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 Issue: December 28, 2020



SouthWest Bank Credits Growth in West Texas to Their Employees



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"We employ people that strive to be the best in many aspects of their lives – whether it's serving our customers or our communities. That translates to every interaction you have with our bank. You are going to receive financial products and services in a manner that no one else can deliver. Everything that makes us who we are - the products and services, the people that work here, the way we treat our customers and fellow employees - it is all dear to our heart."

Dewey Bryant

CEOCFO: Mr. Bryant, would you tell us about SouthWest Bank?

Mr. Bryant: SouthWest Bank opened its doors January of 1999. We have grown from a \$8 million bank to where we are today, which is a little below \$520 million. We have branches in Odessa, Midland, and Lubbock. We have approximately 107 employees.

CEOCFO: What is the geographic area; what type of communities are there and how are they faring under COVID?

Mr. Bryant: The oil and gas industry is the primary industry in Midland and Odessa. The greater Permian Basin accounts for nearly 40 percent of all oil production in the United States and nearly 15 percent of its natural gas production. As an oil and gas town, we have a double whammy. Our markets have not only been impacted by the pandemic itself, but the oil and gas market has also been hit hard with huge price decreases of our products; therefore, it is extremely slow and unemployment in this area is over 11%. Lubbock includes Texas Tech University, so they have fared somewhat better with the education and medical industries driving their markets.

CEOCFO: What is your range of products and services?

Mr. Bryant: We are primarily a commercial bank. We are a preferred SBA lender and are consistently ranked one of the top lenders in the West Texas region.

CEOCFO: Are there services you would like to add?

Mr. Bryant: We are always looking for ways to improve our customers' experience. With all of the technology available to customers today, we want to make banking easier and more accessible. We recently rolled out updates to our internet banking system and updates to our mobile app to allow our customers to do more from a device if they choose to.

CEOCFO: *How do you help your customers in a way that might be different, better and more friendly? What sets SouthWest Bank apart?*

Mr. Bryant: One of the biggest things that sets us apart is our SouthWest Bank family and the tremendous amount of experience that we have. The lenders within all of our markets have well over ten years of experience at the minimum. We have been through the ups and downs, especially in the Permian Basin where everything is tied to the oil and gas economy. Therefore, I think that our experience, the way we approach our customers with open arms and a personal touch, and that community feel sets us apart.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us a concrete example about what someone might experience when they are working with SouthWest Bank?*

Mr. Bryant: One example that comes to mind is with our recent response to the pandemic and the rollout of the Paycheck Protection Program to support the businesses in our community. We knew we would have many businesses that would rely on this assistance to stay afloat and keep their employees paid, so we mobilized our employees to best position ourselves to help our customers during this unprecedented time. We reallocated resources, increased staffing in critical departments, and worked together to serve these customers as efficiently as possible. When you work with SouthWest Bank, you can be sure that decisions will be made locally, in an efficient manner, and with the customer's best interest in mind.

CEOCFO: *Do you have concerns about a possible new administration and focus away from oil and gas?*

Mr. Bryant: I thoroughly believe that oil and gas are going to be products that are necessary in our work and daily lives that you cannot change overnight. You cannot change our major energy resources overnight. It is a process and a long-term process. I feel very comfortable with the fact that we have the right resources here in the Permian Basin and we have 40% of the production here; so therefore, the desire to not be dependent on foreign energy really gives us some security.

CEOCFO: *SouthWest Bank recently moved to a new domain name; why the change?*

Mr. Bryant: The main benefit is that the domain identifies we are a bank. Only legitimate banks are allowed to have a .bank domain. We feel like it is more secure and more sensible. Before the change, it was southwbank.com. SouthWest.Bank is much more in line with our bank's name.

CEOCFO: *How have you achieved growth and how do you continue to reach out to new customers?*

Mr. Bryant: We continue to grow and be successful because of our employees. We have a great group of employees that all believe in the same purpose – take care of our customers and deliver the products and services in the manner the customer prefers. In the communities we serve, word-of-mouth continues to be a great way for us to grow. As their neighbors share their success stories, and they see us and get to

know us out in the community, they decide they might want to be a part of this institution too.

CEOCFO: *It is clear that your team and your employees are important for you. SouthWest Bank was recognized for four years as one of the Best Companies to Work For in Texas. Was there a deliberate strategy to create this atmosphere?*

Mr. Bryant: Each and every employee at SouthWest Bank has helped shape our bank into a great place to work. To support their individual goals, we encourage our employees to attend various training programs, participate in local events, and to be active in the communities we serve. We also recognize their efforts as part of our core values and leadership program. When we invest in personal development, our employees feel good. When we encourage our employees to recognize each other for a job well done, they feel good. That's how it's transpired, and we are proud we've been recognized within the industry for creating an environment where people enjoy coming to work every day.

CEOCFO: *Are you surprised that more banks do not understand that?*

Mr. Bryant: This type of atmosphere works for us. We feel very adamant that we take time to recognize our coworkers. That little pat on the back or that thank-you-for-what-you-did, goes a long way and that is important in our SouthWest Bank family. We try to make sure we perpetuate this atmosphere as we grow, and that we continue to bring on people that value these things as well. Am I surprised? To each their own.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about giving back to the community and why it is important for SouthWest? How do you decide where to focus your efforts?*

Mr. Bryant: SouthWest Bank employees are very active in our communities and we are often seen outside of the bank serving on boards or volunteering our time. I think others are able to see how that plays an important role in who we are as a bank. It is the stewardship part that's important, not only in the form of monetary gifts, but also in the form of time and talents that we provide to our community.

We have to be involved. You need to be involved to know what is happening. We also really encourage our young people to get involved in the markets we serve.

CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to SouthWest Bank; why choose SouthWest Bank?*

Mr. Bryant: We employ people that strive to be the best in many aspects of their lives – whether it's serving our customers or our communities. That translates to every interaction you have with our bank. You are going to receive financial products and services in a manner that no one else can deliver. Everything that makes us who we are - the products and services, the people that work here, the way we treat our customers and fellow employees - it is all dear to our heart.