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Service delivery, community investment, local ownership define Omaha's Core Bank

by Richard D. Brown

At Omaha-based Core Bank, there's a strong emphasis being placed on customized service delivery, part of the growth strategy of the community bank that finished the second quarter of this year with \$525 million in assets.

"We want to grow 10 percent in asset size every year," said President and CEO John C. Sorrell.

Sorrell, a Tecumseh, Nebr., native and nearly 30-year veteran of the local banking community, said Core Bank — created in 2013 out of a merger of Omaha State Bank and Centennial Bank — is positioned for strong growth, as reflected in its roster of 135 employees, a 14 percent increase in the past two years.

Core Bank

Phone: 402-333-9100

Address: 12100 West Center Road, Omaha 68144

Services: personal, business, real estate, SBA and trust

Founded: 2013 with merger of Omaha State Bank and Centennial Bank

Employees: 135

One-year goal: Move to new headquarters building and adapt new technology.

Industry outlook: Federal regulations on the financial industry are being evaluated by lawmakers with greater recognition that a "one size doesn't fit all" approach isn't necessarily the most prudent.

Website: <https://corebank.com>

He said that the bank's community-focused approach has factored into its growth.

"Our name speaks to strength and substance, strong character and sound banking principles, and heart and soul," Sorrell said.

Sorrell said the team culture being built will be enhanced later this year with the opening of Core Bank's new 60,000-square-foot, four-story headquarters building on six acres at 180th and Burke St. The facility, housing 75 corporate office employees that are now divided between the bank's Bel Air and 132nd and West Maple locations, will come with several amenities. Included is a fresh-food cafeteria and outdoor patio, gym and nearby walking trail, and a community



President and CEO John C. Sorrell ... New headquarters to enhance Core Bank's strong growth.

room on the main level accommodating 220 people.

The second floor will have a collaboration room with teleconferencing equipment.

Sorrell, a 1988 graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, said Core Bank could hit \$1 billion in assets in the next five years, and having facilities to enable employees to more effectively communicate with one another and do what's necessary to serve customers has been an important goal since the merger of the two institutions.

Omaha State Bank, founded in 1972 at the Bel Air location, had assets of about \$200 million five years ago. Centennial Bank brought about \$50 million to the table.

Omaha-based SecretPenguin, an experiential branding agency, was retained by Core Bank to help the institution create, refine and manage its brand to differentiate itself from a crowded field of other financial institutions.

The family of retired business executive and philanthropist Walter Scott are majority owners of Core Bank.

According to Sorrell, among the differentiators identified is Core Bank's local ownership and long record of community

investment. By hiring talented bankers, loan approval decisions are made locally and more expeditiously.

Many of the members of Core Bank's team have previously worked for other financial institutions.

The 54-year-old Sorrell said the hires that have been made display a passion for shepherding customers through the process in order to complete a transaction. By tapping into their level of experience and communication skills, he said small business loans, for example, can more often receive the green light.

"An important part of the process is our listening to them and what they want to do," he said.

For example, a company seeking \$250,000 for additional equipment might be asked to go through a fact-finding type of budgeting process, enabling the capital purchase to possibly be structured differently. One scenario could be a purchase structured over five years.

Structured credit work has enabled a lawn company and a cement company to meet their equipment investment needs.

Tax increment financing and SBA financing remain viable options.

Sorrell said by studying a transporta-

tion customer's business and paying close attention to acute details, Core Bank's chief credit officer found a SBA product that was a great fit.

After opening a branch in Overland Park, Kan., a couple of years ago and its relationship with the SBA, Core Bank has had fast growth in that market.

"It's going like gangbusters," Sorrell said. "We just hired their third person."

Core Bank's SBA loan relationship is being expanded in Omaha, too.

Sorrell said while Core Bank does not rule out acquisitions in building a larger Midwest-based institution, an important prerequisite is the culture must mesh with what is being built in Omaha.

While Core Bank invests in much of the latest technology for use by customers in making payments and a myriad of other online transactions, Sorrell said the institution continues to steer clear of expanding into services such as leasing and insurance.

Core Bank does have a trust company.

"Our bread and butter comes from the commercial banking unit, and that's where we're expecting significant growth," Sorrell said.

He expects a high six-figure investment will be in harnessing the latest technology over the next 12 months.

Sorrell said banking remains a heavily regulated industry nationally. However, he's hopeful the "one size doesn't fit all" mentality in Washington, D.C., will continue to gain momentum.

Core Bank maintains a strong community presence. Via Core Bank Cares, each employee is annually given \$100 and asked which nonprofit they would like the money donated to. The institution participates in other cause-specific philanthropic venues as well.

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