

## INTRODUCTION

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

As chair of the SFNet Women in Secured Finance Committee and member of its Executive Committee, I'm excited about SFNet's dedication to recognizing excellence, whether it's through this annual TSL issue, the 40 Under 40 Awards or the SFNet Hall of Fame. On the following pages, you will meet 65 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have stood out from the crowd. I encourage you to take the time to read these interviews. They are an impressive and diverse group who represent the many sectors of SFNet's member organizations including banks, factoring organizations, law firms, appraisal and consulting firms and institutional capital providers. Some are seasoned executives while others are newer to the industry, but each is having a positive impact on both their company and our industry. Even with demanding, rewarding careers, many also devote their time and energy to community and charitable endeavors as well as a few with really unique hobbies too!

I'd also like to take this opportunity to tell you about the upcoming SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Conference, which will be held in New York City, June 14-15. This year's theme -- *Navigating Through Economic, Professional, and Personal Change* -- reflects the challenges of a fluctuating economy, significant professional decisions or the sometimes-overwhelming demands of our personal lives. Through a series of keynote speakers and interactive roundtables, we will examine and learn to negotiate the various changes we all face. To kick off the Conference, there will be a cocktail reception at the offices of Paul Hastings in the MetLife Building on the evening of June 14.

In addition to profiles, this issue includes interviews and articles focusing on other women in the industry, including Gordon Brothers' new CEO, Norma Kuntz, on page 110.

On page 124, Dr. Arin Reeves discusses *The Paradox of Belonging*. Much has been written and discussed about "inclusion" but this is the flip side to that topic.

It's no secret that, despite great progress, secured finance remains a male-dominated field. On page 118, we shine the spotlight on three unique SFNet members whose teams are made up of more women than men.

Secured finance executives discuss the challenges of

retaining staff in this competitive environment in *Taking a More Proactive Approach to Retention* on page 116.

On page 122, SFNet's CEO Rich Gumbrecht has a one-on-one with communications director and WISF Committee liaison Michele Ocejo to celebrate her 30 years with SFNet.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Secured Lender*, and I look forward to connecting with you during SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Conference. Be sure to visit [www.sfnnet.com](http://www.sfnnet.com) for details and registration or reach out to Michele Ocejo at [mocejo@sfnnet.com](mailto:mocejo@sfnnet.com).



■ **LAURA GLASS**  
Bank of America Business Capital

Laura Glass

Chair of SFNet's Women in Secured Finance Committee and SVP/East Region senior portfolio manager, Bank of America Business Capital

# Recognizing Excellence: Women in Secured Finance Profiles

*On the following pages you'll meet 65 inspiring women who exemplify excellence and have distinguished themselves within the secured finance industry.*





# RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE



■ **TESSA BREND**  
SLR Business Credit

**T**essa joined SLR Business Credit, then PrinSource Capital, in 2009 as an assistant to the credit team. She has served in various roles within the company over the years. She was most recently promoted to senior vice president and manages a portfolio of factoring clients. She leads or assists with the underwriting of factoring and ABL deals as well as heading up the cash-processing function in the Minnesota office. She assists with the hiring and training of new staff. In 2020, Tessa was an SFNet 40 Under 40 Award winner.

She is involved with various industry organizations including the Risk Management Association and the MN SFNet Chapter and is a member of the SFNet Young Professionals Committee. Tessa has organized the Minneapolis offices' holiday giving over the last few years which includes Toys for Tots and Adopt A Family. She also volunteers with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

She lives in the suburbs with her husband and two young daughters, and tries to instill in them every day how powerful women are and hopes they bring the confidence they have now with them into the workforce one day.

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

It's okay to ask questions. It's more than okay, it's encouraged. This is a collaborative industry and we often need multiple people working together to manage all the moving parts and get us to the end product. We don't know it all and can always learn something new. I used to think that asking questions made you look inferior, but people appreciate it. Asking questions shows you care and that you want to learn.

Be a sponge. Soak up as much information as you can from everyone around you. It's extremely valuable to be able to fill in and help with any role in the office from portfolio to operations to credit. I know a little to a lot about every role in our company and I think that's one of my biggest assets and I would highly suggest everyone starting out aims to do that as well.

## How did you approach making a big decision in your career, either moving onto a new organization or role?

When I was originally approached to start managing clients I was terrified. I assumed I would handle checks and help account executives the rest of my life. I don't have a finance background and everything I've learned has been taught to me along the way. I basically took a leap of faith and trusted that it was going to work out and that if it didn't we could find another role for me. Change has always been hard for me and I was happy in that starter role, but I was starting to outgrow it and am grateful I was given the push that was needed.

## What role has mentorship/sponsorship played in your career?

I was lucky enough to walk into my first day of work years ago and have a group of people, especially some amazing women, already be there and be open to teaching someone new. I

started as a credit team coordinator and am now a Senior Vice President. If you would have asked me 14 years ago if I would be in this role now, I would have laughed.

I remember sitting at the desks of my colleagues, learning to enter cash, a schedule, pull credit, etc. I was shown how to do things and then asked to do it on my own. I learned everything from the ground up and looking back I wouldn't have done it any other way.

I participated in the most recent SFNet Mentorship Program and was connected with someone who was very helpful to me and it was also good to get perspective from outside my organization. I never had to go looking for a mentor outside SLR because I have so many built in ones, but, if given the opportunity, I think it's a good idea for everyone to have someone outside your organization to be a mentor or sounding board.

I feel like SLR has always been unique because we have so many women in our offices and in higher positions. I'm proud to call these ladies colleagues and friends and hope to be as knowledgeable as them and help pass that knowledge on as they have to me.

I am thankful every day that I get to learn from the women and men in my office and that they're always available to provide help or give advice. I can honestly say I would not be in the position at SLR that I am now without my colleagues.