

Partnership Bank has a familiar look

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Management team draws from experience at former Ozaukee Bank

In a financial climate where mega-banks continue to gobble up smaller competition, a new bank has opened in Cedarburg that bucks that market trend.

Partnership Bank opened late last year, the first new financial institution started by Partnership Community Bancshares.

The holding company was founded in 2007 by Dean Fitting, former president and CEO of Ozaukee Bank, after that local banking group was acquired by Harris Bank. Since then, that parent company was itself acquired and is now known as BMO Harris Bank.

Fitting — who is the new bank's board chairman — helped found Ozaukee Bank in 1975, and his familiarity with its key personnel is reflected in the make up of the new banking venture.



Vince Cameranesi, the former Ozaukee Bank vice president, is president and chief relationship officer of Partnership Bank.

He is joined by Patti Nettesheim, the former senior vice president of mortgage lending, who leads the new bank's mortgage loan department.

Fifteen other employees also have Ozaukee Bank connections, including Jodi Conrad, retail banking manager; Carol Klimke, loan operations manager; and Jeanne Mueller, who is in charge of marketing.

"We didn't do any advertising for the positions at the bank. Everyone was hand-picked for their job," Cameranesi said.

The familiar faces in the lobby and at the teller's windows are proving to be the most successful

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tools in attracting business.

“We are a new bank but people feel comfortable here because they are doing business with people they are familiar with,” Cameranesi said.

“The community approach to banking is something that has been missing here for the last five or six years.”

Although only open a couple of months, the bank has already sponsored a library program and a local concert. More involvement opportunities are being pursued.

“We believe in investing time and talent in the community, not just treasure,” Cameranesi said.

Familiarity has proven to be a strong suit for the bank, a message that came through even before it opened.

Cameranesi said after a management team photograph was posted in the front window of the bank announcing that it would be opening soon, and he casually overheard a couple who stopped to study the display.

“The man said, ‘I’m going to take my banking there.’ On the first day we opened, he came in and opened an account,” Cameranesi said.

Cameranesi, a veteran in the banking field, said the key to success is simply being able to listen to people.

“We have all the bells and whistles of any other modern bank, but the difference comes down to the old Ozaukee Bank tag line — We make a difference. That is something I really believe in,” he said.

“This is a business, and we can’t always say ‘yes’ when someone comes to us for a loan, but we will always be willing to do what we can to work with a customer. We do what we can to help people.”

Cameranesi said the community reception of the new bank has been surprisingly strong during the first few months of business, with customers coming equally from mega-banks and smaller ventures.

Partnership Community Bancshares President David Braaten said comfort level is important, but equally vital is the fact that banking decisions are handled locally.

“Decisions on loans aren’t being sent to some corporate office. They are being made by people upstairs who know the community,” Braaten said.

“A lot of people claim to be community banks, but our appeal can be summed up in two words — in and the. We are in the community.”

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The bank is located at N58 W6194 Columbia Rd., the former Barth's at the Bridge restaurant.

The building is owned by Mal Hepburn, who helped cofound Ozaukee Bank.

"Mal has done a wonderful job of renovating the building," Cameranesi said.

"We have had a number of people stop in to see what we have done with the building. Everyone says they remember eating here, but a number have also said how they used to be a busboy or wait tables here when it was Barth's."

The building, which dates to the 1800s, has also become the corporate headquarters for the parent company. It had been located in Menomonee Falls.

The company owns Town and Country Bank in Watertown and First Bank in Tomah. The Cedarburg location is considered a branch of First Bank.

Image Information: THE MANAGEMENT TEAM at Partnership Bank includes (from left) President Vince Cameranesi, Retail Banking Manager Jodi Conrad and Partnership Community Bancshares President and Chief Operating Officer David Braaten.

Photo by Mark Jaeger