

BANKING ON IT



ADRIAN MENDOZA/THE BEE

Janis Powers and Mike Rodrigues, both vice presidents at Oak Valley Community Bank, talk in front of a project the bank financed.

Oakdale bank lends a local hand

■ Forging strong tie with business key to Oak Valley success

By **JEFF JARDINE**
BEE STAFF WRITER

OAKDALE — Among other things, the folks at Oak Valley Community Bank love consistency.

It's become a cornerstone of their growing business, and it's what they look for in a customer.

Consistent? Each of their first four branches has opened on the 28th day of the month: Oakdale on May 28, 1991; Sonora, May 28, 1996; and Modesto, May 28, 1997. When the bank expanded into Bridgeport as Eastern Sierra Community Bank, the branch opened Sept. 28, 2000.

And the only reason Oak Valley won't open its new Mammoth Lakes branch on the 28th of this month is because banks don't open — or stay open — on legal

holidays.

Memorial Day hogged May 28 this year. So the new Eastern Sierra Community Bank in Mammoth Lakes, a division of Oak Valley Community Bank, will open its doors Tuesday.

The bank also has been consistent in the type of areas where it establishes branches, Executive Vice President Chris Courtney said.

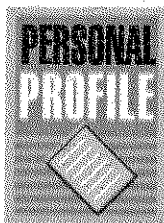
Oak Valley looks for towns and areas in need of an institution that will lend locally, unlike some of the larger banks.

"The eastern Sierra was under-banked," he said. "We think there is opportunity there — especially when we will lend money to the community."

Oak Valley first opened to do just that in 1991, Courtney said. When the recession hit, many other banks tightened up on their lending for local commercial projects.

"The values were going no-

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- **BUSINESS NAME:** Oak Valley Community Bank
- **ADDRESS:** 125 N. Third Ave., Oakdale 95361. Telephone: (209) 848-2265. Web site: www.ovcb.com
- **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER:** Ronald C. Martin
- **EMPLOYEES:** 44
- **HISTORY:** Oak Valley Community Bank was

formed in 1990 and opened its first branch in Oakdale on May 28, 1991. Since then, the bank has opened branches in Modesto, Sonora and Bridgeport, with a new Mammoth Lakes branch scheduled to open Tuesday.

■ **PRODUCTS-SERVICES:** Savings, investments, lending to local customers.

■ **ASSETS:** \$133.8 million in 2000. For the first quarter of this year, Oak Valley Community Bank reported earnings of \$381,000, compared with \$345,000 a year ago. Loans were up 15 percent, to \$90.6 million. Deposits grew 10 percent to \$107.5 million.

■ **QUOTE:** "They've done just about every job I've done," said Rich Murdoch, a commercial developer in Oakdale.

BANK: Oak Valley seeks underserved cities

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where but up," Courtney said. "We are very opportunistic. We fashion ourselves as underdogs versus the big banks."

They moved into Sonora after Valliwide bought out locally owned El Capitan Bank in 1996.

They went into Bridgeport — a small, tourism-dependent community along Highway 395 about 82 miles south of Carson City — after Bank of America withdrew and left the town without a bank.

They're going into Mammoth because the big banks, Courtney said, aren't interested in local commercial investment.

And they'll likely open a branch next year in Bishop for the very same reason.

"Our idea of a perfect project is an individually owned company that runs its business and owns

its building," he said. "We want a complete relationship for banking."

That means not only financing the construction, but also becoming the client's banker for its other needs.

Oak Valley has done that with a number of businesses locally, including financing nine of the 11 businesses in the Oakdale Business and Industrial Park, south of town.

"They sort out so much of the red tape," said Rich Murdoch, the park's developer.

He said Oak Valley is quick to make the money transfers he needs to pay his subcontractors quickly. With other banks, he said, it can take months.

"They do a huge amount of business because they treat us so well on the commercial side," Murdoch said. "I haven't given

them jobs. They've earned every one of them. They make my job easier."

It's a service philosophy that all customers — commercial or individual — can expect, Courtney said.

"You can walk into any of our lobbies and talk to a human being, or pick up the phone and talk to a human being," he said. "That's the way we like to do business."

Consistent?

When Oak Valley expands to Bishop next year, expect another opening on the 28th day of the month.

Barring a holiday, it's as good as in the bank.

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