Independent Banker

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From the Top by Preston Kennedy

[pull quote]“Community banks ask for nothing but a level playing field on which to compete.  
In a fair fight, we like our chances.”

**Community banks ask for nothing** but a level playing field on which to compete. In a fair fight, we like our chances. As I became the new ICBA chairman at ICBA LIVE in Nashville, Tenn., last month, I shared a personal story about how my bank came together in the face of a challenge and succeeded by demonstrating our value.

When one of our oldest small-business customers said they would be moving to a larger financial institution, I promised to personally lead the transfer if we couldn’t prove we were their best possible financial partner. We had two weeks to prepare our pitch.

Turns out, the answer was right in front of my face. The logo for our bank is four identical designs that come together to form one image. I came to recognize that these four panes represent our constituent groups: customers, employees, shareholders and community.

Just as these four panes must be equal and balanced to form our logo, our commitment to these groups defines what it means to be a community bank. We had to demonstrate our ability to meet the financial needs of this customer, the expertise and vision of employees and leadership, our recognition as a leading corporate citizen, and the reasonable return we provide our shareholders.

In the process, we articulated our formula for successful community banking and began to publicly hold ourselves accountable to each of our constituent groups—on our website, in our marketing material, even on the walls of our branches. And during our meeting with the longtime customer who had one foot out the door, we showed that our shared vision could best be realized through our mutually satisfying relationship.

We held on to that customer, and they are still our customer to this day. But if they had walked away, it would not have changed who we are. We are an independent community bank. We balance the needs of our customers, employees, shareholders and community at large.

As community bankers and members of ICBA, we all instinctively and intrinsically understand the value of a community bank relationship. For nearly a century, ICBA has fought to protect our franchise value and advance the community bank business model, to create and promote an environment where community banks can flourish.

This is the business we have chosen. And as we continue to fight to preserve the community banking model, to keep our reputations clean and to exert our influence in Washington, I like our chances.

**My Top Three**

I got to thinking about my all-time favorite bands while in Music City.

1. Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band

2. Dire Straits

3. Cowboy Junkies