

# DALLAS BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Branching out

Benchmark Bank launches wealth management subsidiary.

NICHOLAS SAKELARIS, 14



### INVESTOR INTEL

# Bank toasts golden anniversary, opportunity



JAKE DEAN

Wayne McCullough, Mike Barnett and Keith Beckman will oversee Benchmark Bank's new wealth management arm.

Benchmark Bank celebrated its 50th anniversary by launching a new subsidiary that handles wealth management.

For years, the bank has sent its customers elsewhere for investment advice.

"Most of our customers are small businesses and this is just an extension of what we do to advise them," said Michael Barnett, chairman and CEO of Benchmark Bank.

Benchmark Private Wealth Management LLC will be co-managed by Wayne McCullough and Keith Beckman, who have 40 years combined experience in the industry.

"We decided this was a very underserved business in Dallas-Fort Worth to really have the independent fee-based adviser," Barnett said.

Benchmark doesn't sell its own investor products; it goes out and finds the best one for its customers. That's the definition

of an independent wealth management.

"It's relationship driven. It's trust driven. It's hard to have that trust relationship if you have your own proprietary products in-house and are tied to some sort of incentive or compensation that's not in the best interest of the client," McCullough said. "When I get to sit on the same side of the table as you, have a simple fee-based business and pick independent managers to manager your money, all conflicts are off."

They anticipate many of the wealth management clients will come from the booming oil and gas industry.

"The wealth creation in Texas alone is staggering," McCullough said. "Unlike any other state in the United States, I would say, through the energy space."

The key is to diversify your investments in other fields, he said.

"He's made all of his money in oil

and gas and he's still very exposed to it," McCullough said, referring to hypothetical clients. "Whatever he gives us to manage, probably won't need that exposure. We're looking at it from a global perspective."

Beckman was the senior vice president and director of special projects for Benchmark Bank before becoming a partner in the wealth management group. He has previous experience as a portfolio manager for Highland Capital Management and as a senior analyst for Richmond Investment Advisors.

McCullough comes to Benchmark from Kayne Anderson Capital Advisors where he was a managing director. Before that, he worked in wealth management for Deutsche Bank.

With locations in Plano, Uptown, the Park Cities and Austin, Benchmark Bank has come a long way from its humble beginnings as Quinlan State Bank.

Barnett's grandfather, Bruce Clardy, founded Quinlan State Bank in 1964 in a small east Texas town called Quinlan. Clardy worked in the oil and gas industry before starting the bank.

Barnett took over the bank in 1983 and bought a failed bank in Plano that he called Benchmark Bank. In 2002, he sold all the branches and consolidated everything into the new location at the Shops at Legacy in Plano.

The bank went from \$180 million in assets to \$31 million.

Now, with five locations, the bank's assets top \$400 million.

McCullough just started with the bank two weeks ago but has been a client at the bank for years.

"What I think is interesting is the community feel you still have with your customers," McCullough said.