



Interview with SFNet's New President

BARRY BOBROW

Barry Bobrow is a managing director and head of credit markets for Regions Business Capital. He is a widely respected leader in middle-market leveraged finance and asset-based lending. He has spent the past 38 years working in banking, most of it as a debt capital markets professional, primarily in leveraged lending and supply chain finance. Bobrow has managed highly successful loan syndication teams at several large banks, including Wells Fargo and Bank of America. He has been deeply involved in the asset-based lending market for many years. He is also a past board member of the Loan Syndications and Trading Association (LSTA).

Bobrow is the creator and chairman of the Asset Based Capital Conference (ABCC), an SFNet sponsored conference focusing on the middle-market leveraged and asset-based markets, now in its 16th year. He is also the creator and host of the "SFNet Presents *In the Know*" podcast. In 2021 Bobrow was inducted into the SFNet Hall of Fame.

BY MICHELE OCEJO

In 2017 he was honored as Humanitarian of the Year by National Jewish Health's annual Financial Industries Dinner, an event annually sponsored by major players in the asset-based industry.

Here, Bobrow discusses his career trajectory, his outlook for the industry and his goals for SFNet in 2024.

Please provide our readers with some background about your career.

After graduating in 1985 with an MBA from the University of Michigan, I started my banking career with Continental Illinois in Chicago - a long time ago but seems like yesterday.

I started out in commercial banking, but quickly moved to asset-based lending following the advice an early mentor gave me, "The people I want working on my most important transactions are those that are smart enough to figure out where the deals are getting done and clever enough to get there." There are many different types of banking careers, but for me asset-based lending was, and still is, a place where I believe I can work on transactions that are challenging and important.

My involvement in loan syndication started in the late 1980s when my manager asked me to find a way to better manage our balance sheet. Our borrowers' needs were growing through industry consolidation and the emergence of the private equity market, and we needed to come up with credit facilities larger than what we could hold by ourselves. There was very little syndication of asset-based loans at that time, so this provided me the opportunity to build a unique skill set. What makes asset-based loan syndication different from other types of loan syndication is the need to thoroughly understand how asset-based lending works and to have a strong understanding of how the loans can fit into the broader capital markets. That small decision I made long ago to develop a unique expertise wound up having a great impact on my career.

I've had a number of roles in asset-based lending and debt capital markets, but for the past 25 years I have headed up syndication teams that were responsible for all the asset-based syndication at Bank of America and, beginning in 2006, at Wells Fargo. Through these roles I've built an amazing network of friends across the debt markets and developed a unique perspective on the growth and development of the asset-based lending industry, capabilities I bring to my current role.

I joined Regions Business Capital in 2022 as its head of Credit Markets, where I am helping Regions grow its asset-based business and integrate it more closely with other parts of Regions Bank. This allows us to provide more value to customers while raising the profile and enhancing the profitability of the business.

You've had a successful career in an industry that requires collaboration, whether it be with other lenders, your clients, team members, service partners, etc. Any secrets to fostering strong partnerships and working together successfully?

There is no secret to the fact that forming connections and growing relationships are essential to success in any career. Important relationships must start with trust and a sense of mutual appreciation

for the skills and abilities of colleagues. For me, the keys to building strong relationships are honesty and integrity. It's also crucial to show empathy for others and try to understand their perspective. People can always disagree with your view, but it's critically important that they trust you. Deals come and go, as do specific jobs, but strong relationships last a lifetime and can help you at all stages of your career.

Each time I meet someone I like and respect, I try to establish a relationship that is more than just transactional, and to maintain contact with them over time. That applies to people at every level of experience and in every function. I believe you can never have too many positive relationships, and you never know when those connections will come in handy.

What motivated you to get involved in SFNet and how has it affected you both professionally and personally?

Early in my career, I began attending SFNet events to meet more people in the industry. As I took on more senior role professionally, and particularly because of the roles I played in loan syndication, it became even more important to be present at the big national events, both to learn important industry information and to build upon my personal network. I began participating in panel discussions and helping plan industry events to get to know people better and learn. Ultimately, that led me to create the SFNet Asset-Based Capital Conference in 2008, which has grown to become one of the signature events on the SFNet calendar.

The personal network I've built over time was key to the success of the SFNet podcast I began hosting in 2022 entitled, "SFNet Presents *In the Know*". *In the Know* is a series of interviews with people who have important perspectives on topics that impact our industry. SFNet was extremely supportive of the podcast and has helped broaden the viewership through its marketing efforts.

Something I've really come to appreciate from my SFNet engagement is that there's something very special about the people our industry. It's more than their obsession with the Xs and Os of secured lending. The people I've worked with in the industry are among the finest people and the best credit minds I have ever encountered. The loans we make can support companies through challenging times, and the institutions we work for appreciate our ability to manage risk well. Across the entire industry there is a shared desire to be a part of something larger than yourself, and an appreciation for the good work we can accomplish together.

I am proud of the contributions I've been able to make to our industry through the various leadership roles I've had with SFNet. Taking on the presidency is the culmination of many things I've been working on for years, and it is a way for me to give back to an organization that has meant so much to me.

What role has mentoring played in your career, both as a mentor or mentee and what advice would you give to those just starting out in the industry?

I wouldn't be where I am today without the help I've received along the way. While some mentors have been more senior, I've learned a great

deal from people of all experiences and backgrounds. Often the people I'm supposed to be mentoring wind up guiding me more than I think I helped them. As in any trade, lending can't be learned quickly. We learn over time from our experiences and from all the people around us. I feel a strong sense of obligation to pass on to others whatever wisdom and perspective I have so that I can help others can build their own journey through their careers. I gain great personal satisfaction from seeing the career success being enjoyed by those who have worked for me over the years.

I often urge people who are joining this industry to seek support – you can't wait for others to come to you. Especially when you're new, it's important to identify people whose experiences are different from yours and engage them in a conversation. No two career paths are going to be the same, but if you ask the right questions, you can always learn from others.

What are your main priorities and goals as SFNet president?

SFNet chief executive officer Rich Gumbrecht and his staff are doing an excellent job providing value for our members. Our conferences and online offerings have never been more popular. The advocacy work led by SFNet has helped our members stay well informed on emerging legal and regulatory issues and has had a positive impact on secured finance businesses in numerous jurisdictions. During her time as president, Jenn Palmer sought to find common ground with other related trade associations. As a result, SFNet has established a successful collaboration with the International Housewares Association and the Small Business Administration. In the past year, our data-related initiatives have accelerated with the newly updated Market Sizing Study and the second annual Data Issue of *The Secured Lender*.

One of the most important things SFNet is currently focusing on is developing the next generation of industry leadership. SFNet hosts events throughout the year on this initiative, including the Women in Secured Finance events, the Emerging Leaders Summit and the annual 40 Under 40 Awards gala. The current SFNet Executive Committee, which includes numerous people who have come through these processes, is a testament to how well these leadership development initiatives are working.

In addition to maintaining all the excellent initiatives already underway, my main goal as president is to ensure that our Executive Committee functions as a strategic board that provides leadership in the industry. I want to use their strength and diversity of perspectives to keep us looking around the corner for emerging trends and issues across our entire secured finance ecosystem of asset based lenders, factors, supply chain financiers, service providers and other key partners, ensuring SFNet will continue to play a strategic role in the overall secured finance industry for many years to come.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for the association and the industry as a whole in 2024?

The unprecedented nature of today's markets presents both challenges and opportunities for asset-based lending. The combination of elevated inflation and tight labor markets has most economists struggling for any precedent from which to make predictions. It is

presenting unique challenges to the business plans of both bank and non-bank lenders and the service providers who work with them.

Despite the uncertainty, I believe that the current environment provides a unique opportunity for the secured finance industry to differentiate itself through strong performance. We can accomplish this by doing what we do best: lending money to companies that need it and minimizing credit losses by evaluating and proactively managing the risk of those loans based on our many years of experience. Supporting our clients throughout the business cycle is one of our core strengths. Our stakeholders rely on us to excel during challenging times. If we succeed, we will all benefit in the future.

As for SFNet, we strengthened our position at the center of information and connectivity for the secured finance industry over the past several years by continuing to provide important content to our members in both online and virtual environments. We are now better positioned than ever to play a leadership role in our industry. We have done an outstanding job of convening forums that frame the right questions, advocating for our ability to play a vital role in the economy throughout the business cycle, and developing the next generation of leaders. The path for SFNet is to continue to play the leadership role it has earned in the secured finance markets during its 79 years of existence, helping our membership adapt and thrive through periods of change.

When you aren't working or volunteering for SFNet, how do you spend your time?

Outside of family and work, my passions are current news, tennis, and travel. My wife, Karen, lovingly teases me for my interest in arcane subjects. I am obsessed with learning all I can about current events, financial markets and geopolitics. I consume way too much news, listen to a lot of great podcasts, and have a network of like-minded people who indulge me frequently.

As for tennis, I'm a world-class fan. I follow the results of tournaments around the world and feel like I am on a first-name basis with the Tennis Channel crew (although they don't seem to know me). I hold court in Flushing Meadows for days at the U.S. Open. I love to play tennis too, and particularly enjoy confusing my opponents with my left-handed twist serve.

Karen and I have a lifelong passion for travel, beginning with our honeymoon trek through Nepal. We love exploring new places and always learn something important from the people we meet along the way. The pandemic slowed us down a bit, but we are ramping up again. Earlier this year, we traveled to Israel and Jordan.

When I look back over my career, I'm struck by how my work in banking has allowed me to make a good life as well as a good living. I get great satisfaction from the things I've learned, the friends I've made and what we've been able to accomplish together. 🏠

Michele Oejo is SFNet director of communications and editor-in-chief of The Secured Lender.