

Where Are They Now? Catching up with Previous SFNet 40 Under 40 Award Winners

BY EILEEN WUBBE

Past SFNet 40 Under 40 Award recipients discuss how the Award affected their careers and offer advice to the next generation.

Josh Ceccarelli, SVP, account executive/ team leader, Merchant Financial Group 2018 SFNet 40 Under 40 Award Winner

What advice would you give to this year's "class" of 40 Under 40 winners?

Winning the SFNet 40 Under 40 award is a great recognition of your many accomplishments and outlook to be a leader in your field. It's a wonderful acknowledgement from both your company and the industry as a whole. At this point you already know what it takes to be successful, so the only advice I would offer is to always be open to learn something new no matter how far along you are in your careers.

You have moved onto Merchant Financial since winning. What are you enjoying about your new role?

I'm enjoying the new team and the new contacts I have made. Merchant will be celebrating its 40th anniversary next year, and I'm looking forward to contributing my 20 years of factoring experience to this growing firm. I also now get to work with another former SFNet 40 Under 40 winner, Erika Duran-Polite.

What advice would you give on meeting people and networking in this industry?

Make sure to follow-up after the event. Have a lunch or coffee in a smaller group and you will learn more about the other person. When I started in the industry, a senior executive set up a lunch with a CPA and one of his junior accountants. We stayed in touch and have developed a strong mutual friendship for around 15 years now.

What advice would you give to recent grads or entrants into this industry?

Set a goal and work towards that goal. Do not expect to get promoted just for staying at a company for a long time. Get advice from senior executives on how to advance and take the pieces that you agree with. Look for ways and brainstorm ideas to help make the company be more efficient and successful. Look for the right opportunities to share these ideas to get noticed.

Lisa Collier, partner, Latham & Watkins LLP 2022 SFNet 40 Under 40 Award Winner

Did receiving the SFNet 40 Under 40 Award help your career visibility? If so, how?

Yes, absolutely! SFNet has a huge presence in the asset-based lending industry, and as a service provider who is always looking to expand my client network, the name recognition and visibility that comes with being involved in the SFNet community has been valuable in building those relationships.

You joined Latham & Watkins LLP since winning. What are you enjoying about your new firm?

I started my career at a different firm and it provided a great foundation in secured lending and finance, but my move to Latham



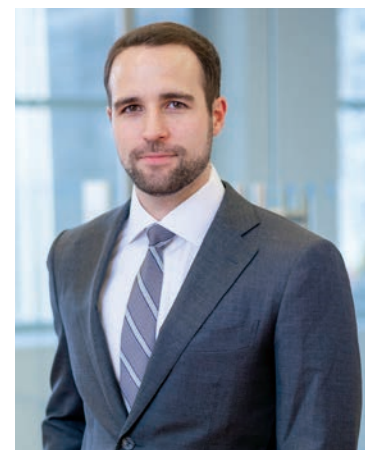
■ **JOSH CECCARELLI**
Merchant Financial Group



■ **LISA COLLIER**
Latham & Watkins LLP



■ **LICIA JACQUES**
Mitsubishi HC Capital
America, Inc.



■ **MICHAEL RICH**
Otterbourg P.C.

& Watkins has really allowed me to take my career to the next level by joining a firm with a global platform and leading practitioners across a number of complementary practices, such as restructuring, structured finance and private credit. With these internal resources, I can be sure that whenever my clients have a question or need input on questions that are outside my core area of expertise, especially on cross-border matters, I am providing them with the best possible answers and support.

In your opinion, how can young professionals build their brand and recognition in this industry?

The most important component of your brand is the quality of the service you provide your clients. Networking and finding opportunities to connect with clients and other industry professionals in person is crucial to building your business, but at the end of the day you are going to be remembered and recognized for the work that you do. Make the quality of your performance and the depth of your expertise the priority and the rest will follow.

What advice would you give to recent grads or entrants in this industry?

As a transactional lawyer, you should always keep in mind that you are part of a professional community of repeat players. You should treat everybody you work with on a transaction, regardless of their role, with the same degree of respect and professionalism that you give to your clients. The lender that is a small participant in one deal may be the agent on your next deal, and the way you interact with their team shouldn't change depending on the role they have in any given transaction.

Licia Jacques, regional controller - Vendor Services, Mitsubishi HC Capital America, Inc. 2017 SFNet 40 Under 40 Award Winner

What advice would you give to this year's "class" of 40 Under 40 winners?

Seize the opportunity, even if it feels "cringe" to promote yourself: put it on your LinkedIn page, add it to your resume, network with your fellow award winners. Women especially are taught to downplay our accomplishments when we should really be promoting them. This is no different, it is an award someone took the time to nominate you for and a panel of very impressive judges thinks you deserve. Own it and honor it.

At the ceremony, an exec from my company joked that I'd need an agent before the night was over. Bask in the spotlight while you have it, then use the attention to make or strengthen connections within and beyond your organization.



This ties into my last point, but the biggest piece of advice I could give to anyone new to the industry or starting out in any field is that every day should be a lesson. Whether you have a good day or a bad day, you can take bits and pieces from each day and learn and grow in light of that. Think of each day as a training session – the more you train the better you will be at your job.

You moved on to Mitsubishi HC Capital America, Inc. since winning. What are you enjoying about your current role?

I worked my way through several areas in my original company before landing in accounting. I'd built long-term relationships with many colleagues, not only through our professional ups and downs, but also our personal milestones like buying a first home or starting a family. I left that behind for a fully remote position in a different industry during a global pandemic. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. My new manager, colleagues, and team members

were so incredibly supportive and welcoming. I would not have lasted if it wasn't for their willingness to teach me about equipment leasing, explain the unwritten rules of our organization, and answer all my questions. When we moved into our new offices and I got to meet people face to face, it felt like we'd been working together for years.

In my previous role I was in the day-to-day guts of accounting: account reconciliations, journal entries, all the way up to financial statement preparation and reporting. At Mitsubishi HC Capital America, I have a leadership role: helping my team resolve issues, setting department goals and best practices, working with other departments on larger projects and initiatives, and offering the accounting point of view on new programs. I really enjoy being involved in more areas of the business and seeing things from a 10,000-foot level now.

Now that I'm one of the "older" employees, I realize how much I enjoy working with younger colleagues: hearing their fresh perspectives and watching them grow in their positions is very rewarding. Mitsubishi HC Capital America is a larger organization within a massive global company, it's exciting to be a part of a company with strong name recognition even if my family still thinks I lease cars!

While I knew Mitsubishi HC Capital America was a large company and that I would have a leadership position, I did not realize how meaningful my new role would be. My impact has a larger footprint than I ever imagined, from individual team mentoring to inter-departmental business resolutions,

my work has a positive effect on the company overall and that is something I am very proud of.

What changed for you professionally after receiving the award? Did receiving the 40 Under 40 Award encourage you to become involved in additional professional or community activities or organizations?

It gave me the confidence to raise my hand and put myself forward for new opportunities both inside my company and in professional

organizations like Secured Finance Network. Before I won the award, I believed in myself and knew I was good at my job, but the external validation from my award nominator and the panel of judges was the boost I needed at that point in my life and career. The inaugural class of winners was so impressive and included people I'd looked up to for years. To be included the next year and stand on stage with another wonderful group of people was very special. I realized these are my peers and we are going to do great things with this industry as we take it into the future.

After attending the SFNet 40 Under 40 event, I knew I wanted to get more involved with Secured Finance Network so I joined the Women in Secured Finance and YoPro Committees and became the treasurer of my local chapter. I met so many great people through these committees, including someone who referred me to my current role at Mitsubishi HC Capital America.

How can YoPros stand out, especially as remote and/or hybrid work situations have become permanent for some?

Raise your hand and speak up! If you have regular one-on-ones with your manager, be prepared for the meetings: what are you working on, do you need help from your manager or another team member, is there something you can do for your manager, do you want to learn a new skill? Be specific. This time is valuable for both of you, so be prepared to get the most out of it. If you don't already have them, ask your manager if you can set them up and what frequency works best for them. Show your gratitude for the time by being prepared and engaged in the meetings.

Show an interest in the overall operations and direction of your company. This is a way to learn about new opportunities outside of your day-to-day work and projects that can help you gain visibility with a broader range of people. In my experience, people like to talk about themselves and what they're working on so pay attention and be ready to jump in when the opportunity presents itself.

Michael Rich, member, Otterbourg P.C. 2023 SFNet 40 Under 40 Award Winner

What is something you know now that you wish you knew when you started your career and that you would encourage all young professionals to keep in mind?

Early on in any career, it is very difficult to envision and navigate a path towards your ultimate goal. Starting out can be challenging, as you are learning so many new things and sometimes it feels like every step forward is two steps back. I would encourage everyone to remember that your path is not going to be linear – there will be twists and turns throughout your journey. Embrace those twists and turns, as they make you better at what you do.

What advice would you give to recent grads or entrants into this industry?

This ties into my last point, but the biggest piece of advice I could give to anyone new to the industry or starting out in any field is that every day should be a lesson. Whether you have a good day or a bad

day, you can take bits and pieces from each day and learn and grow in light of that. Think of each day as a training session – the more you train the better you will be at your job. When things are tough, I try to remind myself of this frequently. While it might be hard to put that into perspective early on, no one became an expert overnight.

You were promoted to member in the Banking and Finance Department since you won. What are you enjoying about your current role? How did your prior experience help prepare you for it?

2023 was very good to me both professionally and personally. After winning the SFNet 40 Under 40 Award and being able to attend such a wonderful gala in June, I was married in September and was promoted to partner in December. It was truly a year I will never forget. In terms of the new role, I am enjoying the challenge that comes with added responsibility and more face-to-face client interaction. I was lucky enough to have a mentor, Jim Cretella, let me take on an active role in the deal process and managing a client relationship early on in my career. While this may have been daunting early on in my career, the experience was invaluable and put me in a position to succeed in my current role.

How can YoPros stand out, especially as remote and/or hybrid work situations have become permanent for some?

Whether you work in the office, hybrid or remote, you should try to maintain the same attitude and approach each day. Each working environment has its benefits, but you should try to do your job the same every day, no matter where you are. If you are working remotely and have a question, pick up the phone and call someone. If they don't answer, send an email. Don't hold off on doing something simply because you are working remote and might not be able to walk into someone's office. If you maintain the same attitude and approach every day and continue to do good work, I don't think it matters where you are, people will notice you.

What advice would you give to this year's "class" of 40 Under 40 winners?

First and foremost, like everything good in life, do not forget to take everything in and enjoy the moment. You are being honored for good reason, you worked hard to get here and excelled in your position. This is an important steppingstone in your career and you should all be very proud of yourselves. Remember that the best is yet to come. Keep doing what you are doing, and the results will continue to follow. 📌

Eileen Wubbe is senior editor of The Secured Lender.