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*Putting Capital To Work*

THE 2026

UNDER

AWARDS  
ISSUE

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Network

## CELEBRATING THE CHANGE-MAKERS

# 10 Years of SFNet's 40 Under 40 Awards

As SFNet marks the 10th anniversary of our 40 Under 40 Awards, this year's program is both a celebration and a milestone. Over the past decade, these honorees have come to symbolize what makes secured finance so dynamic and resilient: talented, principled leaders who step forward in times.

When SFNet launched the 40 Under 40 Awards in 2016, the goal was simple, but ambitious: to shine a spotlight on the rising stars who would shape the future of our community. Ten years later, that vision has become a reality. Alumni of this program are now leading and *founding* businesses, building teams, driving innovation, and mentoring the professionals who follow in their footsteps. Many have played integral roles in SFNet.

Each year, our 40 Under 40 celebration in New York City brings that story to life. It creates a rare moment where established leaders and emerging talent share the same room, the same stage, and the same sense of purpose about where the industry is headed next. This year's gathering carries added meaning as we look back on a decade of honorees while welcoming a new class into this growing community.

The 2026 40 Under 40 class represents the best of what comes next for our industry. These professionals are not just high performers; they are problem-solvers, collaborators, and change agents who have earned the trust of their colleagues and clients. Their stories underscore how much can happen when opportunity, preparation, and commitment converge.

Importantly, many of this year's honorees are also giving back—to SFNet, to their firms, and to their communities. They serve on committees and chapter boards, contribute as speakers and thought leaders, and dedicate time to mentoring and volunteer efforts. That kind of engagement strengthens the fabric of our industry as well as our communities.

Selecting just 40 honorees from an outstanding field of nominees is never easy. I am deeply grateful to this year's judges, Jennifer Wallace (Chair), Wells Fargo Capital Finance; Kristine Darroch, eCapital; Doug Jung, Hilco Global; Jordan Klein, Winston Taylor; David Kurzweil, Greenberg Traurig; and Randy Mitzman, SLR Digital Finance.

Be sure to turn to page 92, where senior editor Eileen Wubbe spotlights several past 40 Under 40 recipients including a few from the inaugural 2016 class.

As seasoned professionals retire, firms face a widening replacement gap that threatens leadership continuity and hard-won institutional knowledge. On page 86, drawing on workforce

data and industry trends, Brian Resuek of Republic Business Credit explains what's driving the "aging cliff" and outlines practical ways to bridge it—starting with mentoring and smarter talent development.

On page 90, in *Protecting Collateral Liquidity Through Cyber Operational Resilience*, Doug Jung and Alexander Niejelow of Hilco Global explain why cyber risk is now a core ABL liquidity risk, and how resilience-focused field exams protect capital.

In the Industry Pulse column, we ask industry executives about a hot topic. In this issue, we are asking: As the ABL industry goes through a generational turnover, and AI becomes more embedded, how can organizations ensure institutional knowledge is passed down to newer entrants in the industry?

To the 2026 40 Under 40 class: Congratulations! As we celebrate ten years of this program, you join a group of peers who have helped define what leadership in secured finance looks like. The industry's future is in very capable hands, and I look forward to seeing where you take it.

Rich Gumbrecht  
Chief Executive Officer  
Secured Finance Network



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

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■ **GEORGE KEKEJIAN**  
Vice President  
SLR Business Credit

**G**eorge Kekejian is a vice president at SLR Business Credit, where he originates asset-based lending and factoring transactions across both traditional C&I and digital media verticals. In 2018, fresh out of UC Berkeley with a degree in economics, George applied to FastPay, a digital media factoring firm, with little understanding of the industry. He didn't get the job he applied for, but Danielle Baldaro, now SVP of portfolio management, recognized his talent and ambition and created a role for him within her group. That opportunity became a career. FastPay was acquired by SLR Business Credit in 2021, the same year George earned his MBA from Pepperdine University. He has since held roles in portfolio management, operations, and business development, giving him a comprehensive view of the credit lifecycle. Today, he sources deals across manufacturing, aerospace, staffing, transportation, ad tech, media, and more, working alongside many of the same colleagues he started with eight years ago.

**How are you keeping up with rapidly changing technology (e.g., AI) in secured finance today? What do you think its role will look like in the future of the industry?**

On my own time, I have taught myself how to use AI tools to design and build fully functional software applications. I have no coding background, but I have learned how to take a problem, think through the logic, and use AI to turn it into a working product. That process has changed how I evaluate workflows in lending. I look at a manual process and immediately start thinking about what could be automated, where errors are likely to creep in, and how technology could free a team to focus on judgment calls instead of data entry. AI can flag financial reporting inconsistencies in seconds, surface early warning signs in borrowing base data, and help originators find the right deals faster. But the technology works best when it amplifies human judgment, not when it replaces it. A model can tell you a concentration is building or that an aging bucket looks unusual, but an experienced lender still has to understand why. Over the next five to ten years, the firms that integrate AI into their workflows early will have a meaningful advantage in speed, accuracy, and portfolio performance.

**What advice would you give to other young professionals looking to build a successful career in secured finance?**

Learn every part of the business, not just the part you were hired for. I started as an analyst in digital media factoring, moved into portfolio management, handled operational workflows, and eventually transitioned into origination. Each role gave me context that makes me better at the next one. However, as unconventional as this may sound, the single biggest asset in my career has been humor. Being someone who can make people laugh and feel comfortable has opened more doors than any technical skill. Laughter builds trust. It turns a cold call into a real conversation and a client meeting into a relationship. I have had borrowers

share information they might not have volunteered to someone they did not feel at ease with, and referral sources send me deals because they genuinely enjoy working with me. The support I have received from my work family, people I have laughed with through long days and tough deals, has been the most rewarding part of this career. Happiness is an underrated strategy.

**What's a skill you've developed that doesn't show up on your resume, but is applicable to this industry?**

My entire career up until a few years ago was built on credit, portfolio management, and legal negotiation. I knew how to structure a deal, monitor a borrowing base, and work through amendments and defaults. Moving into business development was a completely different skill set. I had no formal sales background and no playbook to follow. Randy Mitzman, our managing director, was crucial in opening the opportunity to join his team in business development. Jeff Goldrich, our CEO, Dan Tortoriello, our COO, Betty Hernandez, our chief credit officer, and Danielle Baldaro, our SVP of portfolio management, have all been incredibly supportive in backing that transition and giving me the room to explore a new career path. On top of that pivot, I went from working exclusively in digital media and ad tech to evaluating businesses in manufacturing, aerospace, staffing, and other industries. Every new industry is its own education. You learn how revenue cycles work, where the collateral risk lives, and what keeps a CFO up at night. That learning curve has made me a better originator because I can walk into almost any conversation and find common ground quickly.

CONGRATULATIONS TO

# GEORGE KEKEJIAN

**SLR ABL** is proud our colleague has been selected as an SFNet 40 Under 40 Award winner.



**George Kekejian**  
VP, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT  
SLR ASSET-BASED LENDING

Specializing in adtech and digital media business financings, George Kekejian is a key member of our business development team and based in Los Angeles. George's expertise extends to a broad range of industries and other ABL and factoring solutions. His territory is throughout the United States, and we are privileged to have George as a colleague.

Our best wishes to all 40 Under 40 recipients.



# SFNet's 40 Under 40 Awards 2026

June 11, 2026 | The Plaza Hotel

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