

# Community Credit Union celebrates 75 years

By Allison Lindgren

Think back for a moment about what you remember about American history back in 1942. The United States had just been attacked at Pearl Harbor in December and the country was at war. A look into the *New Rockford Transcript* archives shows that Eddy County had a high percentage of men participating in the war effort and news about the war dominated the paper. There were weekly articles about ships, planes, guns, ammunition, bread baking for the “doughboys,” and reminders to write to the soldiers overseas.

Full page ads urged people to buy war bonds, reminded them about the county war bond sale quotas and there were regular updates on the county quota progress. It was a time of rationing, scrap metal drives for the war effort, raising victory gardens, and even changing labor laws because of the women working in town.

It was a time when the country elevators were full from the previous harvest with little hope of getting box cars to move the grain. Farmers were being encouraged to plan ahead and build on-farm storage for the upcoming year’s harvest. It was a time when articles were written about the families who were leaving their hometown to make a living somewhere else. It was also a time when there were many farm auction ads.

This was the climate that preceded the organization of the local credit union when twelve people met to organize the Eddy County Federal Credit Union in 1942. It was originally organized to serve the farmers that were members of the Eddy County Farmers’ Union and patrons of the Farmers Union Oil Company in New Rockford and Sheyenne, ND.

According to an article written by Marvel Ebenhahn in the Eddy County Centennial book, “A Century of Sowers...A Harvest of Heritage,” their first board of directors were listed as H.R. Aslaksson, Horton Starke, Hugh O’Connor, Emil J. Christ, and Martin Valer.

At their first annual meeting, the local credit union had 33 members and showed an operational loss of \$32.57. Despite discussions about the advisability of continuing operations, the 19 members in attendance voted to continue and they pledged to deposit six or seven hundred dollars into a savings account. Marvel Ebenhahn was elected secretary-treasurer in 1952 at a time when the credit union had 250 members and \$18,000 in assets.

In the beginning, they operated from office space they rented from the Farmers Union Oil Company, but by 1961 the assets had grown to \$250,000 and credit union officials began discussing their own building. They started their first building project in 1965, in what seemed to be a turning point for the credit union.

“We were always very conservative,” commented Ebenhahn. “Even in building. This building was built in three stages. When you walk in the front door of the credit union, the area going up the stairs and to the right was built first, then the lobby and counter area were added in the second building phase and more office space was added in the third building phase.”

In 1972, the charter was changed from a Federal Charter to a State Charter, the name was changed to Community Credit Union and they could accept anyone in the New Rockford and Sheyenne trade areas as members. A merger between Community Credit Union and Fessenden Credit Union was approved in 1974 and a branch office later opened in Fessenden. Community Credit Union also purchased the credit union in Carrington and operate a branch in Carrington.



The second building project, the current lobby and counter area, were added in 1976 with the final building project being completed in the 1980s.

Jeff Olson, president and CEO of the Credit Union Association of the Dakotas said the Community Credit Union has grown from having \$18,000 in assets to having \$165 million dollars in assets and is the seventh largest credit union in North Dakota by asset size, and has over 5,000 members.

Marvel Ebenhahn recently stepped down as Community Credit Union’s president after 65 years with the company. Barb Messner is now Community Credit Union’s second president in its 75 year history. She has worked at the credit union for 35 years. Ebenhahn and Messner both agree that the philosophy of the credit union needs to remain the same today as it was the day that it started.

“Our purpose is to help our members,” Ebenhahn stated. The passion she felt for the work she did was obvious as tears welled in her eyes when she related a story about a family they were able to help with a loan. “That’s what makes a good day, and I have had many more good days than bad days in this profession.”

Because of his story and the help they were able to provide years ago, Community Credit Union now also serves his children and grandchildren as members of the credit union.

“We can’t do this alone. There are so many people’s stories who could be told. We have had great employees, not to mention the board of directors and committee members who serve,” Messner was quick to point out. “So, we want to make this celebration a member appreciation day where members can come in and enjoy lunch and we can talk and share those stories.”

Speaking of stories, it’s likely a mystery to some members why the credit union serves treats once a month. According to Messner, it’s a company tradition to serve treats on Social Security Day, even though there really isn’t a Social Security Day anymore. Apparently, for those of us not in the banking industry, all Social Security checks used to come in the mail on the third day of every month. So, as many can imagine, it was a busy day at the Credit Union as members brought their checks in, made deposits and withdrew cash.

Because there were so many people coming in, they started serving coffee and treats and it became known as Social Security Day. Now, with the advent of technology and checks being deposited directly into their checking account, the need to come to the credit union is no longer there but the custom of treats on the third of the month still remains.

This quotation taken from Community Credit Union’s website is a good example of their philosophy. George Washington Carver, the famous scientist and inventor best known for the many uses he discovered for the peanut, once said “It is service that measures success”. His life was focused on unselfish thinking, trying to help others.

Phil Love, President/CEO of Pactola (Commercial & Agricultural Lending) stated the following in his CUAD(Credit Union Association of the Dakotas) memo:

“Those are great words to live by. We work in an industry that is not driven by profits, but by the people we help. It is not focused on the accumulation of cash, but the advancement of our communities. We are not striving after massive fame, but by memorable friends and families. Every day, in our credit union and in our lives, we have the ability to make a difference with our service. The challenge is to rise above our selfish limitations and to serve others. That is what will make us great.”