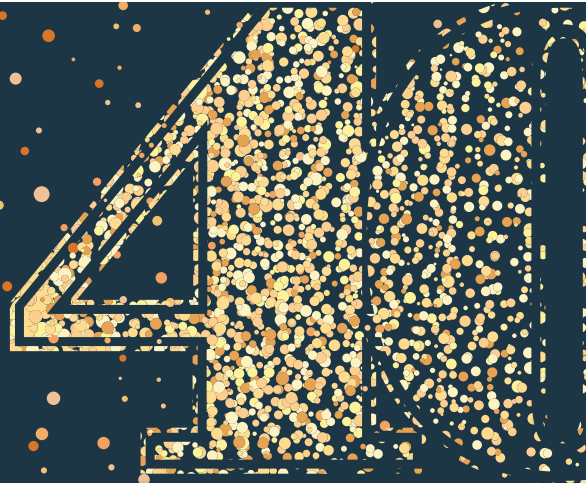



## Building A Legacy Of Caring!



# 40 YEARS OF BEING INSPIRED BY YOU.

## FOR GOOD REASON.

## 40th Anniversary Special Edition



As we celebrate Shirley and Steve Huston's 40-Year Anniversary of BANKWEST family ownership, we wanted to get a behind-the-scenes look at their journey throughout the years and hear their perspective of what's to come.

We think you'll enjoy their story!

**"I grew up playing with check blanks, check protectors and deposit tickets."**  
~ Shirley Huston

Growing up in a banking family might seem to be the natural route to becoming a banker, but the road was a bit more winding than that for Shirley and Steve Huston.

In 1979, while Steve was still in college, Shirley drove tractor as her husband stacked hay bales in the summer heat. "Steve's dad began to grow a bit weary of farming and wanted to give something else a try," Shirley recalled.

He noticed an ad in the paper regarding a bank for sale in northern Minnesota. They consulted Shirley's brother, Rholan Larson (Larson, Allen, Weishair & Co) about the idea, and they were surprised to hear him encourage them to pursue a bank purchase opportunity. However, not the bank in northern Minnesota. "There's a bank on the corner in Rockford," Larson noted, "the owner is a bit older, and he may be interested in selling."

The Rockford bank owner, Jim Grinnell, adamantly was not interested in selling, but Steve's dad, Bill, was persistent. He formed a quick relationship with the owner and eventually negotiated a deal to purchase the Rockford State Bank.

Shirley grew up in a banking family, and she was excited about this new endeavor. "My first full-time job was in a bank. Banking was in my blood, so I was all for it."

The Hustons purchased the Rockford State Bank from Grinnell in 1980. There were six employees on staff and all stayed on board.

The early years after the purchase had their challenges. We were in an economic recession and interest rates spiked into the teens, leaving customers struggling to make payments on their business and

home loans. As the economy recovered, the Rockford area was growing and we were able to grow with the community.

Residents in Hanover desired a local banking presence and asked if Rockford State Bank would be interested in operating an office in their community. Shirley shared, "In 1992, we purchased land and a double-wide mobile bank and put it on the property to test the waters, and it became a win for all involved."

Soon afterward, the population in Wright County was increasing so we wanted to open a branch in Buffalo. There were a few challenges to tackle along the way according to Steve. "Because the city of Buffalo was fewer than 10,000 residents, and due to banking regulations, we were only able to open a loan production office."

But a new census was about to be taken, and the gates finally opened. "When the 2000 census was concluded," Steve shared, "I believe the community had grown to a population of something like 10,097, and we were then able to convert into a full-service bank."

"Opening the doors in Buffalo in 2001 was a big leap, and we knew we were in this for the long haul after that," said Shirley.



## How did BANKWEST get its name?

As we were expanding our territory beyond Rockford, we felt a name change was needed to address the communities we were planning to service. After tossing a few ideas and options around with our staff, we eventually hired a marketing firm in June 2000 to assist with selecting the name and logo that represented our west-metro perspective.

## What is at the heart of community banking?

As BANKWEST began to establish roots and relationships throughout the area, the driving factor of doing so was clear to both Shirley and Steve.

“We really saw a need to provide community banking services in this growing area,” said Steve. “And having a presence in Buffalo, Rockford and Hanover, we felt we could better serve the needs as well as hopes and dreams of people in Wright County and beyond.”

It’s rare to have bank owners live in the community, but both feel it has been instrumental in helping forge relationships and establish credibility. “We may be one of the few banks in Wright County where all the owners live in the community we serve. We think that’s unique because we have a vested interest in the community and providing what people need with banking services,” shared Steve.

Another interesting aspect of BANKWEST, of course, is that it is a mother and son run company. Shirley was forthright in her thoughts on this unique relationship.

“People wonder how it is to work with your son, and I understand that concern. But, our working relationship is so easy, we work well together. One employee asked years ago, “Because this is a family-owned business, how do you handle it when you have disagreements?” I remember looking at Steve and thinking, I don’t remember when we had disagreements. It’s not that we agree on everything, but we talk things through and move forward.”

## Walk us through a challenging time in your tenure and how you responded.

Not surprisingly, the Great Recession of 2008-2010 was a formative time for Shirley and Steve as owners of a financial institution, and they make no qualms about how difficult it was.

“We honestly didn’t know what the future held,” Steve admitted. “We saw property values dropping by 50%. It was an incredibly challenging time for the clients and for us.” Many of our clients were not working and closing the door to their businesses.”

As we all know and have experienced, sometimes we just need a sliver of hope or a word of encouragement from someone to keep going. That held true for Shirley and Steve during the recession and still holds true today.

Shirley shared, “There are times when one of us will be down and discouraged, and the other will say “We’ve got this” and vice versa. We leaned on one another during that stretch, and we still do, and it seems to work out well.”

Along with that, something else was a key factor in how each of them responded to challenges during that time and helped them stay the course.

“Our faith impacted our view of the daunting situation in a significant way,” Shirley remembered. “It got to the point where we laid it all at God’s feet and said, “This bank is Yours. If you want us here, we’ll be here. And if You don’t, we will accept that,” Shirley said.

Steve added, “One of our core values is “Integrity,” and we really felt like it was important to handle this with a lot of integrity, and we tried to work with people who were really struggling.”

“From the very beginning, this was God’s business, and it still is,” Shirley continued. “There have been many miracles along the way, and it’s been a blessing to see how God has provided for all.”

### **What is the most rewarding part of your career?**

It didn’t take but a half-second for Shirley to respond to this question, it’s near and dear to her heart. “The relationship with staff and with customers is what it is all about for me. To know that just maybe you can have a little part of helping others enjoy their life and accomplish their dreams, that’s so humbling and rewarding.”

Steve agreed, “Relationships come to my mind right away. It’s really special to think we have been doing this long enough that at one point in time, we helped a young family build their first house, and now we’re helping their kids build their first house. And now maybe we’re helping mom and dad transition into retirement.”

### **What do you want BANKWEST to be known for?**

Steve chimed in without hesitation, “Building a Legacy of Caring” isn’t just a mission statement to us, it’s really how we, as an entire staff, try to live out our values each day.”

He continued, “Sometimes it’s the unseen things that really make our hearts happy, such as staff members serving at the Food Shelf, delivering Meals on Wheels or helping someone financially get through hard times that nobody knows about. That is what really drives us, not only for our history but for our future.”

Making dreams become a reality is at the core of who Shirley and Steve are, and is what they want people in the community to know BANKWEST for.

Shirley shared, “My dad, who was a banker, loaned money to a man who always told me whenever he saw me, “I could never have started my business if your dad hadn’t had faith in me.”

Steve added, “When people think of banks, they generally think of dollar and cents, but we want to be known for helping and caring for people.”

### **What is the significance of the bank’s 40th anniversary?**

As Steve likes to say, “The days are long, but the years are short.” And that saying held true when he was informed of the 40 years of ownership.

“To be honest, I didn’t even think about it being 40 years until Randy Whitcomb brought it to my attention.”

Steve continued, “Two thoughts come to mind when I think of 40 years; first of all, it’s hard to believe that it’s been that long. Secondly, it’s really encouraging to know that it has been that long that we’ve been helping customers make their dreams come true.”



## If you weren't in the banking business, what would you possibly pursue?

Steve thoughtfully shared, "It's hard to imagine doing anything else, I love my role and opportunity here. But, if I had to say, I guess some type of ministry would interest me, whether based in the United States or overseas."

Shirley took a bit more time pondering, and shared, "I can't think of anything I'd rather do or be involved with than banking, because it's all about the people. I have two families, a biological family and a BANKWEST family!"

## What's ahead for BANKWEST?

Steve responded with confidence and passion, "I'm excited and encouraged about what lies ahead for BANKWEST. We both have a fervent and steadfast belief in the future of community banking. We continue to believe there is a place for an organization like ours to impact our community and continue to serve and help people pursue their goals and dreams."

Over the years we have had opportunities to sell or merge with another bank. But for the foreseeable future, we want to remain independent, providing personalized banking products and services to customers in our communities.

# Employee Quotes

“ Shirley and Steve both live our mission statement of “Building a Legacy of Caring”. They are involved in local civic organizations. They donate time at the local food shelf. I have worked by Shirley's side organizing items at the local thrift store in preparation for the Christmas season. Staff volunteerism is always encouraged by them.

Whenever Shirley is in the office, she stops by each department to say “Hi” and catch up on our lives. She listens to all our happy events and has prayers for each of us when times are hard. I truly am blessed to be a BANKWEST employee.

— Lori



“ Shirley and Steve are always giving back to the community. They are both involved in the Rockford Historical Society. Shirley volunteers at Riverworks sorting donations and Steve is a member of the Rockford Lions helping in their community projects. They both participate in the annual Thousand Hearts Crow River Serve Day. These are just a few examples of how they truly live out the BANKWEST mission and core values.

— Denise

Thank you for your  
40 Years of patronage