

BUSINESS

Chino bank records big growth

By Michael Rappaport
Staff Writer

CHINO — As much as it is in almost any other business, the banking business is about numbers.

Profits, losses, good loans, bad loans.

But when you're not on the same section of the food chain with the big banks like Bank of America, when you're barely even part of the same chain, there's often more to it than just statistics.

That's why Chino Commercial Bank's first-quarter 2006 earnings, including a 49.4 percent increase in net income over last year, says more than just good profits.

"We're doing great," said Dann H. Bowman, president and chief executive officer. "We actually opened our new Ontario branch during the first quarter, so to overcome the increased expense of that and still do this well, that's pretty good."

Until this year, the bank had only one branch at 14435 Pipeline Ave. in Chino. That made the decision to expand into Ontario a big one for a bank with just \$91.5 million in total assets.

But with Ontario up and running, Bowman says Chino Commercial Bank is starting to think about additional locations.

"We're not in any hurry," he said. "We want to get our Ontario branch to a break-even or better position, but we are looking at some other areas that might work for us and considering what we could do."

What they'll definitely do is continue their focus on personalized service. In an industry where smaller banks are being gobbled up by larger ones, and even medium-sized banks have dozens of branches, service is the key.

"It's funny," Bowman said. "In a world that's getting more complex and modern all the time, this sort of service is very old-fashioned."

But in a good way.

Regional economist Jack Kyser said with a tremendous amount of small businesses in the area, small banks have a terrific opportunity.

According to the L.A. County Economic Development Corp, there are 99,952 businesses in San Bernardino County small enough to be classified as "non-employer" businesses.

"They love this sort of personalized banking," Kyser said. "They would totally get lost in the shuffle at a bigger bank."

That's Bowman's niche, and he knows it.

"It's all about service to us," he said. "We have businesses who might call us on a Thursday and need money the next day to make a payroll. Because we have a relationship with them, because we know them, we can accommodate them."

Chino Commercial Bank isn't about super-sizing, or online banking, or dot-com, Bowman says, although the bank does have a Web site.

"We're just trying to have steady, progressive growth," he said. "We're not in this for the short term. We're a long-term investment."

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