

The Moss' Sessions: An Interview with Ken Glanc - Part III: the conclusion

May 22, 2009 by: George L. Stewart

Just a little more broadly: you live in Cuyahoga County. What do you think is different, as far the government runs...the way the city is run, in terms of economic development? What's the difference between what Cuyahoga County is doing and what Lorain County is doing? More specifically, what is First Merit doing to stimulate(the economy in) Lorain County?

Ken: "That's a good question...well, first off ...let me tell the statement on First Merit: We're a local bank. We're based out of Akron. We serve only North-East Ohio. This branch here in downtown Elyria is our corporate headquarters for all of Lorain County. And we have regional presidents that sit in those headquarters...our region co, Bill Lamb sits opposite of the office that I do.

"In Lorain County, we have a 50% market share....that's huge. So we've been visible and accessible to our community.

"How are we developing business in Elyria and in Lorain county? We've empowered our managers and our business bankers and the rest of our officers to become engrained in community service organizations, community events, networking opportunities...help reinforce not only the existing business relationships – and let me touch on those: because this bank has gone through so many acquisitions of the local territories into the umbrella, there's a large portion of our existing customers that have been with us for a long period of time and had not been upgraded yet into current services and products that would suit them better. Nothings broken right now but they just aren't aware of the offerings that they have. When you have a chance to meet with those customers, we are certainly able to refine some of their holdings and make them much more profitable.

"Now, if we can take that same methodology to some of the new relationships that we're forming...new prospects that we're encountering...we're setting them up for success to begin with. First Merit didn't get involved with any of the sub-prime lending that (our) peer group did, so we've avoided all of those financial pitfalls that the rest of the industry has partaken in. We – 9 quarters in a row – we've beaten analyst expectations on our stock performance and, in 2008, we did post a profit.

"Just recently, we returned all the tart money that was issued to us and paid the interest on that as well. So we are tart free – and loving it , fully capitalized local and doing business. I think *that's* the big difference right now: that we do have appetites for lending, we do want to be engaged in the community and see those success stories.

"The quality of some of the applications that we are seeing, though, are not as...as...basically, its not meeting the appetite. We're not seeing maybe the credit score on an individual or a company *per se*. We're seeing some over leveraged individuals...and I think a lot has to do right now (with) most certainly property values when your talking on the consumer side.

"Some of the initiatives that the government's engaged with – especially when it relates to the FED fund rate, and the prime rate there after – certainly make a big impact on *how* we are able to develop economically. So, if there's risk that's involved with the loan, it could be overly priced...I mean, we could price someone out of potentially doing something.

"Lorain County, specifically, and Elyria I think has a better opportunity to grow economically because what I have witnessed in this market as opposed to Cuyahoga and Summit — and I say this graciously, especially about downtown Elyria: everybody knows

everybody. And everybody knows who you know. It's sort of Mayberry-ish in a way...and I mean that in complimentary way. I think that's one of the greatest assets that we have here...relationships that we've formed are transparent and they are transferable...we overlap on a lot of the relationships and reinforce those commitments to doing business and grow. "There's a lot of opportunity in Lorain (County), we've got the right people in place now, and we really just need to start capitalizing on those opportunities and relationships.

I'd like to thank Ken again for taking the time to speak with me about The Elyria Comic Book Initiative and The Comic Book Academy, as well as sharing his thoughts on the area. If you have any questions, comments, or would like to get the ECBI involved in your school, you can contact them by email at ElyriaComicBookInitiative@yahoo.com .