

BEST PLACES TO WORK **SPOT** LIGHT

FIRST BANK OF HIGHLAND PARK

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First Bank of Highland Park Lives by Its Words

At First Bank of Highland Park, a culture of **growth, development, communication, recognition** and **respect** is why this bank is one of Chicago's Best Places to Work for 2019.

As one of the five largest privately-held banks in Chicago, First Bank of Highland Park is steadily growing, in assets as well as employees. Five years ago the bank had 93 employees. Now it has 130. The bank's growth strategy has the team well on its way to reaching their goal of becoming a \$2 billion bank in the near future.

The bank recently introduced a new division, First Bank Chicago, which will support the Commercial Banking, Treasury Management and Private Banking groups already serving clients throughout the Chicagoland area. A new banking center is scheduled to open in Skokie this summer and another location in Chicago is on the horizon.

This growth offers employees the opportunity to advance in their careers. This fall, Denise Bryant celebrates her 12th anniversary at the bank. She started as a part-time marketing associate and the only employee in the marketing department. She worked her way up to her current position as director of marketing. "As a military spouse, it is always a challenge to maintain a decent resume when moving every few years disrupts your career path. I re-entered the workforce in my mid-thirties and the bank provided me with support and opportunities to grow and develop my skills," Bryant says. After a series of promotions, she now leads a marketing team of four full-time employees. "Promoting from within is a priority here and I am grateful the bank saw my potential as a leader," she says.

One of the longest tenured employees is John Rimkus with nearly 30 years of service. Many years ago, he started in the bookkeeping department and he is now fulfilling a new role as senior vice president facilities manager/security officer. "The bank is

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definitely my family. This organization cares about people on a professional level and a personal level," he says. "When I recently had health issues and had to take an extended leave of absence, everyone was continuously reaching out to me, checking on me and lifting me with positive encouragement. We might be growing into a big bank according to the numbers," he continues. "But the bank's atmosphere remains to be a tight knit family."

The bank provides a platform where people can do their best work, notes Eric Ephraim, president and COO at First Bank of Highland Park. "We love that our employees come to work with a sense of purpose and belonging," he says. "That's the kind of environment and culture we provide."

"We offer a variety of opportunities and benefits for employees based on their unique professional and personal needs," says Lenore Erickson, executive vice president, human resources. On-site training sessions are provided on an assortment of technical, business and leadership topics. During their first year, new employees attend Explore FBHP seminars to learn about all of the bank's departments and how they contribute to the bank's success.



All employees are encouraged to pursue continuing education opportunities, at the bank's expense, including webinars, seminars or conferences. In addition, the bank provides tuition reimbursement for employees pursuing a college degree.

With the growth in business and employees, communication is key. Formal communications include a monthly update that focuses on employee contributions to the success of the strategic plan. Another bi-monthly communications initiative produces short, fun highlights of various departments. The "Vault," the bank's intranet, provides critical information for employees and facilitates inter-departmental communications.

Joe Haugh, an experienced banker with over two decades in the financial industry, joined the team about a year ago as senior vice president and managing director of the middle market banking team. He's responsible for expanding the bank's commercial and industrial lending division.

As a relative newcomer, Haugh already understands the bank's priorities: employees, clients and the community. "Those three things are clicking," he says. "This is a special place."

The bank's goal is to provide employees with a climate of belonging. The bank formally recognizes exceptional work with yearly awards that honor the contributions of individuals and teams. Employees receive a hand-written note and a gift card from the CEO each year to recognize their anniversary. Promotions are celebrated with an all-bank announcement and gift baskets. Keeping the bank's IT systems safe and secure is key, so the annual "Phishing Awards" are presented to employees who identify and report computer hacking attempts. The Phishing Award includes the much coveted fishing trophy.

Opportunities to get to know colleagues on a professional and personal level abound. FBHP hosts an employee appreciation dinner, holiday party with guests and quarterly new employee breakfasts with senior management. They celebrate weddings, babies and retirements. The employee activity committee hosts events from contests, to potlucks, to Thanksgiving feasts, to ice cream socials. "We like to get together and celebrate," says Tammy Jader, administrative assistant and chair of the employee activity committee. "These activities are a great way to get to know each other."

The best way to recognize and appreciate employees is through a competitive salary and benefits package and First Bank of Highland Park delivers. Employees comment on the variety of benefits for every stage in their lives - paid family and medical leaves; dental, medical and vision insurance; generous 401(k) match and profit sharing; and children's college tuition assistance, to name a few.

The compensation and recognition are a great way FBHP lets their employees understand the significant role every person plays. Ultimately, it's the meaningful connections with coworkers that motivate employees to exceed expectations for their clients and each other. Ephraim points with pride to a comment on the "Best Places to Work" employee survey: Our successes are a shared joy. "That says it all, it's always a team effort," he says.

And those are words to live by.



First Bank of Highland Park

Where Community is First!