

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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Alston & Bird, LLP,
Partner and Co-Leader of the Consumer Finance Team



WHF Member Spotlight – May 2019

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Alston & Bird, LLP

Hometown

West Peabody, Massachusetts

Fun Fact

I'm one of those odd people who chooses to wake up at 5 am to work out or go for a speed walk. And yes, the only TV channel I watch is HGTV, unless my family won't give up the remote.

Walk me through your journey in the financial services industry and how your career has evolved to your current position.

After working in tax during my first two years after law school, I recognized that it was not my passion. One of my mentors was an attorney at a mid-size DC firm called Brownstein, Zeidman & Lore and suggested that I apply for the associate position in that firm's Mortgage Banking Group. I had just purchased my first house and thought I would enjoy learning more about consumer protection law. That was in 1994. Shortly thereafter, the Mortgage Banking Group moved the practice to what later became K&L Gates. (Brownstein imploded in 1996.) While I never envisioned myself working in Big Law, I landed there. As a young associate, it was suggested to me that I should be a regulatory attorney because I may want to have kids someday. Too naive to know differently, that off-handed comment shaped my practice. At K&L Gates, I worked my way up from an associate, income partner, and finally equity partner, all while working on a reduced-hour schedule while I raised two children. I was fortunate to work with many talented attorneys, including my mentor Gus Avrakotos, and was able to avail myself of the many opportunities a large firm offered. I started off working on licensing and state regulatory matters and defending companies when challenged by the regulators. Pre-crisis, I also spent a significant amount of time advising the primary and secondary markets on anti-predatory lending laws. After the enactment of the Dodd-Frank Act in 2010, I pivoted and began working on issues related to preemption of state laws, the National Mortgage Standards and CFPB servicing rules, debt collection, and AMC / valuation issues.

By 2014 and with the support of my family, I was back full time and ready for a greater challenge. I moved my practice to Alston & Bird LLP. It was a difficult decision and felt risky at the time, but has been such a wonderful experience to be able to continue to grow and expand my practice. Today, I co-lead a

team of five associates and three paralegals, and we are growing. We are even starting a blog (the “Consumer Finance ABstract”). On a daily basis, I work on a wide variety of consumer finance issues in the primary and secondary markets—defending CFPB and state enforcement actions, providing regulatory review on securitizations, and conducting due diligence in connection with M&A activities—along with a steady diet of providing regulatory advice on the alphabet soup of federal laws and the laws of 54 jurisdictions. Every day is fast paced, varied, and (mostly) fun!

What do you love most about what you do?

I may have fallen into being a consumer finance lawyer, but it really works for me. I truly enjoy speaking with clients and helping solve their most pressing problems by providing pragmatic advice and creative solutions. I enjoy my colleagues and being able to brainstorm with them. Recognizing the importance of a mentor and a sponsor, I enjoy paying forward.

Hobby

I wish. But I do like to spend time with family, travel, exercise, and reconnect with old friends. I love small talk when I am out and about and meeting new people. I also enjoy shopping and decorating with my kids.

How long have you been a member of WHF?

A long time. I think I joined in the late 1990s.

Please describe your involvement with WHF.

I became active in WHF in the early 2000s after hearing about it from one of the founding members and my former colleague Rebecca Laird. I’m very proud to have served as General Counsel to the WHF Foundation from 2007 to 2009. One of the most rewarding experiences I had while serving as GC was working with other board members to review and award grants to the many deserving organizations that support the WHF Foundation’s mission!

What have you gained from being a member?

Networking opportunities are definitely a key gain in working with WHF. I’m also better able to keep up with industry news, and I learn a lot from the great speakers WHF brings through its Brown Bag lunch program.

How do you make the best use of your day? (think techniques to enhance productivity, time management, time out, meditation/prayer, etc.)

When I am not traveling, I start off most days by going to the gym with my workout buddy. We have been working out together for more than a dozen years, and it is a great way to manage stress, stay connected to friends, and stay in decent shape. I also try to meditate several days a week. I started using a new app: 10% Happier, which I recommend to others. I try to keep organized by using the Bullet Journal method. I try to prioritize the few “must dos” for the day. No matter what, try and get a good night's sleep.

Who or what inspires you?

My daughters; I try to be a strong role model for them. I also think of the women trailblazers in our profession—I don't want to let them down!

What is the best advice you have ever received?

- You can only plan 40% of your day.
- Everyone needs mentors (someone you can turn to for guidance) and a sponsor (someone who will advocate for you).
- You are in charge of your career.
- Pick your battles and accept what you can't control.
- Properly separate your recyclables—for domestic bliss.

Who do you look up to the most and why?

RBG. Does anyone really need me to explain why?