

Melnik Award Winner Q&A's

Bernadette Barron, 2018 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? The best part of being an IWIRC member is the referral sources and friends I made over the past 20 years. For the past 10 years, almost all of my referrals came from IWIRC members or related connections. I had over 40 clients that came directly from IWIRC related sources, all of which came out of attending a cocktail party when I was a new member that I had to convince myself to attend.

2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? For most of my career, I have had my own consulting firm. Receiving the Melnik Award gave me national recognition – it signified to the bankruptcy community that my peers believed my professionalism both within and outside of IWIRC should be recognized, which was truly a tremendous honor.

3) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? Probably the best advice I received over the years was try everything once, even if you know you won't enjoy it, which will allow you to be part of any conversation. The next piece of advice (which obviously needs to be taken with a "grain of salt") was don't apologize or explain. Starting a letter or email with "I'm sorry" forever memorializes that there was an error or tardiness – and will never let the matter drop. Better to simply handle the problem with promptness and attention. If really needed, give your apologies separately in either a call or separate note. As for explanations, there is no need to give the details behind what lead up to the issue – again simply get the situation corrected. Explanations only "dig the hole deeper." Accept and move forward as quickly and as quietly as possible.



Judith Elkin, 2013 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member?

I joined IWIRC in 1993 at its inception. We had incredibly lofty goals at that time – to turn IWIRC into a global organization for women insolvency practitioners that both nurtured young women professionals and had the same credibility as other bar organizations which were predominantly male-dominated. Through the dedication and enthusiasm of our members, we have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. The best part about being an IWIRC member is meeting so many talented and dedicated woman professionals from around the world. I have formed lifelong friendships with many of the women I have met through IWIRC and those friendships have benefited me both personally and professionally.



2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? At the time I received the Melnik Award, I had a well-established career and was the chair of both IWIRC International and the IBA Insolvency Section. I was honored to receive recognition for my years of practice and service to the insolvency community. Recognition from one's peers is always appreciated and it cannot be underestimated how such recognition enhanced my reputation at my own firm and with clients.

3) What is next/upcoming for you? In 2016, I retired from the firm I had been with for over 30 thirty years so that my husband and I could travel both globally and around the US. We travelled with our two dogs through the Maritime Provinces in Canada and cross-country and without our dogs, throughout the world. When the pandemic hit, bankruptcy was booming and I couldn't travel. With the help of an IWIRC friend, I joined Pachulski Stang Ziehl & Jones as of counsel. I have enjoyed practicing again – this time on the debtor and committee side, rather than the secured lender side. My new position gives me the flexibility to travel as well as the intellectual stimulation of a sophisticated insolvency practice. This year, we travelled from the caves of Lascaux France to the wilds of Alaska photographing bears. I have also stayed active in IWIRC, recently attending the UNCITRAL Working Group V meeting in Vienna as part of the IWIRC delegation.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? My advice to IWIRC members is to do what you love, and always put your whole self in every project. Every organization is only as good as its members, and ours have shown themselves to be smart, dedicated, and enthusiastic agents of change in the global insolvency community.

Evelyn Meltzer, 2016 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? The best thing about being an IWIRC member is friendships I have made with women in the insolvency profession all around the world. I look up to, and respect, these women who are smart, hardworking, at the top of their game, and who make juggling work and family commitments look easy (even when we all know it is not).



2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? I was honored to receive the Melnik Award for helping to start the IWIRC at the Shore conference 12 years ago. It was the first IWIRC regional conference and I am thrilled to see how regional conferences have now become a key part of IWIRC around the world. IWIRC gave me my first leadership role in insolvency. I started out on the board for Delaware, then served on the planning committee for IWIRC at the Shore, and ultimately moved up to the international board. My roles in IWIRC and winning the Melnik Award opened doors for me in other organizations. For example, it was an IWIRC friend who got me on the ABI Central States Advisory Board, which led to me getting on and ultimately chairing the ABI Asset Sales Committee and the ABI International Committee. Last year, I was elevated to the ABI Board.

3) What is next/upcoming for you? Last year IWIRC celebrated 30 amazing years. As IWIRC grows and expands to even further destinations, there are new challenges and opportunities that IWIRC needs to consider and plan for. I am excited to help shape the future of IWIRC as we work to refine IWIRC's strategic plan, so that IWIRC can continue its mission of connecting and promoting women in the insolvency and restructuring profession around the world. I can't wait to see what IWIRC will look like five, 10, and 30 years from now.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? The best advice I can give is to get involved in IWIRC. Join the board at the network level. Sign up to be on an international committee (an email comes out every January with a list of IWIRC committees and how to sign up). Attend a network event, regional conference, or the Fall or Spring conference. Simply put, the women you will meet at IWIRC will become your friends, mentors, sponsors, and business referrals.

Joanne Hewitt-Schembri, 2022 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? Being a part of IWIRC is rewarding on both a professional and personal level, through its fostering of professional connections, leadership and educational opportunities, as well as forging friendships of likeminded individuals through its extensive network.

2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? It is such an honour to be the recipient of this award, and to be recognised and promoted by so many inspiring women and peers in the industry. Being a Melnik Award winner has increased my exposure, giving me an opportunity to make further impact within the industry.

Professionally, the Melnik Award gave me confidence. It is not often in this line of work that someone takes the time to really recognize your effort and its impact. This organization and this award put a spotlight on just that. What an incredible boost to know that I had an impact beyond myself!

3) What is next/upcoming for you? I am very excited to be recently appointed to the IWIRC Executive Committee, where I will have a strategic hand in continuing to grow the IWIRC network. I look forward to using the IWIRC platform for mentoring and development.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? Be sure to maximise opportunities for networking and invest in relationships! This can have a significant impact on your career and development – on a professional and personal level.



Jennifer McLemore, 2012 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? The best part of being an IWIRC member is the deep relationships that I have established over my years of membership.

2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? I continue to be a grateful recipient of such recognition and honor in an organization that has already given me so much. In my different service roles with IWIRC, I was given profound opportunities to learn, grow, and challenge myself. To receive an award for those efforts, on top of all of the other benefits I received, was really overwhelming and humbling. Beyond those initial feelings, getting an award in the name of Selinda Melnik, who was a beacon in our field, literally is stunning. The fun part is, every year, when a new recipient is named, I feel honored all over again. IWIRC is truly lucky to have such continually generous members.

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3) What is next/upcoming for you? The last couple of years have taught me to be nimble and assess my abilities and skills in an objective light. While bankruptcy trends change, my developed skills are not always obviously relevant. I expect that the next few years will be filled with opportunities to challenge my base skills, to pivot and develop my skills to help new industries in distress, and, I imagine, to develop and hone entirely new skills to keep up with our changing times. Just that... and raising teenagers! My boys are the most rewarding part of my days.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? Raise your hand, get involved, and find the opportunity in every task you are asked to undertake. IWIRC will give you so much more than you give.

Ladies, Thanks for the opportunity to speak up about this award. I continue to be humbled by the company it puts me in. GO IWIRC!



Jennifer Meyerowitz, 2015 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? Definitely the people. I love IWIRC because I love interacting with smart, strong, talented and fun professional women from around the globe. No matter how far apart we live or how different our cultures from which we come, IWIRC women share a special bond from sharing similar turnaround experiences, similar work engagements and similar life experiences. The bond and connection with IWIRC women is unparalleled and unique.



2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? First of all, it is such an honor to be a Melnik winner and to be listed among the other incredibly bright, talented and inspiring women that have also won the Melnik award. Secondly, being a Melnik award winner has given me exposure in the industry by promoting me and recognizing me throughout the industry. Finally, being a Melnik Award winner also conveys a sense of responsibility to nominate other deserving women for the award and to be sure to pay the recognition forward.

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3) What is next/upcoming for you? Despite having previously served in various IWIRC leadership roles, I will never fully be done with my service to IWIRC. I will always stay involved and continue to give back to the organization and members that gave so much to me and helped to enhance my career. I will always be available to give ideas, mentorship, advice or counsel wherever needed.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? IWIRC is an incredible organization with incredible members. While the old saying "you get out of an organization as much as you put into it" is partially true, the real truth with IWIRC is that you get ten times as much from IWIRC as you put into it. Getting involved with IWIRC will enhance your job opportunities, your connections, your education and knowledge, your training and your advancement tenfold. It will positively impact you as a person and your career in ways that you can't even imagine. Get involved and stay involved and you will be rewarded.

Debra E. Kuptz, 2010 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? The best part of being an IWIRC member is being part of an organization that is focused on the professional growth and success of women. That we are (or were) all involved in various aspects of corporate bankruptcy and restructuring is secondary to members' commitment to the ideal of mutual respect and support of each other. It is true now and it was true on day one.



2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career?

Receiving the Melnik Award, coming not long before I retired, felt like a timely and very appreciated capstone to my career. Professional recognition is a signal that one's efforts have been noticed and deemed important. That's the kind of reward I will value for the rest of my life.

Professionally, the Melnik Award gave me confidence. It is not often in this line of work that someone takes the time to really recognize your effort and its impact. This organization and this award put a spotlight on just that. What an incredible boost to know that I had an impact beyond myself!

3) What is next/upcoming for you? The really fun thing about retirement is not really knowing "what's next." I've done a good number of marketing and communications projects, as well as helping my younger family members prepare for and pursue their own careers. I'm active in sports, civic matters, and volunteering.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? My advice is IWIRC colleagues is to be engaged. IWIRC offers a positive and encouraging environment where you can learn, get support, build your network, develop leadership skills and reach back to help those coming up.

Leslie Berkoff, 2009 Melnik Award Winner

1) What is the best part about being an IWIRC member? Being a part of a global network of amazing women who share the goal to cross-refer business, support one another in both the development of business, professional growth and education. Some of my closest friends in the industry have come from “growing” up with them over the years through IWIRC, as they have moved up in their respective firms and industries, our ongoing relationships have only deepened both professionally and personally. They are my colleagues, my friends and at times my support system in the industry.



2) How has being the recipient of the [Melnik Award] impacted you and your career? Selinda Melnik was my friend and took me under her wing when I was a baby lawyer to share her guidance and mentorship through our IWIRC connection. She was an amazing woman- a force to be reckoned with and an early female leader in our industry. To one day receive the award named after her, holds a special place for me – as do the memories of our friendship for someone who left us all far too soon.

3) What is next/upcoming for you? I don't believe that the practice of law is stagnant – and by that I mean we should always look to learn more, develop new areas of practice and keep moving. I am continuing to grow and expand my areas of practice which include not just Restructuring work, but Alternative Dispute Resolution (mediation and arbitration) along with grow the receivership and special referee work that I have taken on in the last several years. I am working on another book for the ABI and continue to write and speak on many areas of interest for me. I will also be launching a Podcast series in the near future through the ABA focused on my ADR practice.

4) Any words of advice you would like to share with our members? You are never too young to start building your network. In my early years my IWIRC colleagues proved to be an early source of business development. However, the information sharing, support, ability to have “friends” all over the world is invaluable and I am often looking to this network to cross-refer work, get local insight on cases and so much more. So please use your IWIRC relationships, go to conferences, attend events, stay in touch with your colleagues—support comes in some many packages—these women will help you out along the way, they have and continue to mean the world to me.