



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## A Century of Relationship

Linda Ashley, President and CEO  
Poca Valley Bankshares

Linda Ashley, president and CEO of Poca Valley Bankshares, is a fourth-generation Poca Valley Bank customer and shareholder.

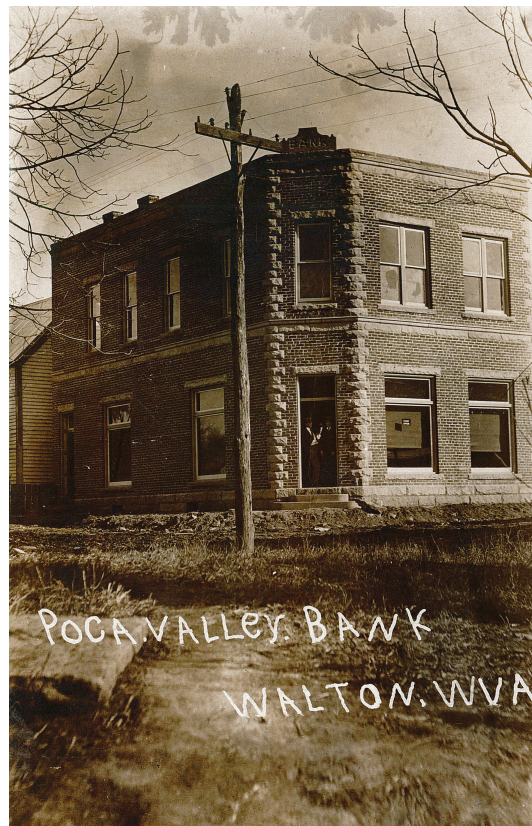
Early in her career, Ms. Ashley worked in the oil and gas industry for Energy Corporation of America (ECA), located in Charleston, West Virginia, and headquartered in Denver, Colorado. She managed various credit facilities and domestic and international cash management services with large national and international banks; worked in cash forecasting and with software and acquisition integrations, and became a member of the management team.

While in college, Ms. Ashley worked summers in the bookkeeping department at Poca Valley Bank. In 2003, she returned to her roots as a director for Poca Valley Bankshares, drawing upon her core competencies and leadership experiences at ECA.

She is a 1985 graduate of Marshall University and is a member of the July 2016 graduating class at Graduate School of Banking in Colorado.

Even before there was a road, there was a vision and a desire.

As a fourth-generation shareholder and board member of our century-old community bank, the model that makes us different is what guides my daily walk. Our bank was barely 21 years old when the Great Depression knocked on our doors and escalated our concern for continuance. We all know what the history books tell us about that time: devastated households and communities, panic-ridden behavior, the fear of tomorrow and uncontrolled chaos manifested in bank collapses across the nation. Back then, they couldn't imagine the phrase, "Too big to fail." Why did some banks, including ours, survive?



*The original building for Poca Valley Bank, circa 1908.*



Times were hard. Roads were mere pathways and indoor running water was a privilege, but communities were built around each other. Knowing your neighbor was expected and most usually, you ate dinner together on a regular basis. The intimacy that existed in 1908, when our bank came into existence, was the same intimacy that allowed us to survive the Great Depression and remains the same intimacy that we cultivate today. We simply call it **relationship**.

Relationships matter, and we work hard to build and retain them. From my viewpoint as a community banker, I have the rare good fortune of understanding the dynamics of how relationship can bring control to chaos. My great-grandfather was the president of our rural West Virginia bank during those difficult Depression years. Vehicles were rare and travel difficult, so the relationships he enjoyed with his customers were face-to-face. In 1929, this bank president simply called on his customers and asked them to trust him. He asked each customer for advance notice to make a withdrawal, so he



could plan accordingly. Maintaining liquidity just needed one ingredient – relationship. Hence, today, here we are, still sitting on the same corner in an economically-challenged community, still meeting the needs of our customers.

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So what does relationship look like today, nearly 90 years later? With increased regulations, gone are the days of mortgages agreed upon under a shade tree. The practices of some have caused all of us to experience burden. I would imagine that the difference between a community bank in West Virginia, with a total population of less than two million, is greatly different than a community bank in Miami, Florida.

Why do we feel we have an edge on what other community banks covet, which is a relationship with our customers?

Here in West Virginia, we continue to live life *with* our customers. We see them at ballgames and at Walmart. We attend their funerals. We listen. In a world of changing environments, we choose to focus on what should never change ... **relationship.** ∇