

Benton County NEWS

FOLEY, MINNESOTA

(USPS 050-620) | COUNTY SEAT | \$1 PER COPY

Tuesday, July 4, 2023

VOLUME 93, NUMBER 27

Minnesota Newspaper Association Member

WHERE FALCON NATIONAL BANK
got its wings

PHOTOS BY
JAKOB KOUNKEL
John Herges
stands in front
of the Falcon
National Bank
building May 16
on a bridge near
the bank in St.
Cloud. Herges is
the CEO of Falcon
National Bank,
which started in
Foley in July 2003.

Financial institution celebrates 20th anniversary

BY JAKOB KOUNKEL
STAFF WRITER

FOLEY – The story of Falcon National Bank is one of humble beginnings, and it started with a phone call between the bank’s CEO, John Herges, and board chair, Brian Bauerly.

Bauerly called Herges with a simple yet transformative opportunity: He wanted Herges to be his partner at a new financial firm in Foley.

“We opened our doors July 1, 2003,” Herges said. “I walked into the bank that day – it was a Monday morning, we had this huge building and probably about half a dozen employees and not one customer – and thought, ‘What did I get myself into?’”

Herges, then 52 years old, was already a successful financier at the top of his field as president of Stearns Bank in St. Cloud. His work history could be the subject of a Hollywood movie about work ethic – starting at the bottom and working his way to the top.

Herges was comfortable and secure. It would have been easy to sail into the sunset by continuing to lead Stearns Bank into the digital revolution. But Herges sought opportunity, not comfort. He sought potential, not complacency.

As Falcon National Bank celebrated its 20th anniversary, Herges looked back on how the bank went from a reliable, local financial institution with \$4.5 million in assets to a regional giant with nearly a billion dollars to its name over two decades. It was a journey defined by risk assessment – both personally and commercially.

“I had a great job and family,” Herges said. “To take a chance like that, I don’t think I really pondered it that much. But now I look back on it and say, ‘Wow, that was a bit of a risk.’ But it worked out.”

For a bank, risk assessment is key to success. In finance, workers are apt to taking calculated risks, whether personally or in the field. Herges is no different. Coupled with an entrepreneurial drive instilled in him by his father, Paul Herges, landing as a CEO was only a matter of time. Herges utilized his industrious spirit to get the job and turn the bank into what it is today.

“We don’t go off willy-nilly making decisions, but there’s risk in everything you do,” Herges said. “You need to not be afraid of taking some calculated risks from time to time.”

And while it may seem risk-taking is a feature of every success story, that does not make it any less stressful in the moment. If the bank makes a bad financial decision at a bad time based on a faulty risk assessment, it is not only the bank and its leaders that suffer but also its employees and their families. And with 150 employees, the impact of a poor decision could have poignant downstream effects.

That fact has been most apparent through acquisitions. Herges said it is not often a bank is looking to sell unless it does not believe it can continue operating successfully, so when Falcon National Bank acquired three banks and started working from six locations, bank leaders had to be sure operations would be airtight.

“That’s a huge responsibility for an owner and CEO of a company,” Herges said. “You’re not only working for yourself; you’re responsible for a lot of families that are counting on you and counting

on the bank to do well.”

A guiding principle for Herges is that if the bank is doing well, its employees will benefit, and if the employees are happy, all conditions are satisfied.

“It’s always on my mind with decisions we make,” Herges said. “That’s why I always make decisions that are in the best interest of the bank. If the bank is OK, all the people working for the bank will be OK.”

When it comes to community, Falcon National Bank offers support and resources in various ways. Herges said the Foley community has been supportive of the bank, especially in its early years. It is important to Herges that the bank gives back.

“One of the things we emphasize is being good corporate citizens,” Herges said. “We’re really big on giving back. ... We support and get behind big, important projects in the six communities we do business in.”

The Foley Fire Department, Foley Fun Days, CARE in Foley, Foley Public Schools and many more Foley-based organizations benefit from donations and support from Falcon National Bank, including being the sponsor for the stadium that holds DeRocher Field – Falcon Bank Stadium. The bank also supports businesses and programs like the ones it does in Foley in other communities it operates in.

Looking forward, Herges said the bank has big plans despite an economy in free fall.

“The future has never been brighter,” Herges said. “We’re in kind of an economic downturn right now. At any time, there’s two ways to approach this. One is to panic and get nervous and start cutting back. I take the opposite approach and look for opportunities.”

By the time the bank is cele-

brating its 30th anniversary, Herges said the goal is to have \$500 million more in assets than it does now, to a total of \$1.5 billion.

“What has allowed me to take the bank to the

successful levels it’s at is really due to the cooperative efforts of the employees, shareholders and advisory board members,” Herges said. “And last but not least, our loyal customers.”



PHOTO BY NATASHA BARBER

Brandon Voit unloads a bucket of candy in the Falcon National Bank float June 21 during the Foley Fun Days Grande Parade in Foley. Voit is the president of the Falcon National Bank Foley location.