

BUSINESS PROFILE

Bob Guididas banks on being the best, not the biggest

BY ALYSIA SHIVERS
Special to Florida Weekly

Boring is not a word that springs to mind upon mention of the banking industry these days. As Bob Guididas, president and CEO of the Bank of Naples, admits, business is anything but boring.

As interest rates fluctuate, loans become difficult to acquire and investment options are viewed with doubtful eyes, Mr. Guididas steps in to guide customers, and ultimately the bank itself, through difficult times.

Being there for its customers is top priority for the Bank of Naples, especially since new challenges and issues arise every day. While taxing and altogether tricky to navigate, it's in times like these that Mr. Guididas knows he chose the right career path. Early on, though, he wasn't as sure of himself.

As a new graduate of Cleveland State University with a bachelor's degree in accounting in hand and also a master's in business administration with a concentration in finance, he had "no earthly idea" what he wanted to do with his life. What he did know was that he needed a job.

The insurance industry seemed promising, so he accepted a position selling fidelity bonds. After three years of paperwork and very little interaction with people, he left for something more challenging: the management trainee program at Central National Bank. "At

25 I had a job that most people retire at. I gave up a company car when I left," he says with a chuckle about the job he's so happy he left behind.

From there, he was off and running, acquiring experience by spending time in nearly every position within a bank — all except teller, a position that, bewildering even to him, somehow passed him by. All the while, he was enjoying not only the steady paychecks but interacting with the public and, more importantly, helping people create improvements in their lives.

Central National opened doors to Huntington National and then Bank One.

But while Mr. Guididas was enjoying his career, he wasn't necessarily enjoying his surroundings. Ohio was downright cold most of the year, and his frequent vacations to Florida spoiled him with warmth and outdoor activities that eventually convinced him that the Sunshine State was where he wanted to be full time.

"I enjoyed boating, golfing and the beach, and you really can't do much of that up there during those long winters," he says.

His move to Florida came with a new position: area president of one of the state's largest banks, Southeast Bank. When it closed in 1991, Mr. Guididas moved on to Bank of Naples, which in 1999 was sold to a large out-of-state group. In 2000, when a group of local investors bought back the Bank



Bob Guididas

COURTESY PHOTO

Springs, Mr. Guididas has his sights set on not growing the business into the biggest bank in town, but rather into the best bank in town.

"It's really a people business, and that's my focus," he says. "I would never go back to a big bank. A small bank is more diverse. I can make a \$3 million loan one minute and bring cookies out from the kitchen the next."

Out of the office, though, his focus is on his wife and three children as well as various civic and charitable involvements, including the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, the Collier Building Industry Association, the Economic Development Council, the YMCA and the Collier County Affordable Housing Commission.

"This town has been very good to me. It's only right that I give back to it," he says. Another organization dear to his heart is the Naples Mid-Day Optimist Club, of which he is immediate past president.

Since running a bank takes much more time these days, Mr. Guididas has taken a step back from sitting on various boards and councils, yet he remains dedicated to their causes. His commitment today revolves around successfully guiding Bank of Naples through this challenging time.

When he does get a spare minute, he's likely to be found on the golf course or out on his boat, two of the many reasons he's so pleased to call Naples home. ■



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