

Banks helping clients during pandemic

By David Nordby
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BRILLION – The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans created challenges for area banks.

The loan designed to help businesses keep their workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic required hours of work when the program was rolled out. The money on the loans is planned to be forgivable to the borrower.

“It was kind of a hectic program because they just kind of threw it to the banks with very little instruction,” Laura Hoerth, State Bank of Chilton’s executive vice president and chief operating officer, said.

Terry Van Engen, Collins State

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Collins State Bank received \$20,000 in grant money which was donated to local non-profits. State Bank of Chilton and Collins State Bank have both been working with businesses and other clients during the coronavirus. (David Nordby/BN)

BANKS

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Bank’s president, says that mortgage refinancing has remained another client priority as rates remain historically low.

“As a smaller bank, the mortgage refinancing would have been enough in a normal world ... then we got into the PPP and did a very good amount of those, so it was very taxing on our loan group and our loan processors to meet those demands. We’re still fighting through it for probably another good month, month-and-a-half,” Van Engen said.

State Bank of Chilton processed 250 PPP loans.

“I’m proud that we worked 24/7 there for a couple of weeks to get

that done,” Hoerth said.

When the loans were introduced, the banks did not receive thorough information.

“All banks experienced challenges when it came out because they didn’t really come out with any strict guidelines,” Hoerth said. “We were constantly just trying to get on and get our customer’s loans approved.”

Hoerth says that ultimately the loans are a good thing. She says \$15 million is coming back to area businesses.

“Just in our small area, that’s kind of a huge dollar amount,” she said.

Van Engen says that Collins State Bank reached out to its business account owners at the start of the pandemic.

“We proactively reached out to some of our business customers and

offered them flexible payment terms to get them through this obstacle, if you will, recognizing they may be suffering a little bit on some cash flow and revenue,” Van Engen said.

The bank also received \$20,000 in grant money which was donated to local non-profits.

“Whether they’re open or not, the small businesses still have to pay their electric bills, property taxes, insurance, those things, so if we can give them a little bit of relief on the loan payments or the line of credit payments, we tried to do that up-front,” Van Engen said.

“We’ve been deferring payments as necessary, waived all of our overdraft fees, we’ve just been working with bar owners on a one-on-one basis to help them,” Hoerth said.

Both banks have maintained all their employees. Van Engen

said that the pandemic has allowed workers to take time to update account records.

Banks were deemed essential and were not required to close, but both have operated mainly using the drive-through. They allowed customers to come in as necessary for appointments.

Neither Hoerth nor Van Engen say that the drive-throughs have become so frenzied they cannot handle the increased traffic.

“Obviously, the stimulus check did create some increased traffic, but we’ve been able to handle it pretty easily through our drive-through,” Hoerth said.

Hoerth adds that they have seen increased traffic of online and mobile banking.

In the past, things like cashing in coins or opening accounts were

not issues that were not done via the drive-through.

“I’m very pleasantly surprised that the customer has been very accommodating to the fact that pretty much all the banks closed their branch lobbies and opened up the drive-through to do almost any type of transaction,” Van Engen said.

“It’s just always been nice that we always know our customers and they know we’re looking out for them,” Hoerth said.

Van Engen and Hoerth are not always needed in Brillion. Kim Buboltz manages the State Bank of Chilton Brillion branch and Amber Butturini manages the Collins State Bank Brillion branch.