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**Client Focused:
Paul Noris and
Bank of Central Florida**

A photograph of Paul Noris, President and CEO of Bank of Central Florida, standing in front of a brick building. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a light blue shirt, and a patterned tie. The building behind him has a vertical sign that says "Bank".

Client Focused: Paul Noris and Bank of Central Florida

Bank of Central Florida President and CEO Paul Noris in front of the bank's downtown Lakeland location.

Bank of Central Florida President and CEO Paul Noris loves Polk County. After all, it's where his children were raised and his bank was born. Now five years old, Bank of Central Florida has grown to \$325 million in assets and three locations — one in downtown Lakeland, one in South Lakeland and one in Bartow.

"I love the sense of community in Lakeland. It's like being in a small town but with all of the culture and amenities of a large urban area," said Noris. "Our local theater and parks are second to none, but you still bump into people you know at the grocery store and at community events like high school football games."

A Florida native who was born and raised in Melbourne, Noris attended college at the University of Florida and began his banking career immediately after graduation when he joined SunTrust and entered its training program. He stayed in Gainesville until his wife graduated and then moved with her to Orlando and then Lakeland, where he continued to work for SunTrust under mid-Florida CEO Charles McPherson, who became a friend and mentor of Noris.

"Charles has been a huge influence in my life. He taught me about banking and being a good corporate citizen," said Noris. "He's still a good friend and mentor."

Noris and his wife fell in love with the Lakeland community and knew it was just the sort of place they wanted to raise their family.

In 2006, after 17 years, Noris left SunTrust. A year later in March 2007, he opened Bank of Central Florida after having worked to form a board made up of 12 local members and raising \$23.5 million in capital over a short, 10-week period.

"When the very respected George Harris of Citrus and Chemical Bank suddenly passed away from a heart attack, there was an unexpected opportunity for someone to start a community bank in this market," said Noris. "Because of the efforts of our board, we were able to open at a time when people were looking for a solid bank to fill a void that had been left in the community."

All of Bank of Central Florida's board members have deep roots in the Central Florida area, a vast knowledge of the local business climate and long-standing relationships in the market. That knowledge and expertise has proven to be beneficial as they have built the bank.

Finding a Niche

"The secret of our success has unquestionably been the team we have assembled," said Noris. "Because

"I love the sense of community in Lakeland. It's like being in a small town but with all of the culture and amenities of a large urban area."

we have so many experienced bankers, our customers deal directly with people who understand banking."

Bank of Central Florida now has 53 employees, most of whom have worked in the Polk County market for many years.

And, according to Noris, Bank of Central Florida employees — himself included — are knowledgeable and always accessible. Phone calls are answered and messages are returned promptly. Furthermore, customers are able to speak directly with people who can make decisions.

"When my phone rings, people get called back — most times within the hour. In our market, customers expect to be able to call the bank president directly and get answers," said Noris. "Because we have local decision-makers, we can quickly respond to our customers' needs. Our bankers fully understand the local marketplace and can uniquely respond to individual needs."

When the bank first opened, Noris would see customers out somewhere, like the golf course or a restaurant, and they would literally hand him deposits. They would make comments like, "I was going to run to the bank today, but let me just go ahead and give this to you."

"I was the bank president then just like I am now and that expectation of approachability hasn't changed just because the bank has grown," said Noris.

Bank of Central Florida has concentrated on commercial banking and typically does business with professionals and small businesses.

"We have focused on executing a commercial and private banking model and are pleased that our market has responded positively," said Noris. "That's our niche."

The bank serves customers with a high-tech platform, utilizing technology to interact with customers using the most up-to-date methods. An early adopter of mobile banking, the bank coined the phrase, "intelligent banking," which Noris notes is the summation of qualified personnel utilizing state-of-the-art technology in client service.

"Technology is core to what we do. Because of it we are able to offer innovative banking solutions. Our approach is focused on providing a superior level of service and developing solutions to meet the needs of our customers," said Noris. "Even though we have all of these great systems in place, I know that the basis for our bank's success is our employees. They are committed to exceeding customers' expectations."

A Good Position

Noris and his team have been closely watching developments in Polk County that have the potential to change the area's demographics. Recent announcements about Florida Polytechnic University — the state's newest university — have been exciting for the area and residents are already excited about what it will bring.

"We believe the university will change the demographics of the county. Students, as well as

firms that want to recruit them, professors and staff, research arms of the university and much more," said Noris who was recently at the campus groundbreaking. "The fact that the university will be focusing on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) disciplines means that it will attract a certain type of student and we expect it will also attract a higher-level of research, as well. Lakeland could potentially become the high-tech corridor between Tampa and Orlando."

Bank of Central Florida is well positioned geographically, near the middle of the state and right between the growing cities of Orlando and Tampa.

"We believe that our location will continue to create success over time. It's location, location, location," said Noris. "Ours is the only county within 100 miles of more than 7.5 million people. It positions us very well, right in the center of an area that's growing with the right types of jobs — high-tech, high-paying jobs of the future."

As the area grows, Noris expects that the bank will too. His view is that they can manage in a 75- to 100-mile radius, building a franchise from Hillsborough through Kissimmee.

"We want to be a dominant player," said Noris. "In Lakeland, Bank of Central Florida is the fourth largest in the market in terms of deposit size and we've been able to build that in just five years. Our model has been validated."

At this point, Noris is focusing on organic growth, although there is some expectation that opportunities for consolidation may present themselves. The bank is currently well capitalized with a clean loan portfolio so they are poised to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves in the near future.

"We are going to be patient and see what happens," said Noris. "We're in a good position right now. We are ready if there is an opportunity, but don't feel we need to do anything dramatic to have continued success. Either way, we will remain focused on small businesses and professional clients."

Taking Care of Business

Bank employees are also focused on what is happening in the community. They are involved with a number of local boards, United Way and other civic organizations. And each December, the bank gives each employee \$100 to send to the charity of their choice. Last year, more than 30 local and other charities received donations from Bank of Central Florida employees totaling \$5,000.

"We expect a lot from our employees," said Noris. "And, believe me, they deliver. They serve customers with passion. They work to build relationships and they definitely take care of business." 



Paul Noris