

Keeping an Eye on the Trends for Banks

by Elizabeth Silverstein

Randy Dennis, president and managing partner of DD&F, considers it his job to watch the trends. That priority helped him in 2008, when he saw the market crash happening before Arkansas banks were at risk.

That's a benefit of being in the middle of the United States -- the ripple effect can take a little while. "In July of 2008, we were involved in a large failed bank acquisition in Arizona and California," Dennis shared. "As we were going through the closing process, I realized that we were experiencing, firsthand, 'the next big thing.' During that week in July, we learned how failed bank acquisitions worked."

He brought the information back to Arkansas' hometown bankers, meeting with Arvest, Simmons, Centennial and Bank OZK. "As a result, our banks were leaders in the number of failed bank acquisitions across the entire US," he said. "Even though Arkansas had a few failures, we always look for the trends in the industry and make sure that our members understand them and how they can take advantage of them."

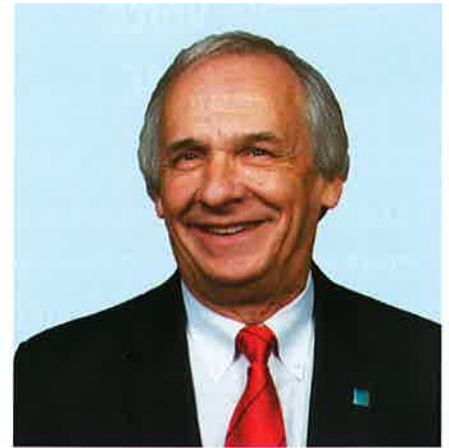
Dennis started his career in finances at age 24, when he joined Arkansas Financial Services after moving to Little Rock with his wife and infant daughter. He met Bob Fegtly and Bill DaBoll five years later when they joined AFS. Ten years after that, the three men built DD&F, which is now ranked as one of the top financial advisors for M&A in the United States.

Dennis and his team of 26 employees are still watching the trends.

And they're offering a lot more services these days, include mergers and acquisitions, strategic planning, expansionary assistance, recapitalizing and repurposing small rural banks, loan reviews, compliance, IT audits, and marketing. "Almost anything a bank needs in consulting services, we can provide," Dennis said. "We are most effective with banks that need strategic direction, that are struggling with the changes going on the industry, struggling with how to do things, how to expand, how to deal with new regulations, how to pass on the bank to the next generation or whatever their plans are. We're always looking for what our clients' needs are and how we can meet those needs. We also want our clients to know, when a new opportunity arises, how it can benefit them."



Dennis decided to become a member of ABA in 2004, when Ken Hammonds served as president/CEO of ABA, due to the shared missions between the two organizations. "Many of our clients are ABA members," Dennis said. "We've worked with the ABA for years doing strategic planning for the association. I'm very familiar with the mission of ABA and its purpose — they align very close-



Randy is one of the original founding partners of DD&F. He has been involved in all phases of bank consulting since 1978.

ly to our mission. Our goal is simply to help our clients be successful. Since we live in Arkansas, Arkansas banks will always be our first priority. I'm proud of our clients and our state banks. Several years ago, I predicted that Arkansas' innovative bankers would get the recognition they deserved, and they have. Without question, they have done well."

Dennis explained that Arkansas has four banks with over \$10 billion in assets. This places Arkansas fifth in the country behind only New York, California, Utah and Texas. "ABA has always been very supportive of our banks and desires to expand the frontiers of banking," Dennis said.

And he hopes to continue to work with banks in Arkansas and across the country, growing awareness one grassroots attempt at a time. "I think a lot of banks see us as one dimensional," Dennis shared. "They may know us from our M&A, or loan, or IT side. That's our fault. We're not big marketers or promoters. We're not running big ads everywhere. Our biggest challenge is making sure our client base understands all of the different things that we do and how we can help them. People don't need help all of it all the time. They usually need one thing. When they think, 'What do we need here?', we want to be the people that they call."

