Independent Banker

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Flourish by RRR

[pull quote] “When our customers’ needs take center stage, we identify creative solutions to help them achieve their dreams.”

**When I think about how the lending market** has changed over the past decade, there is one consistent theme—community banks have been, and continue to be, the backbone of our nation’s financing. Despite regulatory hurdles and increased competition from nonbank providers, community banks thrive in both consumer and commercial lending. In fact, we provide about 60% of small business loans and 80% of agriculture loans, and those numbers continue to climb.

How, with all the hurdles placed in our paths, have we managed this feat? It’s simple—we focus on the customer and the relationship. When their needs take center stage, we identify creative solutions to help them achieve their dreams.

In my days as a community banker, I ran across many opportunities to be inspired in loan offerings. For example, we had a customer who built “earthships,” homes that were totally off the energy grid and used recycled materials like tires and beer cans in their construction. That’s certainly a different business model, but we financed the design and construction of these homes anyway. Only a community bank would take on a project like this, but I was proud that we were able to support an innovative client that also had the interests of the environment in mind.

This kind of ingenuity prevails in community banking, and this month’s issue features banks with an inventive mindset. Take the Bank of Glen Ullin in North Dakota. Its loan portfolio is 95% agricultural, fueled by two loan officers who are also farmers. That deep understanding of the customer led the bank to help its clients create marketing plans that support their business development and growth. Then there’s First Bank in Hamilton, N.J., which is growing its lending business through both strategic acquisitions and targeted product offerings. The bank offers real estate financing to current customers who want to acquire investment property out of state.

These examples capture the diversity and resilience of thinking that fuels community banking, as well as a glimmer of emerging opportunities. There’s so much more that awaits us, and I urge you to look at this issue as an invitation for innovation. Explore how you could apply these concepts within your own institution.

That spirit of invention and intention allows me to see so many possibilities for our future. Community banks will continue to flourish in lending precisely because of who they are at their core: bold leaders that constantly evolve to meet their customers’ needs in new and creative ways.

**Where I’ll Be This Month**   
I’ll be visiting the Montana Independent Bankers for their annual convention

**Connect with Rebeca @romerorainey**