

Twin Cities bank focuses on internal training

Anchor Bancorp, a \$1 billion holding company based in Wayzata, Minn., has launched a new program to train its 400 employees. The company, which has five subsidiary banks ranging from \$50 million in assets to \$324 million, hired Susan Basil King last fall to launch Anchor Academy, which will offer in-class and internet-based education.

"Anchor Academy is about providing more opportunity for our employees and increased service for our customers," commented Carl Jones, CEO. "For example, our tellers will be learning communications skills, customer needs assessment techniques and team effectiveness - skills that will make them more successful and confident in their positions, which benefits customers as well."

"This is a program to develop people," said Basil King. "It is a training approach that is integrated with our strategic plan."

Basil King noted that service is the hallmark of a community bank. As Anchor Bank grows, she said it needs to work to develop employee skills that will help them to continue to offer superior service. "The organization is very employee-focused," she said. "It takes training quite seriously."

Basil King said about half of the organization's employees will participate in training through Anchor Academy this year. Tellers will be involved in a three-day training program, and managers will be involved in a six-day curriculum. Courses take place during regular work hours at company expense.

Some training is being delivered on-line through a partnership the bank holding company has developed with LearnShare LLC, a training firm created through a consortium of trainers from 31 Fortune 500 companies.

Basil King is teaching some of the in-class sessions herself, with help from two Minneapolis-based corporate training firms: the Ridge Group, and Klassen Performance Group. Basil King said most of the training is designed to "make you a very good organizational citizen," and will address topics such as active listening, offsetting personal styles for effective team work, and maximizing communications.

Basil King, who joined Anchor Bancorp last September, worked previously for Manchester Companies, a consulting firm. She also has worked at Ernst & Young and St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. She has a doctorate of philosophy degree and is considered a veteran of organizational planning and effectiveness.

"We are committed to creating an environment in which learning is an integral part of the corporate culture and therefore easily accessible to all employees," she said. "These courses will reinforce skills that are fundamental to all successful organizations."

The five subsidiary banks are: Anchor Bank St. Paul; Anchor Bank Farmington, N.A.; Anchor Bank Heritage, N.A., North St. Paul; Anchor Bank West St. Paul, N.A.; and Anchor Bank National Association, Wayzata.

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