



Shining the Spotlight on Leaders (Who Happen to be Women) in Commercial Real Estate

Lucinda Smedley • published in the November 2020 issue



Top Row: Lani Baker, Sandra Barton, Caroline Janjić, Melissa Lal, Jane McCollum, Linda Morales
Bottom Row: Barbi Reuter, Erin Riggins, Keri Silvyn, Allyson Solomon, Priscilla Storm, Alice Templeton

Twelve extremely accomplished women are the focus of this first ever Women in CRE issue of TREND report. Featured in this issue are Lani Baker, CFO and Partner at Holualoa Companies; Sandra Barton, Senior Director of Commercial Real Estate, for Alliance Bank of Arizona; Caroline Janjić, COO and Partner at Iridius Capital; Melissa Lal, President and Partner at Larsen Baker; Jane McCollum, General Manager of the Marshall Foundation/Main Gate Square; Linda Morales, CEO of The Planning Center; Barbi Reuter, RPA, CEO, Chairman and Designated Broker of Cushman & Wakefield | PICOR; Erin Riggins, Development Project Manager and VP of Finance at Aerie Development; Keri Silvyn, Partner/Owner at Lazarus & Silvyn, P.C.; Allyson Solomon, Executive Director of Metropolitan Pima Alliance; Priscilla Storm, VP and Partner at Diamond Ventures Inc; and Alice Templeton, Business Development Director for Barker Contracting.

I have known most of these women since launching TREND report in 2008 and they have each mentored and advised me along the way. They range in age from 30's to 60's, and their careers span decades. They were selected for this issue as they represent a wide range of professions and opportunities within CRE—planning, finance, property management, advocacy, legal, banking, and business development and because they are at the top of their game! I am grateful to them for sharing their personal and professional stories and their market insights. It is an honor to acknowledge the professional accomplishments of these women while also recognizing that there's more work to be done especially in terms of pay parity and career advancement as indicated in the findings of CREW's 2020 benchmark study measuring progress for women over the last 15 years in commercial real estate.

Get to know more about them in their own words on the following pages and join us in celebrating their accomplishments and contributions to the commercial real estate industry in Southern Arizona.

An Interview with Keri Silvyn

Keri Silvyn has been practicing zoning and land use law in Southern Arizona for almost 20 years. Her practice emphasizes sustainable development and appropriate and responsible growth. Her work focuses on advising private developers and local governments on application of zoning codes, compliance with state statutes, compliance with current land use case law, and effective public/private partnerships.



Greater Tucson Leadership Selected Keri as the Tucson Woman of the Year for 2013. Keri has been listed annually as one of America's Leading Business Lawyers in the category of Real Estate: Zoning/Land Use since the 2012 edition of Chambers USA by Chambers and Partners Publishers. Keri has been recognized annually since 2008 as a Best Lawyer in America. In 2017, Keri was recognized as Tucson's 2017 Lawyer of the Year in the area of Land Use and Zoning Law. Most recently, Keri was appointed by the City of Tucson Mayor and Council to serve on the Planning and Development Services (PDS) Advisory Committee that worked to establish priorities for the newly organized PDS and assisted with the selection criteria for the new PDS Director.

How did you get started in your field?

My father is a long-time zoning attorney in Phoenix. Having grown up watching land use entitlement work, I swore I would NEVER be THAT kind of lawyer! Turns out after law school, I tried a few areas of law and found that I had the patience (who knew) and desire to really help the Tucson region grow as a land use attorney. I started at Gust Rosenfeld doing land use part time with Frank Cassidy and found I loved it. (Insurance defense was not working for me.) I then moved over to Lewis and Roca and learned so much about all things real estate, land use, economic development, etc. I loved it and still do.

How is CRE same/different for women today, than when you began your career?

In 1997 when I started, there were a few women in the field – primarily at the lending financial institutions. Really almost all developers, architects, and engineers were men. In addition, most of the elected officials and advising boards were men with a few women. In addition, many of the trade organizations—Metropolitan Pima Alliance, Real Estate and Allied Professionals, etc.—were predominantly men. This has changed exponentially in 24 years and it is very exciting to see. Having diversity— in all ways, not just gender—is critically important to community decision making!!

What strides have been made in your area of CRE?

This 24-year journey has been amazing. I have not only learned (and continue to learn) the subject matter, but I have also learned how to both be an employee and run a business. Understanding how zoning and land use plays into creating the fabric of a community, economic development and overall health in a community is exciting. I also love to educate people on these types of connections to their daily lives. I am looking forward to the next and continued chapter of learning in my career.

Talk about your mentors.

Obviously, my father is one of my primary mentors. He has set an amazing example of how to practice land use law ethically, with enthusiasm and having fun while doing it. Frank Cassidy was my first mentor at Gust Rosenfeld and was the primary reason I decided to be a land use attorney. He has continued to mentor me in his focused problem solving as Town Attorney in Marana— until end of October when he retires. And of course, Frank Bangs and Mary Beth Savel mentored me for my 15 years at Lewis and Roca. Frank's patience was amazing in helping me understand complex (and not-so-complex issues). And Mary Beth was brutal in her editing of my written materials, which caused me to become a much stronger writer and editor. At the time, it was hard but the results were worth it!

What are you seeing in your field/the market today?

Tucson is really benefiting from all of the marketing and positive developments over the last ten years. We are on the radar for prospective employers and other regional expansions. Our size as a community is in a sweet-spot for recruitment of new businesses. Because of that attraction and our need for additional housing supply, land use entitlements are very busy.

The future?

Hoping to stay busy.

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