

CENTRAL VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL | CEO Spotlight

Trezza reflects on 34 years as CEO of BAC, challenges in the industry

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STOCKTON—William “Bill” Trezza, CEO of BAC Community Bank, knew how to fix the problems in the banking industry long before taking on his position.

As Trezza plans for his coming semi-retirement, he reflected on his career in the industry, starting out as a federal bank regulator in the 1970s. He was a bank examiner in the New York region, traveling throughout the state, its neighboring New Jersey and the Virgin Islands within different banks.

The job helped prepare him for a life of leadership at BAC, for which he seems to be naturally suited.

Coming from a big Italian family in New Jersey (his dad had 55 first cousins), he believes that helped him to be a “people person.”

He’s been mentored and he’s mentored others, and that’s what he believes the banking industry is ultimately about: people and developing relationships.

On Dec. 31, 2018, Trezza will hand the reins of BAC to Dana Bockstahler, the current executive vice president chief operating officer. After that, he will stay on in a consultancy role, travel and work on restoring old vehicles. He will also stay active on non-profit boards, workout and watch a lot of NCAA basketball.

Trezza took time to speak with the Central Valley Business Journal about his life in banking and the challenges the industry faces today. The content of the conversation has been edited for space.

CVBJ: How did you get your start?

Trezza: I started out of college as a bank examiner in New York City. I took accounting in college and I liked it. Accounting is almost like a language. It’s interpretive. It’s like reading a story if you like numbers.

Through happenstance, a friend of a friend introduced me to this job. I took it, and I liked it. It was fascinating because, in my first year, for a period of time I could be in CitiBank or Chase Manhattan Bank. Another time I could be in rural New Jersey or Upstate New York in a little five-person bank.

It was a great education, but it wasn’t the career I wanted. I wanted to somehow get into banking. I just didn’t know where.

The way we used to look at banks was very simplistic, things had changed. It was not hard to figure out if banks were making money.

(Trezza explained a top-down study was conducted by Haskins and Sells on how to fix the antiquated operations of banking at the behest of the U.S. Senate, resulting in two large studies—the administration of banking and one on the bank exam process)

H&S says, “You need to bring 100 people into Washington (DC) and beef up the needs of both.” So, they put a call out in ’75 and said, “we need people in the following areas.” The one that fascinated me was problem bank resolution. I thought that would be interesting.

CVBJ: How did you come to BAC Community Bank?

Trezza: The last three months of my assignment, I called all these consultants [in 1982] and some banker friends, and I said, “I’m coming out [to California].” I’d take a five-day weekend and meet with people in the South Bay and the North Bay. I basically said, “If you can’t use me, but you think I could be helpful, pass my name around.”

[BAC] had a new CEO. He was an old, retired branch banker. He was a tough loan collector. That’s all he did. He didn’t do bank finance and stuff. In the late ’70s this bank ... was under regulatory duress.

They hired a regulatory trouble-



MARC LUTZ/ CVBJ
William “Bill” Trezza, CEO of BAC Community Bank, recently talked about his 34 years leading the business.

shooter. He came in, he looked at the bank. It was very weak on the finance and operations side.

He was at a golf tournament, with some of these consultant guys. [They asked him how he liked his new job]. He says, “I need help.” They said, “Have we got the perfect guy for you.” It’s funny how things happen ... I took the job.

CVBJ: How and when did you become CEO?

Trezza: I was charged to take the investment account, accounting systems, legal compliance, all that, you name it, get that fixed ... I got that done and we made money in, I think, four months. After two years of that, I got the bank stable, [Art Berberian] fixed his part, then we were a solid small bank.

March of ’84, we were at a board meeting. The guy that hired me quits at the board meeting. He said, “The bank is good now, and I think you should make Bill the CEO because he’s the one who really fixed it and made it money.” So, they asked me to leave the room. Five minutes later they said, “You’re the new CEO.” It’s crazy the way things worked out.

CVBJ: How has the industry changed in that time?

Trezza: It’s much more complicated. The regulations are daunting. They’ve mushroomed. It’s amplifying old regulations and new ones. The markets have become more complicated and risky.

Compared to the beginning of my career, it’s much more complicated, people are more complicated. It’s so easy to get sued today, it’s crazy.

The good thing about it, it’s still a people business. We have a great team of people at the bank. We have our own culture here. Banking is banking, but how you do it is your culture. People understand that if you do it right, you only do it once. Really understand your customer and do what’s in their best interest.

It’s what makes community banking really special, the people part.

CVBJ: Is there any one ideal you’ve carried through your career?

Trezza: People relationships. Competency, yeah, that’s a given. But I think it’s developing good relationships with people. The rest is a precursor. You have to be competent. You have to know your business. You have to comply with the law. But how you work with people makes a big difference. I’ve always been like that. I enjoy people. 