

Through the years, Magnolia State Bank grows

BAY SPRINGS — “For many years, there seemed to be the general attitude, especially in banking, that ‘bigger is better.’ Now, the ‘big boys’ want to be like us.”

These are the sentiments of Thomas Brown, president, CEO and chairman of the board of the Bay-Springs-based Magnolia State Bank (MSB). The bank’s growth since it was chartered in 1975 and its expansion into other towns underline what Brown says.

From its headquarters bank in Bay Springs — where it was chartered as the Jasper County Bank — MSB first expanded into eastern Jasper County, opening a Heidelberg branch in 1977. A Smith County branch, in Taylorsville, was next. And earlier this year, MSB opened a branch in the former Union Planters Bank on 16th Avenue in Laurel.

MSB now has assets of \$154 million, total loans of \$72 million and employs 46 people.

Enlarging on his remark about a small town bank and the “big boys,” Brown said that “I believe that there are several factors for MSB’s continued vitality in its competition with larger banks.”

Brown cited five factors:

- “The most important is continuity — consistency in the bank’s mission, consistency in its ownership, management and presence in the community and consistency in its respect and concern for its customers and employees. Our mission has always been to treat each and every customer as equal and as fairly as any other, without regard to race, gender or economic status.

- Unlike many larger banks, our ownership has remained unchanged for many years, a fact that is reassuring to our depositors and prospective customers. Even when our bank changed its name in 2000 to better position itself for future growth, there was no change in ownership or management.

- We also have an uncommonly low rate of employee turnover. Many of our employees have been with us for 20-plus years. Our customers know that they will continue to see the same smiling faces, enjoy the same friendly service of that favorite employee whenever they come into the bank.

- Our customers enjoy the lack of red tape whenever they have a need for a loan. They can speak with their favorite loan officer this morning and, with satisfactory credit, usually have their money within a couple of hours. We provide what every loan applicant is seeking — a fast and fair response to their request.

- We have spared no expense in maintaining state of the art technology. Customers can get anything at our bank as any of the big banks.

I realize the most important thing that we do is not the technology but the relationship our employees have with our customers. Those big city banks can’t put feelings and emotions in their brochures. I think our customers can see it in our faces.”

Active in community

Bauer Financial Reports has awarded the Magnolia State Bank five stars, its highest rating, which indicates that MSB is one of the safest banks in the United States.

Brown said that he thinks that MSB is the prototype community bank and cited the bank’s donation of a branch building to the City of Bay Springs to be used as a library, purchasing the old post office building and developing it into the Courtyard for Community Affairs and establishing the Magnolia State Hope Fund to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina in Jasper, Jones and Smith counties.

“In the aftermath of the worst (natural) disaster in United States history, we must do our part to help people,” Brown said when the fund was established September.

“The contributor gets to decide where the contribution goes within that county — whether it is a church, organization or another point of interest, we will put their contribution where they want it to be,” he said.

Two early donors to the fund were cited by Brown. One is a North Carolina waitress who, when told by a customer of the plight of Mississippi’s hurricane victims, reached into her pocket, pulled out \$30 and told the man she wanted to donate it to the victims.

The other is the First National Bank of South Florida, located in Homestead, an area

severely damaged by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

“The First National Bank of South Florida understands what it takes to recover from a hurricane like Katrina,” Brown said. “Many of their employees lost their homes. We are thankful for their contribution.”

New branch in Laurel

Brown spoke enthusiastically about the new Laurel branch, saying that business has been particularly good.

Danny Glenn, a Jones County banking veteran with 35 years of experience, is president of the Laurel branch and serves on the board of directors.

Another board member is former Judge Charles W. Pickering Sr., who is also chairman of the Jones County Advisory Board.

At the helm

Brown has been MSB’s president for 26 years and was named chairman of the board of directors in 1999. He has also served as president of the Abney Insurance Agency in Bay Springs and the Jones County Finance Company.

He’s past chairman of the Jasper County Economic Development District and is a past member of the Bay Springs Zoning Commission.

This past spring, Gov. Haley Barbour appointed Brown to the State Board of Banking Review.

“I am very proud of this appointment,” Barbour said. “Thomas brings a wealth of banking experience to the table, and I know he will do an excellent job in serving the citizens of Mississippi.”



Donations to the Magnolia State Hope Fund can be made at any bank office or mailed to Magnolia State Hope Fund, c/o Magnolia State Bank, P.O. Box 508, Bay Springs, MS 39422.

The bank can also be called at (601) 764-2265. Contributions to the fund are tax exempt.