
TWO TRADITIONS IN CLARINDA, IOWA: GLENN MILLER TUNES AND FAMILY BANKING

Community service, a banking legacy, and all that jazz

Bank CEO-turned-Winnebago driver Larry Marik blows a solo passage on his sax during the recent Glen Miller Festival in Clarinda, Iowa. While he and his wife Mary Ann attended the festival, they also surveyed the local banking scene.

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New to this blog? After he hung up his president hat, bank chairman Larry and Mary Ann decided to sell their house, buy a Winnebago, and see more of America. They will now also be blogging about what they see about banking for ABA Banking Journal. Read more about the Mariks in ["Chairman of the Open Road"](#);

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The strains of ["In the Mood"](#) and ["Tuxedo Junction"](#) enticed us to Clarinda, Iowa, birthplace of Glenn Miller and site of the annual Glen Miller Festival.

Larry has officially retired from the Columbus Jazz Orchestra (CJO), but when the orchestra was invited to play, they called Larry back for this very special gig. CJO was in great company. The Glenn Miller Orchestra and the Toronto All-Stars also performed.

Welcome to Clarinda

Clarinda, a town of nearly 6,000, lies in southeast Iowa. The economy, according to a local banker, is healthy. Two major manufacturers, the family-owned Lisle Corp., which produces specialty parts such as the car mechanic's ["Jeepers Creeper"](#); and two Japanese-owned firms, NSK Corp. and NSK-AKS, which produce ball bearings, are based in Clarinda. Of course, in Iowa, agriculture is always the mainstay. Current land values are strong.

Clarinda, Iowa, birthplace of bandleader Miller, has hosted the festival named for him for 36 years. [Click here](#) to learn more about the festival.

Clarinda is home not only to the Glenn Miller Museum but to a historic bank as well. On Monday morning, we stopped in to visit Ken, Scott, and Cindy Whitmore at the Page County State Bank.

The bank's sign proudly announced "founded in 1866." We had had no intention of visiting another Iowa bank, but when we saw that sign, we thought, "there might be a story here."

The bank has been in the Whitmore family for four generations. We met in the boardroom, which was lined with the pictures of past bank presidents … some obviously contemporaries of Grant.

Page County State's sign points out not once, but twice, that it has served Clarinda and environs for nearly 145 years.

The \$84.1 million-assets bank had been recently remodeled, and it was apparent that PCSB wanted their customers to

have a "lobby experience." The Internet Café featured a single-serve coffee maker with lots of choices, a giant gumball machine for the kids, and a change counter--way more fun than handing your change jar to a cashier.

Keeping things in the family

Whitmores have owned PCSB for 50 years. Indeed, the bank's logo states, "Our family serving yours." Prior to the Whitmores, who were invited to come, the bank was privately owned by a number of community shareholders. Ken said the family "stumbled into becoming a bank holding company." His grandfather, father, and uncles had farmland as well as the bank.

"On his dad's deathbed, my dad requested that they incorporate," Ken recounts. "The farmland was put in the bank holding company. The bank still holds a 4Cii."

(When holding company laws changed, the Whitmore interests were grandfathered into a 4Cii, which is a little-known law which allows the mixture of banking and non-banking interests. Today, the \$211.8 million-assets Whitmore Company, Inc., owns three Iowa banking companies.)

We discussed regulation briefly with the Whitmores.

"We don't know how they're going to regulate us," Ken said, with Dodd-Frank and more on his mind.

He added, "We're (all community banks) being punched around because we're surviving. The government is regulating the turnpike that we built. That's just not right."

Whitmores have owned Page County State Bank for more than 50 years. Ken Whitmore, chairman of the board, and his daughter, Cindy, and his son, Scott, plan for that community involvement to go on for years to come. To read more about family owned banks, see the July ABA Banking Journal online.

Page County State ownership--the next generation

This is a true family bank where the kids start at the bottom and learn every aspect of the bank operation.

Ken's first job at the bank was stripping wax around a toilet in the basement.

When his daughter, Cindy, started, her first job was shredding.

Scott and Cindy, the newest generation in this banking family, are bringing this generation's skills to the bank. Scott's interests lie in technology, and he and Cindy are currently revamping the bank's website.

They are aware of Clarinda's demographics and the current low demand for technology, but they see the upgrade as a way to attract future, younger consumers. They know what the younger generation expects, and they know how this generation operates in a technologically dense environment.

Scott, who appears to have a very dry sense of humor, took out his phone while we were talking to check his email, and said, "I'm still listening." He commented with a smile, "Multi-tasking is second nature to us."

We discussed trends in banking, and Ken said, "Any new banking product becomes commoditized. It's difficult to keep a leg up because everyone else copies new ideas."

"The important thing is how you're perceived," he continued. "How you present yourself."

"At those big banks, you're looked at as just another buck," said Cindy, whose interest lies in the marketing area.

Family serving family

PCSB is dedicated to its community. It is committed to "Teach Children to Save," an ABA national initiative. Bank employees, including Cindy, present lessons in the schools. The bank also makes presentations on personal finance at Clarinda Academy, an institution that provides residential treatment and shelter care to at-risk and delinquent male and female youth.

In its first quarter newsletter, PCSB proudly announced that in 2010 PCSB "re-invested \$75,000 in the

communities we share, making them better places for everyone to live, work, and play.”

Later on, we golfed locally and noted that hole #3 was particularly challenging. It turns out that Ken Whitmore designed the hole.

We enjoyed our visit with this family devoted to their community. Once again, strong banks make strong communities.

Having started in 1866, Page County State Bank’s roots go deep. The original building now is home to a local law firm, and the bank is headquartered elsewhere.

Keep your eyes open for Larry and Mary Ann Marik and their huge Winnebago Journey. If they come to your bank, you just might wind up as their next blog.