

## Longtime area resident Weinberg is elected to the Fidelity Bank board

By Ken Datzman

MERRITT ISLAND — Independent banks, often seen as financial first responders for local small businesses, pride themselves on their community roots.

Their staffs, their leadership teams, and their boards of directors typically reflect this hometown makeup. And longstanding Fidelity Bank of Florida is a shining example of a deep-rooted community institution.

Thomas “Tom” Weinberg, the newest elected member of the board of directors of the Merritt Island-based bank, has family roots in Brevard “that go back to the 1870s.”

Weinberg’s great-grandfather was one of 39 people who incorporated the city of Cocoa. History shows that his grandfather, Morris Weinberg, was a city council member for eight years and served as mayor for two of those years, in the 1920s. Tom Weinberg was born on Merritt Island and attended public schools in the county.

Businessman Janson Davis, chairman of the board of directors of Fidelity Bank of Florida and founder of Brevard Accounting Group/CPA, recently announced Weinberg’s election to the board.

In addition to a number of civic responsibilities, Weinberg, a fourth-generation Brevard Countian, currently serves as chairman of the Canaveral Port Authority and is the elected District 5 Port Commissioner.

J. Lamar Roberts, Fidelity Bank’s upbeat president and chief executive officer, said Weinberg’s board affiliation will play a role in helping the institution grow in Brevard County.

“As the banking industry continues to recover from the conditions of the past six years, we realize the need to have ‘main-street banking’ as our primary focus,” said Roberts.

“Toward this end, we will increase our presence throughout Brevard County and the addition of Tom Weinberg to our board is a big step in that direction.”

Weinberg is a career public servant. He received his associate of arts degree in 1969 from Brevard Community College (now Eastern Florida State College) and is a 1971 graduate of Florida State University.

Working his way up the hierarchy, he held senior management positions in state and local government throughout his career. The positions included serving as deputy Orange County administrator for seven years, until 2006. Some 2,000 staff members reported to him.

Then he joined the staff of U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez. Weinberg held the posts of state director, deputy chief of staff, and chief of staff



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Merritt Island-based Fidelity Bank of Florida will mark its 25th year of business in 2015, making it the oldest community bank headquartered in Brevard County. In 2011, the institution recruited industry veteran J. Lamar Roberts, left, to be its president and CEO. Thomas Weinberg, right, chairman of the Canaveral Port Authority, was recently elected to the bank’s board of directors. Businessman Janson Davis, founder of Brevard Accounting Group/CPA, chairs the Fidelity Bank board.

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## Fidelity Bank of Florida

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of the senator's administration. He ran the senator's seven offices in Florida and one in Washington, D.C.

In 2011, Weinberg was elected to the District 5 Seat of the Canaveral Port Authority, and held the position of secretary/treasurer before being elected chairman in March 2013.

"I was encouraged to run for the Canaveral Port Authority seat and was fortunate enough to win 82 of 84 precincts," said the personable Weinberg, who is settling in as chairman of the Canaveral Port Authority.

"It's a great honor because the Port is a very vibrant economic engine in this county. Certainly, my interest in community banking is long grounded in my interest in civic and public service. Community banking is really important to building a community."

"When I met with Fidelity Bank President and CEO Lamar Roberts, and heard his philosophy, I knew I wanted to be involved with the bank," said Weinberg. "Lamar has a real passion for community banking and I am certain I can add to the strength of the bank's team."

Across the nation, community banks fund nearly 60 percent of all small-business loans — less than \$1 million — according to the Independent Community Bankers of America.

April is "Community Banking Month" and the Independent Community Bankers of America is encouraging consumers and small-business owners to bank locally with a community bank.

Representing more than 24,000 locations nationwide and employing nearly 300,000 people, Independent Community Bankers of America members hold more than \$1 trillion in assets, \$1 trillion in deposits, and nearly \$750 billion in loans to consumers, small businesses, and the agricultural community.

By driving local economies and creating local jobs, community banks — which are small businesses themselves — are an integral part of the nation's financial system.

There are more than 7,000 community banks across the nation.

Organized and opened in 1990, Fidelity Bank is the oldest of three community banks headquartered in Brevard County.

In 2011, to refocus the institution and transition it into a more traditional community bank, the board of directors recruited Roberts, an industry veteran, to be its president and CEO.

He is one of the most highly regarded bankers in the state, having turned around a number of community banks putting them on the path to growth again, while building others into high performers.

Roberts, a native of Georgia, has been the president of six Florida banks — including First National Bank of Pasco in Dade City, First National Bank & Trust of Fort Walton Beach, and Florida National Bank of Brevard County — over a long career.

Locally, Fidelity Bank reached "high-performance status" at the end of the third quarter of 2013, when its return on equity, which measures a corporation's profitability, was 22.4 percent — the seventh highest in the state, according to government data.

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The results have been noteworthy. Roberts and the Fidelity Bank team are reshaping the institution as it seeks opportunities in the market. "There were so many positives here when I came on board, we just needed to focus and strengthen our community-banking culture," he said.

Roberts has a keen historical perspective of banking over the last half-century, having guided financial institutions through up-and-down economic cycles and gyrating interest-rate environments while seeing the industry consolidate.

His first banking job was as a part-time teller for \$1 an hour while attending college in Georgia. At the age of 20 Roberts became a junior lender and was promoted every year thereafter until he was named president of a Florida bank at age 29.

Earlier, at age 27 he had been elected mayor and city judge of a Florida municipality.

Roberts enjoys telling the story of flying his private plane over cattle ranges to take pictures of herds so he could estimate the head count. The cattle were being used as collateral for agriculture loans.

He also served as president of the Florida Bankers Association and held leadership positions with the American Bankers Association and the Independent Community Bankers of America.

The son of a Baptist preacher, Roberts says he has three simple guidelines for building a successful bank.

His first rule is to make the bank a "great place to work. Create an environment where people enjoy what they do and want to do a good job. We have a 'Fun Committee' that was formed to enhance the enjoyment of working for this organization and to recognize outstanding performance."

Quarterly, his bank presents a "World-Class Service" award to an employee who has been nominated by their peers and approved by management.

Rule No. 2 is to make the institution a "great place to bank" — have the products that people desire and deliver them with world-class service.

"If you accomplish Rule No. 1 and Rule No. 2, then Rule No. 3 — have an institution that shareholders want to own — takes care of itself," said Roberts.

The Fidelity Bank team and board members are honing such an institution.

Weinberg joins other board members who include Janson Davis, one of the organizers of Fidelity Bank; Carolyn Storey, local investor; Russell Barnes, retired president, Pan American Services; Dr. Jeffrey Stalnaker, vice president of medical affairs, Community Hospital Section, Health First; and the newly elected Ken Page, who retired from the U.S. Treasury's Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, where his last position was assistant deputy comptroller.

Page, a graduate of Illinois State University and the

Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin, began his career with the OCC in 1974. He held a number of management positions in Illinois, Washington, D.C., Georgia, and Florida over the course of a 36-year career.

"I've known Ken for many years," said Roberts. "He is now a highly sought after banking consultant and a trusted advisor. His expertise, coupled with the efforts of our exceptional staff, will keep us focused on compliance."

Complying with regulation is a much larger component of bank operations today than years past.

A successful bank in the coming decade will be one for whom regulatory compliance is "business as usual" and not a daily "fire drill," said Roberts.

Fidelity Bank has taken a number of initiatives to distinguish itself in the market. The most notable being lending, said Kelly Guldi, vice president of commercial lending.

"We're lending money in the community. We are aggressively seeking small-business loans, particularly for the purchase of owner-occupied real estate," said Guldi.

The bank is also making residential mortgage loans. "We are seeing many banks exiting this business entirely because of regulatory concerns," said Joy Winslow, vice president of Fidelity Bank's Residential Mortgage Department.

"Helping families achieve their dream of homeownership is the foundation on which our industry was built and we are continuing to provide service in this essential area of banking."

Another team member, Sue Eastling-Chastain, vice president of business development and a Brevard County banker for more than 30 years, said she enjoys attracting new customers to Fidelity Bank and helping existing clients with their financial challenges.

"We have raised the level of service at Fidelity Bank," she said. "A 10-point 'World-Class Service' pledge signed by each employee is displayed in our lobby."

Among the notable points are, "We will know you by name and use it to address you; if we don't know it, we will learn it," said Eastling-Chastain, who is involved in many community organizations including Habitat for Humanity of Brevard County, where she is a board of directors member.

Roberts says "to be successful, community banks must take their place in the cities and towns they serve. Longstanding and successful community banks are staffed with people who are active in the community."

"The additions of Messrs. Weinberg, Page and Roberts to the team has positioned Fidelity Bank for the future," said Janson Davis, board chairman.

"We believe we have our finger on the pulse of Brevard County, and we know our team can help Brevard County grow and prosper."