



From HW Magazine

## 2016 HW Vanguard Award winners

### 40 executives leading the mortgage industry

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As the door closes on 2016, the mortgage industry is full of good news. Increasing home prices mean the vast majority of homebuyers have positive equity in their home, and the number of foreclosures continues to drop to pre-Recession levels. Millennials are starting to step into the market and both GSEs and private companies are making room for first-time homebuyers with low down payment programs and alternative credit models.

But the challenges of 2017 lie right around the corner.

Any new presidential administration signals change for our industry, but this year's changes could be unprecedented. As the mortgage industry continues its slow but steady recovery from the financial crisis and the Great Recession, a new administration will have weighty decisions to make.

Amid the potential new direction from the president, congress and regulators, leadership in our industry is more important than ever. Understanding and planning for a changing environment will test the proficiency of mortgage lenders, servicers, investors and real estate professionals across the country.

Which is why HousingWire is proud to present the 40 winners of our 2016 Vanguard award. These leaders from all segments of the mortgage ecosystem demonstrate that our industry is more than capable of meeting the challenges that lie ahead.

Our Vanguard winners excel in a variety of skill sets, but all share the ability to energize and mobilize their employees. We asked each of our winners to answer questions about what has made them successful, and many chose to point out that their most valuable resource is not a strategic plan or a key technology — it's the team of people they work with every day.

Strong teams under inspired leadership ensure that the future of our industry is bright indeed.

# RALPH SELLS

## PRESIDENT, MORTGAGE SOLUTIONS | ASSURANT



With more than 20 years of mortgage banking experience, Ralph Sells, president of valuations at Assurant, is a leader in the valuations sector and continues to push the industry to new heights.

Sells began his career as a servicer then moved on as a leader in mortgage at Freddie Mac, where he was one of the designers of BPO Direct – a platform (which is still in use today) that allows servicers to manage the broker price opinion and default appraisal orders process.

In 2002, Sells sought to correct significant inefficiencies in the mortgage valuation industry that could be alleviated by using new technologies. As a result, Sells founded eMortgage Logic (EML), a company that offered Wall Street and mortgage servicers alternative valuation solutions with an emphasis on customization and flexibility.

After more than 12 years of extraordinary growth, EML was acquired by Assurant, a global provider of risk management solutions for the housing and lifestyle markets. Assurant's core focus on protecting what matters most aligned closely with EML's core values, and resulted in seamless transition into the Assurant family.

eMortgage Logic's strength was recognized in September 2015 when the company was assigned MOR RV1 by Morningstar Credit Ratings. This is its highest ranking for residential vendors in the asset valuation market. Morningstar cited the company's operational stability and performance, superior risk management practices and highly effective technology architecture in their assessment, and ultimately led to their determination to give EML the highest ranking available. In late 2016, eMortgage Logic was integrated into the Assurant Valuations product line, which is part of the growing Assurant Mortgage Solutions division.

Currently, Sells' team at Assurant Valuations is focused on building new technologies and a proprietary system that will continue to utilize and enhance data and national MLS capabilities. This system is projected to further improve accuracy and quality of BPOs. Sells has led the charge on this initiative and has been a crucial driver in the development of this technology. As a hands-on leader, Sells has played a significant role in the development of the user interface design and experience, rule design, rule engine configuration and more.

Sells also contributes to the growth of the industry through his role in the Real Estate Valuation Advocacy Association (REVAA). Sells is a cofounding member and currently serves as a member of the board. REVAA's mission is to promote awareness and advocacy for the real estate valuation industry through dialogue with local, state, and federal governments. The group acts as advocates for all stakeholders in the valuation sector including servicers, banks, investors, appraisers and brokers.

Through the delivery of quality products and his work with REVAA, Sells has worked to promote integrity and credibility in the valuations industry, which has been vital to its evolution. Looking to the future, Sells plans to apply his industry knowledge to assisting various trade organizations, investors and the real estate community in developing different approaches to the industry's greatest challenges.