

# Signature Bank continues steady growth

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At Signature Bank, business is done the old fashioned way – almost.

Meetings aren't conducted over a three-martini lunch or five-hour round of golf. But Signature bankers are given their "freedom," said Joseph J. DePaolo, Signature Bank's founder and CEO.

The distinction means DePaolo's employees aren't required to file call logs or sell a certain number of credit cards every week, like they would at many retail banks. Instead, bankers are given the time and freedom to maintain client relationships and seek new ones.

"If a banker has 30 years of experience, I don't care who they're calling," DePaolo said. "I count relationships, not widgets."

The concept has helped DePaolo win several recent awards, including Community Banker of the Year from trade paper American Banker and the title of second best bank in America by Forbes.

Signature, based in New York City, caters to privately owned businesses and high-net-worth individuals in the New York metropolitan area. It's a largely underserved group and one DePaolo says he takes pride in serving.

Since DePaolo, a New Rochelle resident, founded the bank in 2001, deposits have dramatically grown, making it one of the most profitable banks in the United States. As of Dec. 31, 2013, the bank had \$17.1 billion in deposits and a return on average equity of 12.7 percent over



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The bank operates 27 private offices – none of which can be seen from the street level – including two locations in New Rochelle and White Plains. Over the last two years, the bank's Westchester presence has grown significantly. The number of employees has doubled and its deposit balance has increased more than 50 percent to \$1.3 billion.

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love to do more business here," DePaolo said. With a number of quality banking institutions now absorbed or otherwise gone, there's an opportunity to hire bankers and continue developing their books, he said. There's also a high density of deposits and privately owned businesses in the area, making the growth opportunities virtually limitless, he said.

"What we like to say is 'we have a lot of runaway,'" DePaolo said. "We see the growth in Westchester as an opportunity."

The strategy behind the bank's growth lies largely within its talent recruitment strategy. Essentially the bank poaches bankers with more than 20 years of experience and a plump list of clients to join its ranks. It's a healthy growth strategy, DePaolo said, and both bankers and clients are happier. It also means Signature doesn't need to deal with any messy acquisitions.

For bankers who have grown tired of internal bureaucracy, it's an easy sell, he said.

"They move over because they're no longer satisfied with the opportunities they have to serve their clients," DePaolo said. "They don't necessarily have time to continue developing the relationships they have."

There is no 1-800 number for clients to call. Rather, clients can expect their banker to be present at major deal closings and events.

They might even be offered a ride.