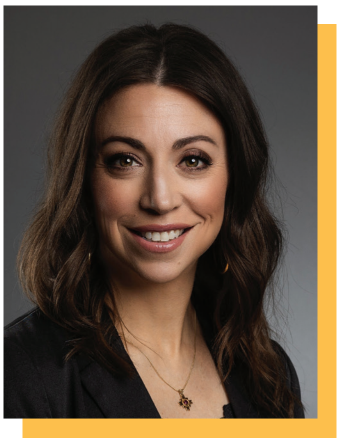
LEA COUNTY STATE BANK | SUMMER 2025

BANKNOTES

Local Banking the way it should be

LYDIA GRAY'S BANKING CAREER COMES FULL CIRCLE



In 2008, Lydia Gray joined Lea County State Bank as an assistant to the cashier, knowing little about the business of banking beyond balancing her own checkbook.

Today she is that cashier.

Officially a LCSB Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Gray's responsibilities include overseeing the flow of money into the bank's systems—whether through ATMs, teller windows, branch operations, or online transactions. In short: she helps track it all.

Not bad for someone who moved to Hobbs from Texas more than 20 years ago, unsure of where her professional journey might lead.

"Within a very short period of time, I could see she had absolutely dedicated qualities and wanted to do a good job," said D'dee Sharp, the cashier who hired Gray and mentored her until her own retirement in 2012.

The admiration runs both ways.

"D'dee was the first person I called to thank when I found out," Gray said of her promotion this spring, which came after the retirement of Jerry Bell—another mentor who helped prepare her to take over key responsibilities for several years.

"I never set out for a career in banking," she said. "But I feel very fortunate that it happened. I'm very lucky to work where I do. I'm fortunate to have had the trust of people who taught me along the way."

FROM HATS TO HELM

Now 40, Gray has worked in nearly every department—from loans to operations. That depth of experience, she said, helps her lead with both empathy and insight.

"We were a much smaller bank when I first started, and we all wore a lot of hats. I opened accounts, was a backup teller, did a wide variety of jobs," she said.

That hands-on journey equipped Gray with a rare combination of frontline service savvy and operational know-how. It also helped position her to lead the bank's most recent implementation of a major new core banking platform—a yearlong project she helped guide from planning through launch.

"I really like figuring things out—solving problems," she said. "I think my strength is seeing the big picture and coming up with a Rolodex of solutions."

"I used to do the same job as many of the people I supervise," she added. "I understand their day-to-day issues. I know what it's like trying to fit all you have to do into your day, professionally and personally. I try to picture myself in their shoes—because I've been them."

CULTURE OF COMMITMENT

Gray is one of more than 80 LCSB employees, many of whom stay with the bank for years—often decades.

"We have a teller starting her first day today and another employee who's been here for more than 50 years," she said recently. "We have many employees with 15 to 20 years under their belts. You don't find that much these days. I'm fortunate—I found a good career."

And that career is still gaining momentum.

Described as "detail-oriented and conscientious" by

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CONTINUING A LEGACY

I am honored to step into the role of Lea County State Bank President, continuing a legacy of strong leadership and community commitment. During the 12 years I've been at Lea County State Bank, I had the opportunity to work closely with former bank president and co-founder Sam Spencer. I want to express my deepest gratitude for that privilege and thank him for his guidance, mentorship and dedication over the years. Sam's leadership laid a solid foundation for the bank's continued success and I am committed to building upon that legacy.

LCSB's growth and resilience are a true reflection of the strength and dedication of a strong team. Together, we've delivered on our commitment to personal service, local decision-making, and a genuine investment in the success of our neighbors.

That will not change under my leadership. What will continue to evolve is how we will meet your needs—through new technologies, improved services and a focus on making banking as easy and accessible as it is personal. I look forward to working alongside our dedicated team to ensure that Lea County State Bank remains a trusted partner in your financial journey.

Warm Regards,

Josh

Josh Grassham
PRESIDENT AND CEO

EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

MEMBER FDIC

NEW LOAN OFFICER BACKS UNIQUE HOBBS STARTUP

Rosa Richert is no stranger to the world of commercial lending. A longtime Lea County State Bank (LCSB) employee, Richert has spent more than a decade supporting the loan process as an administrative and executive assistant. But in April, she stepped into a new role: commercial loan officer.

Senior Vice President Alfonso Cisneros said Richert's promotion was inevitable. "Rosa's dedication and expertise have paid off," said the bank's chief lending officer. "In her new role, she will call on years of experience to drive business growth and build strong relationships with our commercial clients."

And just last month, Richert officially approved her first loan.

"I've always been part of the documentation, spoken to customers, and helped gather the requirements," Richert said. "But now I'm the decision-maker. I get to say, 'Wow, I was part of that building going up or that new business opening in town.' It's a good feeling — knowing you're part of your community growing."

HELPING A DREAM TAKE SHAPE

A prime example of helping the community to grow occurred when Hobbs resident Amy Alvarez walked into the bank earlier this year with a dream: to open a dental hygienist studio in Hobbs —a niche business offering professional teeth cleaning and oral hygiene services without a dentist on-site.

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("Lydia Gray's," continued from page 1)

LCSB President Josh Grassham, Gray is currently enrolled in the Texas Tech's School of Banking program—a two-year course aimed at shaping high-level banking leaders.

Her goal—as well as the goal of LCSB—is to "offer a big-bank experience with hometown hospitality."

That means meeting the needs of a diverse customer base, Gray explained, ranging from those who want 24/7 digital access to those who prefer face-to-face interaction.

"We have four generations of customers banking with us right now," she said. "Some come in every day to do their transactions in person. Others prefer to do all of their banking digitally. We have to serve them all—and everyone in the gray area in between. It's a good challenge to have."

And for Gray, who thrives in gray areas, it's a perfect fit.

("New Loan Officer," continued from page 2)

Alvarez, a hygienist with 13 years of experience, knew teeth. But the loan process? Not so much.

"I thought I could just walk into the bank and get the money," she admitted. "I really didn't know anything about how it worked."

That's where Richert came in.

Having completed two years at Texas Tech's School of Banking, Richert prides herself on staying informed about local economic conditions and business loan options. She helped Alvarez identify and apply for a collateral-assistance loan through a state program that supports small businesses. She also referred her to New Mexico Junior College for help developing a detailed business plan and market analysis.

FROM INEXPERIENCE TO EMPOWERMENT

As Alvarez prepares to open her studio this September, she credits Richert for helping her navigate an unfamiliar process.

"I've come a long way since that first day at the bank," she said. "Rosa was knowledgeable and helpful. Everything was completely new, but she made it very easy."

"That's the ultimate goal," Richert explained. "You want the borrower to succeed, and you also want to make sure the loan gets paid back. That's the ideal."

And even when the outcome isn't ideal—when a loan must be denied—Richert sees opportunity.

"It's hard to turn someone down," she said. "But you try to educate them, help them make changes, and offer alternatives."

For both women, the banking experience marked a significant first.

"To me, it's inspiring to see a woman launching such a unique business—and to play a part in that," Richert said.

In the meantime, Alvarez laughed as she recalled the milestone moment: "I told Rosa this was a first for both of us. I was her first official loan to approve—and it's my first time opening a business."

THE IMPORTANCE OF A HOME INSPECTION IN THE MORTGAGE PROCESS: A BANKER'S PERSPECTIVE

When purchasing a home, prospective buyers should consider various financial and logistical aspects to ensure a sound investment. In many cases, a home is the single largest purchase a person will make in their lifetime. One of the most beneficial, yet often overlooked steps in this process is the home inspection. Whether buying through a real estate agent or a for-sale-by-owner (FSBO) transaction, a home inspection can provide important safeguards in the home-buying process.

An inspection helps uncover any hidden issues that could lead to costly repairs. Structural concerns, faulty wiring, plumbing issues, roof damage or pest infestations can quickly turn a dream home into a financial burden. By identifying these problems early, borrowers can negotiate repairs with the seller or even reconsider the purchase.

In FSBO situations, inspections are particularly essential because there is no real estate agent ensuring that the seller adheres to industry-best practices. The seller may not intentionally hide issues, but they might not be aware of underlying problems that an inspector would catch. A thorough home inspection provides buyers with peace of mind, knowing they are making an informed decision.

In most home-purchase cases, the lender requires an appraisal. Be aware that an appraisal differs from a home inspection. An appraisal estimates a property's market value while an inspection assesses its physical condition. If an inspection reveals significant issues, it could impact the home's true value. Your lender may require specific examinations such as a pest or roof inspections that may require specific repairs be completed before final approval of the loan. This is especially true for government-backed loans such as FHA or VA mortgages.

Skipping a home inspection might seem like a way to save money up front, but it can lead to significant financial stress down the road. Undetected structural damage, outdated electrical systems, or undisclosed hail damage could cost tens of thousands of dollars in repairs. A homebuyer should view a home inspection as an investment rather than an expense. Spending a few hundred dollars on an inspection now could save them thousands in unforeseen repair costs later.

At the end of the day, an informed homebuyer is a financially secure homeowner. Taking the time to schedule a home inspection is one of the smartest moves a mortgage borrower can make.

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USE DIGITAL WALLET FOR EASIER PAYMENTS

LCSB CARDS NOW COMPATIBLE WITH DIGITAL WALLETS FOR EASIER PAYMENTS

Paying for merchandise with a Lea County State Bank credit or debit card just got easier.

Both cards can be added to the digital wallet of an iPhone or Android cell phone using Apple Pay, Google Pay or Samsung Pay applications, according to LCSB Retail Credit Manager Saul Villarreal. Once the card is uploaded, purchases can be made with a simple tap of the phone on a terminal at any store that accepts contactless payments. Digital wallets are also accepted at many sites you already shop online.

If you have an aversion to keypads already touched by hundreds of customers, digital wallets are worthwhile because—for most transactions—you don't have to enter your pin to make a purchase, Villarreal explained.

In addition, merchants don't have access to your account because contactless payments use a token for each purchase instead of the actual credit or debit card number. And because most phones with a digital wallet require facial recognition or a fingerprint to unlock, your financial information is secure even if your phone is lost or stolen.

Villarreal calls the new technology a blessing - especially after a recent visit to a fast-food restaurant. "I was in the drive through and had already ordered when I realized that I didn't have my wallet with me," he said. "But then I remembered that I'd added the card to my phone so I was able to tap to pay and avoid embarrassment."

Contact Saul Villarreal for information on obtaining a LCSB credit card at 575-397-6610.