

Money in the bank

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Going into a bank has certain expectations.

There should be people taking out and putting in money. Others might be negotiating a loan for their dream home or their first car. Tellers help customers while the bank president welcomes curious patrons into his office.

That's right. The door is wide open. Well maybe not at all banks, but that's the way things are run at the United American Bank in San Mateo. CEO and bank President John Schrup started the bank with the same principals he learned back home in Dubuque, Iowa. For Schrup, the family tradition doesn't just include a long line of banking, but providing a friendly, inviting and warm atmosphere within the bank.

Just a few months shy of its third anniversary, United American Bank is the only locally owned and operated full-service commercial bank in San Mateo.

It was never Schrup's plan to open the patron-friendly bank on the Peninsula.

The tradition began in the late 1800s when Schrup's great grandfather Nicholas J. Schrup, became president of German Savings Bank. The tradition was passed on throughout the years. During WWI, the bank's name was changed to the American Trust and Savings Bank in an effort to boost business. In 1932, the Great Depression spread throughout the United States and banks in Iowa were anything but immune. Of the seven banks in town at the time, only two made it through. One was American Trust.

Schrup's plan when he got to college at Santa Clara University was to gain some banking experience at large banks before heading home to work with the family. But he never made it home.

He began work as a teller when he was 15 years old and the 52-year-old hasn't held many jobs outside a bank walls since. When he graduated in 1975, Schrup began working his way up the ladder at different banks in Northern California.

Once the San Mateo resident was married with the family of four in tow, however, driving around as a regional manager didn't leave much time for him to be a dad. At his wife, Michelle's, suggestion, Schrup looked into bringing the bank values and company his family runs to the Bay Area. As a result, United American Bank opened its doors in June 2003.

"We serve people in the community who like a higher level of service. It's not like a bigger bank. ... We're able to handle people's needs here rather than refer them on to someone else. We make our decisions right here," he said.

The goal is to provide what he describes as a "Nordstrom's level of service." For those who don't shop regularly, the model of service is client-oriented with emphasis on creating an inviting environment.

"We're here for people who still value having a relationship with their bank," said Schrup.

The plan seems to be working thus far. Next month, the first bank will open its second location in Sunnyvale. There are plans to have four branches in the upcoming years. All with the same open door policy.

Schrup wants people entering the bank to know it's different. He has an open door policy, and his door literally is kept wide open. He wants to meet anyone and everyone who has a question or just wants to shake hands with the president.

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