

# Community banks continue to grab people, sites

BY MARK CALVEY

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Bay Area community bankers are hiring to lay the groundwork for expansion even as bankers nationwide struggle through subprime woes.

Community bankers say they're hiring to boost divisions and move into new territories. In many cases, they are plucking experienced people from bigger banks while the plucking's good.

"In the banking industry, there's a shortage of talent," said John Conover, president and CEO at Borel Private Bank & Trust. As the large banks moved to more of a retail model for financial services, they cut back on costly training programs that seeded the entire industry with experienced bankers, said Conover, who spent much of his career as a senior executive at Bank of America in San Francisco.

Community bankers are in expansion mode because they avoided much of the subprime turmoil afflicting large financial institutions and focused on the basics of banking: taking in low-cost deposits and lending them to local businesses and residents at a profit.

There's some concern that community banks could feel the pain if commercial real estate falls in value. But even then, community bankers say they know their local markets and many of their commercial real estate loans are to businesses occupying their own properties.

Whetting community bankers' appetites for expanding payrolls and operations is Wells Fargo's purchase last October of Greater Bay Bancorp, which is now unleashing veteran bankers and other employees into the labor market.

San Rafael-based Tamalpais Bank, for instance, hired Jamie Williams as executive vice president and director of commercial and retail banking. The Marin County native was the founder, president and CEO of Greater Bay Bank Marin.

"We've been looking to expand the depth of the senior



"Growth prospects" brought Williams from Greater Bay.

management team. Growth and expansion in the market starts with leadership," said Mark Garwood, chairman and president of Tamalpais Bank. Garwood approached Williams about coming on board shortly after the Wells-Greater Bay deal was announced last May. He made the move this year.

"Growth prospects were a big part of my decision to join Tamalpais Bank," Williams said. "There were quite a few opportunities that I was entertaining."

Tamalpais Bank, part of Epic Bancorp, has big plans on the drawing board. The bank is looking to expand beyond its Marin County base to other parts of the Bay Area, with the East Bay, Peninsula and San Francisco all under consideration. Tamalpais, with a loan production office in Santa Rosa, could also expand further north.

And San Francisco-based Presidio Bank hired four lenders from Greater Bay in San Rafael as its first move into Marin County, where it plans to open an office this year.

Bank of Marin turned to Westamerica Bank to find the branch manager for its second Mill Valley branch, opening this spring. Heidi Drucker, a 21-year industry veteran, was a branch sales manager at Westamerica before accepting the new position.

On the Peninsula, Borel Private Bank & Trust hired John Delaney this month from Wells Fargo to manage Borel's new Burlingame branch. Delaney was market development manager at Wells.

Borel is beefing up its trust division as it takes advantage of Greater Bay employees leaving Wells. Trust services tend to generate a steady flow of fee income, which helps balance the cyclical nature of the lending business.

"Many of the people at Greater Bay had worked at the big banks and prefer to work where they can make a difference," Conover said.

Borel hired Debra Reed, with 30 years of experience, and Anna Paiva, both formerly with Greater Bay Trust Co., as vice presidents of trust services in San Mateo.

"Being able to work with your trust officer one-on-one is truly a service our clients appreciate," Conover said.

Borel also hired Claudia Ferguson from Greater Bay's Mid-Peninsula Bank to be a private banker in San Mateo.

Wells Fargo, for its parts, has retained most employees that came over with Greater Bay, in some cases providing better career opportunities with the larger organization.

"Wells Fargo continues to be a growth company, with hundreds of openings throughout California," said Wells spokesman Chris Hammond. "We're a talent magnet with an all-star team."

But Conover sees more opportunities ahead for Borel and his Bay Area counterparts.

"As Wells Fargo closes (Greater Bay) branches," he said, "a good number of people will be looking for jobs."

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