put my head down and plowed through. Every day was like figuring out a puzzle. Some days I just careened from conference calls to schoolwork, to laundry and grocery shopping, to sports and bedtime routines. Ultimately, most things got done. Luckily, one of my strengths is time management so our family found a rhythm and I was able to handle our schedules more effectively.

It wasn't until the past few months that I fully appreciated what a strange year it has been. Despite the challenges, I became more efficient. I learned a lot of things really don't matter as much as I previously thought. Do I wish my home office was neater? Do I want my kids to make their beds every day? Sure, but not having everything done perfectly doesn't bother me as much as it once did. After a year of mostly being stuck at home with limited social lives, I've gained perspective on what is truly important. I decided I'd rather take a walk with the dog or watch a show with my kids than worry about the small things. Having said that, I sure am glad they're going back to school full time soon.

questions whenever they needed help. Pre-pandemic, I was much more accessible to help as my time with them spanned the late afternoon and evening hours.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was not able to pay as much attention to them as they needed in the moment because work was so busy. I struggled with this, but as the months progressed, they learned I also have another important role to fulfill. They became more understanding about my work schedule and are now much more knowledgeable about what I do for work. "Working" became much less abstract once they saw it in their daily lives.

> I'm not sure what they thought I did when I went to the office every day pre-pandemic, but they now have a better understanding of what my iob entails.

There is a lot more

understanding, and perhaps a little more appreciation, for all the things all mothers do to keep their family's lives running smoothly. I recognize how truly fortunate I am to have a job at a company that allows me to focus on both roles. I did not have to choose between taking care of my children and keeping my job, which is a choice millions of women were faced with during the pandemic.

What have been the biggest changes between your work and home schedule? What has been the most challenging?

Zoom meetings for

everyone! I did not expect to become the IT department for my entire family, especially once school started. Making sure everyone was online, looking relatively work or school appropriate and understanding how to use Zoom, Teams and Skype was a challenge. I had to ensure there was enough Wifi for everyone in the house to be productive. Plus, I had never previously worried about our dog barking incessantly while on a conference call or the cat deciding to walk across the screen when I was in the office. That was...a lot.

When I left the house to go to work every day, the only person in my family I needed to worry about until I got home was me in my



I think we all try to put our families first. That means that we have to respect each family member – I try not to take any business calls during family meals, bedtime with the kids, or during their athletic events. Our children thrive when we are fully focused on them during these priceless moments. They grow up quickly, so it's vital to be present emotionally and physically with them.

#### Despite the significant

advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

The dual role working women play was amplified during the pandemic. More people realize just how hard this dual role is, which is a positive. Our children were suddenly home and in school remotely. They needed help with schoolwork or just reassurance things would be okay during the hours that had previously been reserved for our professional roles. Initially, it was a struggle for my children to understand they couldn't come and ask me

professional role. My role as a mom was put to the side while I was at work. During the pandemic it became so much more difficult to keep the roles separate. Balancing the roles appropriately no matter the time of day was the most challenging part.

## Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

I've worked at the same company since my children were born, and many of my colleagues have known them since they were babies. I am grateful my company was understanding and accommodating with our new normal. I was never concerned I was being judged by anyone if I needed to help my children during working hours. Since many of my colleagues were in the same position, we all managed through it to get the work done.

If we were on internal work calls, sometimes my kids wanted to go on camera to say hi to coworkers they know, which everyone welcomed. Sometimes I even asked my coworkers for homework help because the topics my kids were learning in school were too hard for me to figure out by myself – new math is hard!

### Shari Heyen, Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig

Most companies immediately sprang to action to address employees needs at the start of the pandemic. What are some things your company has done or continues to do to support its employees and particularly working mothers?

Understanding the needs of working mothers is very important. We mentor each other, have regular women's events via Zoom or other e-platforms, and we talk regularly by telephone to stay connected and address issues and suggest solutions in real time.

During the pandemic it has been extremely important to stay close to employees. We have standing calls with our respective teams to discuss workloads, and we schedule periodic virtual social events. It does not replace the face-to-face interaction with our teams and coworkers, but it is the temporary glue that keeps us together.

## Despite the significant advances made by some companies to address the needs of their employees, have you felt that the pandemic has, at times, put you in a position to choose between your role as a mother and a professional working mother?

I think we all try to put our families first. That means that we have to respect each family member – I try not to take any business calls during family meals, bedtime with the kids, or during their athletic events. Our children thrive when we are fully focused on them during these priceless moments. They grow up quickly, so it's vital to be present emotionally and physically with them. There seems to be a mutual respect for family time among our clients and business colleagues, and it has been great to see and hear how we all squeeze it all in and make it happen. Commerce doesn't sleep and we have adapted accordingly.

#### What have been the biggest changes between your work and home schedule? What has been the most challenging?

The biggest change is that we tend to work 24/7; it is difficult to turn work off. The challenge is to try to set reasonable boundaries and schedules to achieve somewhat of a balanced life. Having an action item list for the day, week and month helps me stay organized and focused. It's generally the first thing I check every day.

### Have you had moments where you were concerned about the impression being made on your colleagues as you spent more time with your children?

No. The pandemic has allowed us to see our colleagues virtually, wherever we happen to be in the world and at any given moment. It has created an authentic environment where we have a window into each other's lives. It would be odd these days not to hear a dog barking, experience a child or pet magically appear on screen, or hear someone's yard guys. The pandemic has been a humanizing event, and I love seeing pets and children randomly appear on screen. It can often be an ice breaker to get a conversation going. And, our kids are always watching and listening to us, so it is a great opportunity for us to polish our role-modeling skills.

## What do you envision the return to "normalcy" will look like? For instance, do you believe the pandemic will lead to more family-friendly workspaces?

Everyone wants to get back to some feeling of "normalcy", which means different things to many of us. Even having a cup of coffee with a client seems like a vision of normalcy at this point. We have learned together how to use our time and technology to make tremendous strides in efficiency and stay connected – virtually – but that doesn't replace human contact. I have cherished getting to know coworkers' families, and I want that experience to continue. When we can safely return to an office environment, I look forward to seeing – face-to-face – family members pop into my office. Our firm is one big family and it is important to protect that deep connection to each other.

Nneoma Maduike is a partner in the Banking and Finance Department of Otterbourg P.C. and the co-chair of its Lender Finance practice and she regularly represents and advises institutional lenders and various other public and private companies on structuring, negotiation, and documentation of financing transactions.

Maduike has received various accolades in connection with her work, including recognition by Best Lawyers in America as one of the top 15 Women of Influence in America and as one of the Top 50 Women in Commercial Finance. She is an active member of several organizations, including the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law and the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee of the Secured Finance Network.

#### SFNET MEMBER PROFILE

## Sky Business Credit:

Offering High-Touch Customer Service with Transparency

BY EILEEN WUBBE

SKY BUSINESS CREDIT, LLC PROVIDES CUSTOMIZED ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE FUNDING OF UP TO \$1.5 MILLION FOR GROWING COMPANIES AND PRIDES ITSELF ON OFFERING HIGH-TOUCH CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH TRANSPARENCY. FOUNDED IN 2010 BY GAIL REINTS-PRATL, SKY BUSINESS CREDIT IS SEEING AN INFLUX OF NEW BUSINESS IN 2021, ESPECIALLY IN NURSE STAFFING AGENCIES.



GAIL REINTS-PRATL Sky Business Credit

As a former CEO of the Midwest division of a large factoring company, Gail Reints-Pratl, president and founder of Sky Business Credit, LLC, knew she wanted to run a much smaller company where she would know clients by name and could spend more energy focusing on them instead of managing a large staff.

"Here, I feel like I'm much more connected to who my clients are, and I enjoy that a lot more," Reints-Pratl said.
"I let people be a lot more autonomous because, being a smaller organization, I've been able to hire people that I know and trust and whom I've worked with before."

Running a seven-person office remotely during COVID-19 wasn't a big transition for Sky Business Credit because the company is home-based and never had an office to begin with. Reints-Pratl said she still built the organization as if it were a large business, even employing a remote IT team for a number of years.

"Everything we do has always been cloud-based, so it was an extremely easy transition for us," Reints-Pratl said. "Our clients never knew where anybody was working from anyway because everything was meant to be that way from the very beginning. I want my employees to have a life. I want them to have that balance. I don't think that you should feel like you have to work from 8:30 to 4:30 or 8:30 to 5, or whatever your hours are, just for the sake of watching a clock."

(Editor's Note: For more information

## The Secured Finance Foundation's Campaign 2021 Is Underway

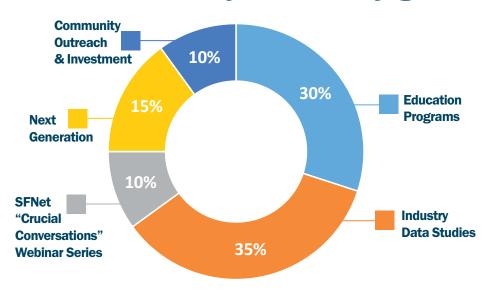
This year's goal is \$350,000 - your support can get us there.

Networking,
Industry data,
Education,
NextGen,
Community
and Webinars/
Roundtables

#### When faced with unprecedented challenges, SFFound is there to help

A strong network is more important than ever in times of uncertainty. That's why the Secured Finance Foundation helps unite our industry for crucial conversations, delivers actionable data to inform smart business decisions and prepares individuals for what comes next with our Education Focus 20/20 initiative. But none of this is possible without your support.

#### Where does your money go?



For more information or to make a donation, please visit SFFound.org

about Gail, please turn to page 89 in our Women in Secured Finance profile section.)

With a staff of seven women, Sky Business Credit's approach is open, honest communication with transparency at every step.

"We follow through on everything that we tell our clients we will do for them," Reints-Pratl said. "We make sure they are aware of each step of the process, including what it costs, so we are not wasting their time before they even fill out an application to make sure it's a good fit - not only for us, but for them. We have found they appreciate our honest, open approach, and it builds trust before we even provide funding to them.

"We want to help our clients succeed, because the more they succeed, the longer we have a client. It's a win-win for everyone and it builds loyalty and trust. I think for me, as a person and a business owner, it's important that we be transparent with our clients.

"Does it maybe scare some people away because I give them too much information too quickly? Sometimes. But they usually don't end up factoring at all then anyway. There are others who appreciate it because I don't waste their time and I give them all the information before they even fill out any paperwork."

Sky Business Credit serves any industry where they can get assignment of payment, verification

of the invoices, and approve the customer's credit. Clients in the nurse staffing, clerical staffing, manufacturing, maintenance construction, and distribution industries are among those currently experiencing the most growth.

Due to the pandemic, Sky Business Credit has seen an increase in nurse staffing agency clients, many of which are run by former nurses who are not aware of all that is entailed in starting up a staffing agency. That's where Sky Business Credit can step in and offer guidance and provide solicited advice.

"We've seen more startups, and we've been happy to fund them and help them get started. Many of them have grown very quickly," Reints-Pratl explained. "They don't always know where to start. They know what a nurse should get paid, but then we'll walk them through how they can determine what they should charge a facility.

"It's not just the difference between what you're paying the nurse and what you're getting paid from the facility. You've also got back-office payroll, employer taxes, workers' compensation insurance, and all of these things that layer-in. We can give them referrals so they can explore what those options are if they're looking for them.

"Some may not even have their first contract yet. They know if they get their first contract and place their first employee, they're going to need factoring in place to fund their payroll. We encourage

them to get the factoring in place, even if it's a month or three months down the road, and everything will be in place for them when they do need us."

While the pandemic brought a 50% slowdown of new business for Sky Business Credit during March-September 2020, the company has seen its existing clients grow and a steady influx of new business in 2021.

"We are excited to see it, but it also creates challenges for a small business like ours. But those are the good challenges," Reints-Pratl noted. "In a small business, you wear a lot of hats and that's part of the fun.

"We all work together to achieve a common goal, which is to grow our

company and meet the funding needs of our existing clients and the funding of any new clients we take on.

"We brought on a new business development officer, Donna Hinrichs, who has been instrumental in bringing in a lot of new business for us. I think we are also finally seeing businesses have a need for funding that they didn't have in 2020 because they had other resources, such as PPP loans. Many businesses that had a slowdown are now seeing growth, and that means they're looking for a way to generate working capital. As a factoring company, that's exactly where we can step in and help."

Sky Business Credit serves any industry where they can get assignment of payment, verification of the invoices, and approve the customer's credit. Clients in the nurse staffing, clerical staffing, manufacturing, maintenance construction, and distribution industries are among those currently experiencing the most growth.

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THE
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LENDER
MAY 2021

Eileen Wubbe is senior editor of The Secured Lender.



## CALLODINE | COMMERCIAL FINANCE IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Callodine Commercial Finance has closed **7 transactions** for proceeds of over **\$175 million** in the first few months since joining Callodine Group, with more deals soon to follow.



CAD \$20,000,000

October 2020



\$15,000,000

December 2020



\$35,000,000

January 2021



\$22,500,000

April 2021

INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURER

\$15,000,000

December 2020

WOMEN'S **RETAILER** 

\$35,000,000

January 2021

CONSUMER BRAND

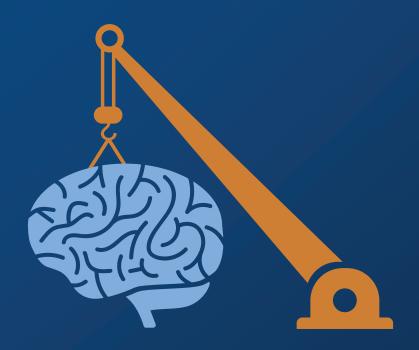
\$35,000,000

March 2021

CALLODINE | COMMERCIAL FINANCE

www.callodine.com

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Let's build something together. At Hilco Global, we deliver over \$3 billion for more than 50 construction, mining, and transportation equipment companies annually. Now that's what we call a solid foundation.

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