



Using the MEDIA to Deliver Financial Education

by Ronald Wilson, President, Desert Community Bank

Desert Community Bank (DCB) is a \$350 million independent commercial bank located in the vast desert region of Southern California. Specifically, DCB serves the upper desert region between Los Angeles and Las Vegas in San Bernardino county (the largest county based on landmass in the United States). San Bernardino county is comprised of six main communities with populations that range from 4,000 to 60,000 for a total population a little in excess of 300,000. The population is 32 percent low-income, 59 percent middle-income and nine percent upper-income.

DCB's niche is twofold. We are the bank of first choice for real estate transactions, as evidenced by our lead in the number of deeds of trust recorded in San Bernardino county for ten out of twelve months each year. Before we began providing financial education, our mortgage loan activity was next to none—about four per month. Last month we granted 39 loans and this

month we will grant over 45, which is about the norm. We are also a leading SBA lender in the area, providing financing to a number of businesses ranging from expanding manufacturers to start-up professionals, including doctors and lawyers.

The bank has become the financial information source in the region through significant newspaper and television involvement. We are often asked why and how we selected these newspaper and television outlets to become a financial education partner in the community. The answer is surprisingly simple, they selected us.

In 1993, I was approached by the business editor of the town newspaper, the *Daily Press*, to write a guest column regarding proper use of credit cards. (The *Daily Press* serves the high desert communities outside of the city of San Bernardino, which is about 45 miles away over a mountain pass.) The editor liked the result and asked if I would write a weekly column. This

column has since appeared every Monday on the front page of the business section. The newspaper columns are not limited to banking. Recently, I wrote an eleven-part series titled *Money Matters* to explain FDIC Insurance. During the height of Y2K, I also wrote several articles to help squash fears and provide practical advice for financial security. More recent topics have covered tax information, Social Security benefits, scam awareness and long-term care.

Television was initiated in a similar fashion to newspaper. The general manager of the television station asked if I would join the news team one night a week to give a two-minute report. The reports I did for approximately two years have become a regular part of the Monday night news on a taped basis for the past seven years. I provide one-minute reports for cable television that air 24 times a weekend and a two-minute financial information segment that airs weekly on a local cable

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RONALD WILSON is a native of the state of Kentucky. He benefited from public school education through high school in the Phoenix, Arizona vicinity. Mr. Wilson started his banking career at Thunderbird Bank in Phoenix while attending college. In 1975, he received a bachelor of arts degree with a double major in business and psychology from Grand Canyon College; a private college sponsored by the Southern Baptist convention.

Mr. Wilson joined Desert Community Bank in 1989 and presently serves as the bank's chairman of the board, president and CEO. In 2002, Mr. Wilson was assigned the additional responsibility of serving as chairman/CEO of DCB Financial Insurance Services and DCB Investment Services.

He is actively involved in a number of community organizations and presently serves as the board treasurer for Apple Valley Care Center Foundation, Lewis Center for Educational Research, Sunset Hills Children's Fund and Rotary Club of Victorville.

Mr. Wilson lives in Apple Valley with his lovely wife, Deanna and five beautiful children ranging in age from nine to twenty.

channel and is also broadcast to cable, transmitter/antenna and direct satellite. I also host a 30-minute television program, called *Money Matters*, that airs on two different cable channels several times a week. The topics I cover range as dramatically as the format and guests. A recent sample includes child custody support, explanation of mortgage programs, jobs for the disabled and the purpose of a CPA in business.

Newspaper and television also offer unique ways to enhance the bank's CRA role. We maintain a detailed list of the articles and television programs that we provide to the examiners who determine CRA eligibility based on the content of the information shared. A good example would be the discussion of first time home buyer and lease-to-own financing programs.

The guests for the television program are often excellent CRA resources and include county or city government officials who manage departments and programs that meet the needs of those in the low- to moderate-income status. The information they provide is a valuable resource for people who are often not familiar with the programs and services available to them. The combination of our daily efforts and our unique and tremendous media exposure culminated in the bank achieving an Outstanding CRA rating on our last examination.

Countless people have benefited from our program. One of the most poignant anecdotes is of an elderly gentleman who called to express his thanks for our production of *Money Matters*. He said he watched it all the time and could tell we were straightforward, honest people. This was someone who did not have substantial means and considered himself less than sociable. Social security was his only source of income and he had been

disabled for several years. He wanted to have a bank account, but thought it was out of his reach on such a limited income. He certainly didn't expect the bank CEO to return his calls. Not only did I return his call, but I told him as a senior he could open an account with a zero balance, have the monthly service charge waived and purchase money orders, cashiers checks and travelers checks at no charge. He literally cried tears of joy for being "accepted as a human being." This is one of many such stories.

With regards to increased patronage, ten years ago, Desert Community Bank had \$85 million in assets. Today, without acquiring the assets of any other institution, we have grown to over \$340 million. In surveying people who open new accounts, no less than 20 percent and frequently as much as 40 percent open accounts because of their awareness of DCB through the media. This represents 40 to 80 accounts per month. Ten years ago we had less than 5,000 accounts; today we have over 32,000 accounts.

Probably the most significant advantage of the media involvement is that it has enhanced the bank's image, reputation and CRA commitment without an expenditure of dollars. While it does take time to write the columns and to produce the television shows, this time is the extent of our resource commitment. Both the newspaper and television management view financial education as a beneficial public service that is popular with their subscribers and viewers; therefore the bank has not been asked to pay to participate. In fact, it is not even considered advertising by the bank or the media outlets. Ironically, its positive impact on the bank's growth and recognition in the community is far greater than any advertising campaign. **CI**

edited by Karen Schwartz-Decker