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LEADERS

COVER STORY

## SFNet's 40 Under 40 Profiles

CELEBRATING THE 40 UNDER 40 AWARD RECIPIENTS

A publication of:  Secured Finance  
Network

## SFNET 40 UNDER 40 AWARDS

# Celebrating Our Rising Stars

In 2016, the Secured Finance Network launched the 40 Under 40 Awards, announcing it was looking for the best and brightest in our industry. This awards program was introduced to honor the achievements of young secured finance professionals and service providers from across the industry and the celebration quickly became *the* fall event in New York for our community.

While we haven't been able to gather in person to honor the classes of 2020 or 2021, we are excited to host a live-online awards celebration on September 9 as well as an in-person reception during the SFNet Annual Convention in Phoenix. We look forward to gathering again in June 2022 to celebrate the next class as the tradition continues.

The 40 rising stars featured on the following pages are representative of the way the secured finance industry weathered the challenges we've faced during the past 18 months. Whether you are a seasoned professional or just starting your career, I think you will be inspired by their creativity, ingenuity and determination, which allowed them to play a significant role in their organizations' ability to overcome the obstacles we all faced since the pandemic began. After reading the profiles of these future leaders, my faith in our industry's ability to not only persevere, but to thrive, has been renewed, and I was reminded of the theme of this year's SFNet Annual Convention: Adapt. Renew. Grow. These young professionals clearly put these words into action.

SFNet 40 Under 40 award recipients not only set a shining example in their professional lives, but they also contribute to their communities, including volunteering to help disadvantaged children, the homeless, animal shelters and religious organizations. The future is indeed bright thanks to their compassion and selflessness.

The SFNet 40 Under 40 Awards wouldn't be possible without the tireless efforts of those who volunteer to chair and judge the Awards. A big thank you to Stewart Hayes, Wells Fargo Capital Finance, for chairing and judging, and to judges Betty Hernandez of SLR Business Credit, David Kurzweil of Greenberg Traurig, Candice Hubert of Republic Business Credit and Hamid Namazie of McGuireWoods.

On the following pages, not only can you get to know the 2021 SFNet 40 Under 40 Award recipients, but you can also catch up with several members of past 40 Under 40 classes who are making their mark on the industry. On page 92, Stewart Hayes, chair of the SFNet 2021 40 Under 40 Awards, interviews four former SFNet 40 Under 40 Award winners who

led their company or group practice during 2020-2021 to dive into how they addressed challenges, what helped prepare them to weather the COVID crisis, and advice on handling the next curveball.

In the June issue we featured one of the biggest frauds ever perpetrated against ABL lenders, Allou Healthcare, which quickly became the talk of the industry. Turn to page 100 for part two in which Mark Fagnani depicts the steps

taken by the lenders and their team of professionals to recoup the loan and to punish the wrongdoers.

We all have questions about the logistics and legal issues of returning to the office, whether it be full-time or a hybrid situation. On page 106, Brooke Iley, Co-Chair of Blank Rome's Labor & Employment Practice Group, discusses what employees and employers need to know about vaccinations, employer mask mandates, obligations an employer has to its returning employees regarding their health and what recourse employees have if they feel their employer is overstepping their rights.

COVID-19 has permanently altered the business world. In Hybrid Workplaces: Leadership Insights for 2021 and Beyond on page 110, Dr. Arin Reeves, a leading researcher, author, and advisor in the fields of leadership and inclusion, examines the necessary tools and mindset for managing a hybrid workplace.

Nominations for the 2022 SFNet 40 Under 40 Awards will open in September, with a refreshed nomination process, and I encourage you all to recognize a rising star in your organization.



■ **RICHARD D. GUMBRECHT**  
SFNet Chief Executive Officer



#### ■ STEPHANIE KOVELESKI

Assistant Vice President –  
Account Executive  
SLR Business Credit

**S**tephanie Koveleski is an AVP at SLR Business Credit and lives in Bucks County, PA.

Stephanie has a BFA from Tyler School of Art. While managing an art gallery in the Spring of 2016, she struck up a conversation with a visitor who offered her a data-entry position at MidCap Business Credit, LLC. Steph was surprised to find that something about ABL just made sense to her and she soon became an operations analyst.

When Steph decided to move back to PA to be with family, MBC introduced her to SLR Business Credit, which offered her the opportunity to become an account executive. Steph jumped at the chance and began her journey at SLR in November 2018, learning through continuing education courses and guidance provided by strong and empowered female mentorship. After a short year, Steph was managing a full portfolio of accounts and promoted to assistant vice president. To this day, she is surprised and thrilled by her fulfilling ABL career, which started with a chance encounter.

#### What is the best professional advice you have been given and how have you implemented it?

My mom once told me at the start of a new opportunity, "If you're not asking, 'What have I gotten myself into?' then you're not growing." That was a big eye opener for me. Being in a career that I'd never dreamed of for myself and having learned almost everything I know about ABL on the job, this advice has enabled me to embrace many growth opportunities without fear. Even when I feel like I'm in over my head, I know that every challenge is a chance to learn. I give myself permission to ask too many questions, and I arm myself with the knowledge I gain from every project so I'm better prepared to step up to the plate for the next one. I continually surprise myself by what I can accomplish when I view new or increased responsibilities as a chance to grow and learn rather than a hurdle needing to be overcome. It's a really good feeling to look back and realize I've accomplished (what I previously believed to be) impossible things by adopting this mindset.

#### What is your definition of success?

Let me preface by first saying, I think everyone has their own definition of success and I think it depends on whether you've been able to achieve a feeling of accomplishment. I'm going to get very real with you all right now: I've struggled with ADHD my entire life. Have you ever heard of the term "adulting?" I pretty much feel accomplished anytime I think I've done "adulting" correctly. I'm immensely proud of myself for holding a steadily growing career and for being happily married (thanks to all the work we've put into it!) for six whole years. If I'm being honest though, what would make me feel truly successful is if someone, just one person who struggles

like me, would read this and realize they are more than just a diagnosis...that they can be greater than what they have been told they can be. I would define success as paving the way for others, so they don't have to face quite so many roadblocks as those before them.

#### Did you change the way you approach work while working remotely during the pandemic? Have these habits stayed with you as we emerge from the crisis?

As an adult with ADHD, I found working from home incredibly easy. I could use my super power of "hyper-focus" without being interrupted. It was awesome! I suddenly found myself getting double the amount of work done in half the time! The downside was, I found myself working late into the night, so absorbed in my work that I didn't realize 5 p.m. had come and gone. I learned a great deal during this time very quickly—but also found myself hitting that mysterious level of burnout that I'd heard about without even realizing it. So, I learned to make time for myself, whether it was setting aside "me" time in the evening and over the weekend or even taking a "staycation." Have you ever used PTO to go to a spa, or a matinee, or play Nintendo for a few hours? It's pretty relaxing. I plan on making a habit of it every once in a while, because I came back feeling recharged and ready to hit the ground running!

#### How do you define a good leader?

Leading by example and helping employees grow. I've experienced good leaders and bad. Right now, at SLR, I'm surrounded by great leaders.



**SLR Business Credit is proud that our team member,  
Stephanie Koveleski, has been selected  
as a 40 Under 40 winner.**



**STEPHANIE KOVELESKI**



**Stephanie plays an active and important role in our company and we look forward to her contributing for many years.**

**Our best wishes to all 40 Under 40 recipients.**

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**You are our priority. Period.**

SFNET'S 40 UNDER 40 CELEBRATION ON SEPTEMBER 9 WILL HONOR THE CLASS OF 2021 AS WELL AS THE CLASS OF 2020.

HERE, WE ONCE AGAIN HONOR THE CLASS OF 2020. CONGRATULATIONS!



■ **SAMIR AHUJA**  
Associate  
Blank Rome LLP



■ **ELIZABETH KHOURY ALI**  
Partner  
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP



■ **SARAH BECKER**  
Vice President - Underwriting  
Citizens Asset Based Lending



■ **HAILEY BENTON-THOMAS**  
Chief Operating Officer/  
General Counsel  
TBS Factoring Service, LLC



■ **TESSA BREND**  
Vice President  
SLR Business Credit



■ **TREVOR BROWN**  
Director  
Bluwat Transaction  
Advisors LLC



■ **ELIZABETH BUCKLEY**  
Senior Counsel  
McGuireWoods LLP



■ **MEREDITH L. CARTER**  
President and CEO  
Context Business Lending



■ **EDWARD CHANG**  
Senior Vice President  
Wells Fargo Capital Finance



■ **DANIELA COHEN**  
Associate  
Winston & Strawn London



■ **BRYAN COURCIER**  
SVP, Transportation &  
Construction Advisory  
Hilco Commercial & Industrial



■ **RYAN DAVIS**  
Managing Director  
Tiger Valuation Services, LLC



■ **JEFFREY DUNLOP**  
Principal  
Goldberg Kohn Ltd.



■ **ERIKA DURAN-POLITE**  
Vice President  
Merchant Financial Group



■ **DAVID ESTRAKH**  
Senior Vice President  
Express Trade Capital, Inc.



■ **AGNES FALCONER**  
Vice President of Operations,  
Gibraltar Business Capital



■ **JENNIFER FENN**  
Partner,  
Choate Hall & Stewart



■ **MEGAN FLAHERTY**  
Vice President,  
Rosenthal & Rosenthal, Inc.



■ **KELLEY C. GASS**  
Associate,  
Parker, Hudson,  
Rainer & Dobbs LLP



■ **JULIA GAVRILOV**  
Counsel,  
Moritt Hock & Hamroff LLP





■ **DANIEL GOLL**  
Vice President,  
Senior Underwriter  
CIT Group, Inc.



■ **TABITHA HUMPHRIES**  
Associate,  
Skadden, Arps, Slate,  
Meagher & Flom LLP



■ **MOHAMMED ISLAM**  
Assistant Vice President  
Underwriting,  
Siena Lending Group



■ **MOSANA KHAN**  
Business Development  
Manager, Canada  
Gordon Brothers



■ **RICHARD C. KIM**  
Shareholder,  
Greenberg Traurig, LLP



■ **MICHELLE GROSS KUHR**  
Managing Director,  
Riveron Consulting



■ **LAUREN WAGNER**  
Vice President,  
Relationship Manager,  
PNC Business Credit



■ **KATIE MARRS**  
National Business  
Analyst Manager,  
Wells Fargo Capital Finance



■ **JOHNPAUL (JP) NUZZO**  
SVP, ABL Portfolio  
Team Leader,  
Santander Bank N.A.



■ **DANIEL PFEIFFER**  
Head of Technology for  
Distribution Finance  
Wells Fargo



■ **IKHWAN A. RAFAEEK**  
Member,  
Otterbourg P.C.



■ **AARON SCEVA**  
Vice President,  
Business Development  
U.S. Bank



■ **JASON SCHUMACHER**  
First Vice President,  
Leumi Business Credit,  
a division of Bank Leumi USA



■ **BHAVJOT KAUR SINGH**  
Senior Associate,  
Paul Hastings LLP



■ **KENNY SMITH**  
Managing Director,  
SLR Credit Solutions



■ **LEENA STOVER**  
Vice President,  
Asset Based Lending  
Truist Financial



■ **JR THOMPSON**  
AVP, ABL Operations  
Team Supervisor,  
Fifth Third Bank  
Business Capital



■ **LAUREN TRUSSELL**  
Senior Vice President,  
Bank of America  
Business Capital



■ **FARRAH VARGAS**  
SVP, Business Development  
Allied Affiliated Funding,  
a division of Axiom Bank, N.A.



■ **JUSTIN WOOD**  
Partner,  
Troutman Pepper

# Words of Wisdom from Industry Leaders

*TSL invited several industry leaders to offer advice to SFNet's 40 Under 40 Award recipients as they take the next steps in their careers.*



**STEWART W. HAYES,  
CHAIR OF SFNET 2021 40  
UNDER 40 AWARDS AND  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,  
LENDER FINANCE, WELLS  
FARGO CAPITAL FINANCE**

Congratulations on your prestigious honor. Your employer and the SFNET have recognized you as a rising star, so take advantage of the opportunity. My advice:

1) be an influential role model and leader to those around you 2) seek out roles/projects that both challenge and excite you, and express your interest to those that can make it happen 3) be engaged in our industry and your home community 4) treat everyone well - our industry is a small world and you will be surprised how often you cross paths with people again 5) strive to be better than required and make a difference. You are the future of SFNet and I look forward to watching you lead us.



**GAIL BERNSTEIN,  
INDUSTRY LEADER**

What you don't learn in business school...

Maximize networking with fellow colleagues, with colleagues who are in the same area of expertise/industry at another company, with people who have more experience than you who you can learn from or who can

mentor you. If you work at a large institution, get to know people in management, as they may be able to vouch for you or suggest you for any opening that may come up. Let your boss know you are open to opportunities for promotions even

if it requires relocation. The more flexible you are, the more opportunities you will have. Management is usually involved in succession planning. Get to know as many departments as possible in your institution so you know what might be available if you want to make a switch. Don't be afraid of titles when asking someone to lunch or for coffee. Everyone eats lunch or can spare 20 minutes for you to help with your career planning and in order to help you get to know more about your own institution. Women are especially focused on helping other women in their careers, so look at joining professional women's groups if available. Be a resource to others; what goes around, comes around.

If you write a memo or an email when angry, sleep on it overnight or have someone else read it. Your communications will always be better when calm vs. pressing send on the spur of the moment. Face-to-face communication is critical and is how you build relationships, so don't just text or email.



**DAVID B. KURZWEIL,  
SFNET 40 UNDER 40  
AWARDS JUDGE; CO-CHAIR  
GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING  
& BANKRUPTCY, CHAIR  
NATIONAL FINANCIAL IN-  
STITUTIONS, GREENBERG  
TRAURIG, LLP**

Congratulations on the well-deserved recognition of your hard work and achievements!

As you progress, continue to invest in yourself in every phase of your career. Identify the skills and attributes you would like to enhance. Your investment will compound and each level of success will build upon another.

Develop and grow your relationships. Long-lasting success comes from strong and diverse teams and the development of supportive relationships. It is just as important and memorable to assist someone in need and contribute to their success, as it is to receive support. Diversity will add thoughtfulness, creativity and greater opportunity for success. Find mentors for yourself and mentor others.

Focus on fundamentals. Always remember the qualities and discipline that helped you achieve your goals. Every challenge starts with a first step and, by remembering the fundamentals, you will stay focused on the task at hand.

Always look for the best in people and be humble. Treat everyone with respect. You never know when someone else might be having a bad day, or personal or business challenges that you cannot begin to imagine.



**BETTY HERNANDEZ,  
SFNET 2021 40 UNDER  
40 AWARDS JUDGE,  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRES-  
IDENT-CHIEF CREDIT  
OFFICER, SLR BUSINESS  
CREDIT**

Now that you've attained the distinguished honor of being selected SFNet's 40 Under 40 winner, this is just the beginning. Expectations are high. By that, I mean that

we expect you to continue your path in the secured lending industry as a leader. If you aren't already involved, feel free to review the various SFNet Committees and your local SFNet Chapter and volunteer your time. It is not only rewarding, but can also lead to other opportunities. The relationships you will make will last you a lifetime.



**TERRY KEATING,  
MANAGING PARTNER  
OF DONALD J. KEATING &  
SONS ("DJKS")**

The number one piece of advice is simple, direct, and universal: Be intentional. Whatever you are working on professionally or personally, do it with thoughtful intention. This is not just the big projects and tasks; it is every interaction with yourself and with others throughout

the day. Be intentional in all: your work, your professional development, your networking, your mentoring, your care of yourself, your care of others and each interaction you have. If you are thoughtfully intentional, all the other important factors will fall into place.



**CHARLIE JOHNSON,  
CHAIRMAN, SFNET FOUN-  
DATION AND SEASONED  
INDUSTRY EXECUTIVE**

I'll be 75 years old this coming November. I started my career in financial services in 1968 (50+ years ago) right out of college...so call me marinated at least, if not totally seasoned. The question becomes: If I could go back to 1985, what would I tell my then 40-year-old

self that would have really helped during the balance of my

career? As it works out, 1985 was the inflection point when I moved from managing a few account executives overseeing a modest-sized ABL portfolio to president of a subsidiary handling all asset-based lending, factoring and leasing for the largest and fastest growing super regional bank in the country.

I was not prepared...what a surprise! I'm technically competent in every secured lending product function, good communication and people skills and had aced every management course available. But the new position required more, much more. It required leadership. Fortunately, my new boss was a retired U.S. Marine Colonel who had spotted my deficiencies before he offered me the job. There were several. But lack of personal awareness was where I needed to make the biggest adjustment. I had no idea how I came across to subordinates. In other words, always telling people what to do because I was (or thought I was) the most technically competent had only gotten me to my first career plateau.

My advice to myself in 1975 (ten years before I was promoted into that position) would have been to spend more time reading about leadership, finding and observing the leaders in my organization, and to seek the best one to be my mentor, to understand how to be a true leader. If you are not already doing those things, I encourage you to start right now. 📖