

## Handing over the reins

Written by Chris Lee

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After nearly 33 years, 25 of which he has been in the driver's seat, John Schneider will retire from Bank of the West on Thursday, Aug. 6. Brian Gales will take over as president/branch manager the following day.

Schneider got his start with banking in Lodgepole, Neb. working for First State Bank as the vice president. After five years, he made the move to the Hilltop National Bank in Casper, Wyo. where he served as an internal auditor for one year.

Schneider recalled the change was a big one moving from the Lodgepole bank where he worked with four employees to the 30 employees in Casper.

In 1976 a group of investors purchased the First National Bank of Holyoke from the Heginbotham Trust. One of the investors knew Schneider from his time in Nebraska and asked him to join the bank in Holyoke. Schneider served as the vice president from 1977-1984 and took over as president in 1984.

He didn't know what path he would take growing up. While taking some general college courses he obtained his insurance license. While living in eastern Nebraska, he saw an advertisement in the Omaha World Herald for the bank in Lodgepole for someone who was capable of selling insurance and would also work in the bank, so he applied for the job.

"If it hadn't been for my insurance license, I probably wouldn't have gotten the job," he said. He also had obtained his real estate license for the state of Nebraska.

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Over the years, Schneider says he has been through roughly seven ownership changes and had somewhere in the neighborhood of 15 bosses.

Schneider says one of his more memorable moments was when the bank celebrated its centennial in 1998. He said being in Holyoke and at the bank for so long, he almost feels he grew up with the bank.

“It’s been very rewarding and a great opportunity,” he said. “I’ve been blessed with dedicated, loyal and great employees.”

Schneider wishes nothing but the best for Gales and hopes to see the bank continue to grow and prosper.

“The good Lord blessed me with 32 and a half years here and I owe it to the man,” Schneider said.

He said he would like to continue helping the community and its members by giving back a little bit. Helping out community members and customers with community service is a big part of Schneider’s plan after retiring.

“They’re customers but they’re also friends,” Schneider said.

He and his wife Lynn, who teaches third grade, will stay in Holyoke. Their daughter Rachel will be a freshman this fall.

Schneider has two other children. Daughter Christie and husband Eric Stein live in Ft. Collins with their two sons. Schneider’s son Chad also lives in Ft. Collins.

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When Schneider first moved to Holyoke he was a member of the local Jaycees. He also has served on the chamber of commerce, is active in the Baptist Church and is active in the Gideons.

“I’ve been blessed with a good job, good family, good employees and good customers,” Schneider said.

Schneider picked Aug. 6 as his day to retire because he also will turn 60 on that day. Friends and family are encouraged to stop by the bank to help him celebrate both occasions.