

# The Business Journal

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## Notebook: Finance

### Bankers following Valley's red hot growth markets

It's hard to find a banker these days who isn't hopping on the expansion trail — even some of the smaller players such as **Meridian Bank** and **Copper Star Bank**, whose activities led off the Oct. 3 finance column.

The name Meridian may not sound familiar, but its roots date back 25 years to its start in Wickenburg. The bank, owned by the **Carl Pohl** family of Minnesota Twins fame, changed its name earlier this month from Community Bank of Arizona.

The bank has grown to eight locations and \$500 million in assets over the years, said Chairman and Chief Executive **Doug Hile**. "And plans are to grow it even larger yet."

Officials have the ambitious goal of doubling assets through new branches and acquisitions, but Hile said that should be achievable with a focused target market and the Valley's growth. The most recent purchase, Valley Bank of Arizona, was completed in July. Plans include the traditional offices in areas such as north Phoenix, Avondale and Glendale as well as new locations for the bank's private banking business, Meridian Capital.

"We've competed against Wells Fargo and other larger banks for years with a focus on closely held businesses," Hile said. Such owner-operated companies have a story to tell, which sometimes does not fit typical financing guidelines, but take personal attention to move forward, he said.

The CEO describes his approach as a "the Goldilocks strategy" — not for consumers, not for big companies, but just right for owner-operated businesses.

"The term 'Meridian' really captures the essence of what we do," Hile said. "Meridian means 'the utmost' or 'the highest degree,' and it reflects our mission to provide customers with the highest degree of service, professionalism, products and partnerships with our communities."

Meridian Bank is part of Marquette



**Doug Hile**

Phoenix and Gilbert.

#### Mesa Bank helps neighbors

Another community player on the expansion track is 5-year-old **Mesa Bank**, which opened its second full-service office last month near Falcon Field airport and Mesa Commerce Center.

The new office already is generating business, said President **Jim LeCheminant**. "Mesa Bank is financing two new warehouses next door in the Mesa Commerce Center as well as a new 13,000-square-foot wholesale doughnut production facility across the street.

Other staffers at the new office include **Steve Mitchell**, vice president and commercial loan officer; **Christine Villanueva**, operations supervisor; and **Amber Steele**, personal banker. Eventually the staff will number nine.

Mesa Bank is an affiliate of Capital Bankcorp Ltd., [www.capitolbankcorp.com](http://www.capitolbankcorp.com).

#### M&I keeps on growing

East side, west side, that's where new **M&I Bank** offices are likely to pop up.

"We're very much committed to growing in this marketplace," said **Dennis Jones**, chairman and president for the Arizona region. That means four new locations this year and eight or nine in 2004, including Mesa and the West Valley.

The bank started in 1965 as Thunderbird Bank with a focus on small-business and middle-market lending, but in the last 15 years has moved into retail banking as well

Financial Cos., a company with a diversified portfolio of banks and specialty financial services companies. Arizona branches are located in Wickenburg, Peoria, Fountain Hills, Glendale, Avondale, Scottsdale,

for a more balanced approach, said Jones.

M&I is the state's sixth largest bank with assets of about \$2 billion and 37 branches by year end, but Jones said it still maintains a focus on service. M&I is part of Milwaukee-based Marshall & Ilsley Corp.

For more: [www.mibank.com](http://www.mibank.com).

#### Barbara, we love ya

We've been watching banker **Barbara Ralston** for a long time as her 30-year career helped boost the Valley banking scene and result in honors from the prestigious Athena Award to Woman of the Year.



**Barbara Ralston**

This month *U.S. Banker* magazine caught on to our local dynamo. She is among this year's "25 Women to Watch."

Ralston is president of the **Arizona Bankers Association** and heads up **Camelback Community Bank**.

#### For coffee lovers only

This one's for all the business types who frequent **Starbucks**.

Starbucks Coffee Co., **Bank One** and **Visa USA** have launched a charge card that rewards customers with Starbucks gifts based on their credit card use. Initial purchases also will result in donations to the Starbucks Foundation to help fund Jumpstart, a program to train college students to serve as mentors for preschool children from low-income communities.

That's a good cause, but I've never developed a taste for latte and the like. It's still Diet Pepsi for me.

For more: [www.starbucksduetto.com](http://www.starbucksduetto.com).

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