

# 111 REASONS WHY OKLAHOMANS LIKE CITIZENS BANK

Long history predates statehood, and excellent service is just doing good business

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After getting an invitation from banker Jill Castilla, the Banker on Wheels, Larry Marik, and scribe Mary Ann made a point of stopping in at Citizens Bank of Edmond, Okla. The couple found a bank that has weathered Dust Bowl, Depression, downturn, and management revamp while taking care of customers. They also found an inspiring story about customer service, personalized.

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New to this blog? After he hung up his president hat, bank chairman Larry Marik, and his wife, Mary Ann, decided to sell their house, buy a Winnebago, and see more of America. They are now blogging about what they see about banking for ABA Banking Journal. Read more about the Mariks in "Chairman of the Open Road," and "Saxophone In The Moonlight Of The Sonora."

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She's a little too petite to wear armor and sit astride a horse, but a rescuing knight is just what Jill Castilla is. In 2009, this fourth-generation banker definitely rode in to save the day.

Visiting a community bank in Edmond, Okla.

We were on our way back to Arizona after getting our "snow fix" in Nebraska for the Christmas holidays. We drove I-35 south through Oklahoma watching oil wells pumping and reminiscing about the old Big Eight days when we drove I-35 to attend the annual football shoot-out between Oklahoma and Nebraska on Thanksgiving weekend.

Now, on to banking , , .

We stopped at \$278.2 million-assets Citizens Bank of Edmond, invited by EVP and Chief Credit Officer Jill Castilla, Jill is the fourth-generation in this bank,

"My step-father is part of the blood line. I get to hijack part of the legacy," she told us, His grandfather, Hiney (H.W.) Granzow, came in the early 1900s, bringing his carpenter with him to recreate the exact same house in which he had lived in Iowa, To put things in perspective, Citizens Bank was founded in 1901; Oklahoma became a state in 1907.

Hiney's son, Gordon, was an "extremely humble and approachable man," Jill said. She recalls that he used to sit in the lobby and greet customers, and there are many stories of the "character loans" he made. Gordon's son, Randy, is Jill's step-father.

Edmond lies in the middle of what, in the 1880s, were the "Unassigned Lands," a section of Oklahoma that had not been allotted to Native American tribes, Edmond got its start on April 22, 1889, the same date as the famed "land rush," and in 1901, Citizens Bank was founded, It was the first building in the downtown and the only bank that survived the Dust Bowl and the Depression.

Jill describes Edmond as the "Natural Epicenter of Commerce," since most of Oklahoma's major cities lie in the corridor of what were those Unassigned Lands, the corridor through which I-35 passes today.

### Life in Edmond

Education is a significant part of Edmond's history. Hiney Granzow was very instrumental in the building of Oklahoma's first university, the University of Central Oklahoma. Consequently, "our legacy is one of highly educated people," says Jill, Citizens Bank has one of the most highly educated work forces, and that mirrors the demographics of Edmond.

Commemorative plaque notes that bank's headquarters, above, is on National Register of Historic Places.

Edmond is a bedroom community of 80,000 people. There are large oil companies in Oklahoma City, only 14 miles to the south, but there is also local commerce, Jill described the dynamic of Edmond: "People coming together to enjoy higher-end golf and restaurants, It's almost a destination community." In 2011, it was voted #1 on CNBC's "10 Perfect Suburbs" list, and it was listed as one of the "Top 100 Places to Live in 2007" by Relocate America.

As we walked down the street, we noted that there were no empty storefronts.

### Doing business as "Edmond's bank"

Even though Edmond is a highly competitive market with approximately 60 other financial institutions having a presence, Citizens Bank has just celebrated its 111th year. There is only one other locally owned bank, and it has been open for only five years.

"Our focus is this community," said Jill. "We know that we are Edmond's bank, We have no plans to branch elsewhere. We know Edmond. That dictates our products and services and the kind of people we hire." Citizens employs 80 people and has five locations, all in Edmond.

After helping ourselves to warm chocolate chip cookies--always on hand in the lobby--we sat with C.H. Wyatt, Jr., president and CEO; Cynthia Hendershot, senior vice-president and chief retail officer; and Jill. We discussed bank culture and philosophy.

"You have to have people around you who will challenge you," said Jill. This bank had the vision to create an institution that is partly owned by the employees.

"One-third of our shares belong to employees, one-third belongs to family, and one-third belongs to outside ownership, mainly members of the community," "C.H." told us. "When you walk down the street, you can meet people whose families have owned stock for generations. "

The Mariks met with (left to right) Jill Castilla, Cynthia Hendershot, and C.H. Wyatt, Jr. We recognized Castilla immediately from her Twitter photo. She tweets about banking and more on Twitter @JillCastilla. Indeed, she tweeted

about the Mariks' visit, which also wound up being covered by the local paper.

This has helped the bank during the past crisis. "In 2009, being able to be transparent with our shareholders meant that they could be our advocates," says C.H. "We had to be transparent with our customers. We had to be trusted, we had to be truthful, Management made sure staff was informed and they knew how to respond to customers' questions."

When we asked about the compliance, C. H said, "It's remarkable what this bank has been able to do as a team, We view the regulators as partners. We are a customer of the Federal Reserve by choice. In order to be effective, we have to go that extra mile." The bank does use a third-party provider, but most of compliance is done within. Management feels strongly about owning the compliance responsibility, and maintain two former examiners on staff.

"We reach out to the regulators to get their input," said C.H.

Find a way into banking, eventually

Jill has had an interesting career path. During her first four years of college, her focus was chemical engineering,

"I never really thought that business was worthwhile," she said, She enlisted in the Army, and after marrying, found herself in Hawaii, where she finished school with a finance major. A woman for whom she worked helped her to see how a career in business can truly impact the lives of others, and that changed her direction.

She has worked for the Federal Reserve and for a bank in Grand Rapids, Minn., and has a master's in economics,. In 2009, her step-father, Randy, called and said "I need your help to keep this an independent bank."

"My job," said Jill, "was to protect his interests and the generations of ownership." The bank was experiencing serious internal control issues, In July, 2009, there was a written agreement with the regulators. Only three years later, it was lifted.

"Jill arrived here six months before me," C.H. remembers. "The first two weeks I was here, my mission was to sit down with staff and find their talents. Jill was saving this bank in a very turbulent time. "

The former president's office had been on the second floor, away from customer traffic, Cynthia said. The two newcomers immediately struck a different tone.

"When these two came, they wanted offices near the customers," Cynthia recalls. As a matter of fact, one happy customer was heard to say, "It's about time that I can walk in and see the president."

Sort of sounds like Gordon's philosophy, doesn't it?

Lady with a "servant heart"

Jill spent quite a bit of time talking about a former employee, and we think she deserves some space. Her name was Geneva Brooks. When the bank she was working for was acquired, Geneva came to work at Citizens. She brought millions in deposits with her, but just as important, she had a "servant heart."

She was going to take a small vacation before she came to Citizens, but when her old customers were lined up at her new bank, she passed on the vacation and came in to work. She also printed out interest checks and then called her customers telling them, "Honey, your checks are ready," often delivering them personally.

Geneva passed away unexpectedly in 2010 at age 82, but that "servant heart" is still beats at Citizens. In recognition of her attitudes, Citizens now has the Geneva Brooks Award.

Although Geneva is no longer with them, Citizens wants to continue to deliver that same kind of service, which Jill calls "nostalgic service." C.H. laughed. He said, "We tease our customers about our concierge service. We're more than willing to come to them."

To celebrate its 111th birthday, employees performed "111 days of service" measured in hours. Citizens also gave 111 turkeys for the community Thanksgiving dinner, and every year, Jill's family helps serve the dinner, C.H. added, "There are many non-profits in Edmond, Citizens has had board members on most of them for years ... so it's bodies too, not just money."

#### Online "community" outreach

"It's such an age of social media," said Cynthia, "We want to appeal to younger customers. We have such a wide age range, We need to keep up to date with technology but we still need to serve our older customers."

Citizens is definitely in the 21st century technologically, The bank makes use of social media, and it has its own bank-dedicated app. Jill said, "The other day I was walking through the lobby, and Caleb was showing an 82-year-old man how to do his internet banking."

C.H. added, "Social media allows flexibility and accessibility, but we train our employees that when at all possible, deal with customers face to face or on the phone."

Before our morning at Citizens, we stopped for breakfast at Around the Corner Restaurant. As we sometimes do, we asked our server where the best bank in Edmond was.

She immediately said, "Citizens, They've been here longer than I have."

"In 2009, there were individuals wondering if this bank was going to sell," said Jill. "I told them, 'Over my dead body. I'm going to be here when I'm 90. We're here to stay.'"

**Strong banks build strong communities.**

Keep your eyes peeled, should you see a huge black, tan, and steel Winnebago Journey roll through town or pass you on the highway. The Mariks will be displaying this poster as they search for stories for their blog.