

Bird Island Frandsen Bank Welcomes New President

Rick Bonlender is not your typical banker or rather he's not the stereotypical caricature of a banker we all think of. You know, the one sitting back in his desk, counting the cash and coming up with ways to trick people out of their hard-earned profits. Rick Bonlender genuinely cares about his customers and the community they are all a part of. He's been through three career changes and is prepared for this to be his final career choice. Mr. Bonlender is supported by his wife who is a Culinary Consultant and by his 23-year-old daughter who is an entrepreneur in San Diego, California. You could say the apple didn't fall too far from the tree.

Mr. Bonlender became involved with nonprofit organizations while attending university at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. In his first position, as a community organizer, Mr. Bonlender showed his outreach skills by helping to spread and manage the group's Community Crime Prevention project. This project brought police officers into the neighborhoods where they worked and gave the citizens and officers an outlet to communicate positively while at sponsored block parties and various community-centered activities. His second career choice was heavily involved with weeding and getting his knees dirty. Mr. Bonlender was part of and founder of a program through the state called "Minnesota Green". This program stemmed from the implementation of community gardens throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul area and brought vertical gardens into classrooms around the twin cities. Mr. Bonlender was also able to get to know many Hmong refugees with this experience, who were a majority of the gardening force. Not too long after starting "Minnesota Green", Mr. Bonlender realized he truly had a passion for helping more than just plants grow; he wanted communities and people to grow as well.

Mr. Bonlender wanted to learn the in's and out's of running nonprofit organizations but he wanted to find ways for these organizations to be successful and not hurt for support like so many nonprofits are. He decided to move in a different direction and worked with a mentorship and community networking program: "Enterprise Facilitation". Here he learned to be a new kind of community organizer; he became an organizer that learned to network and leverage social capital for aid in various projects for many people and businesses to get the training or recognition for good work that they deserved. Mr. Bonlender is a true believer in serendipity, the process of experience, and letting go of preconceived notions that could cloud out the positivity and collaboration that is possible in any situation. He made contacts in the banking field once he realized he needed financial background information to run a nonprofit organization and eventually eased into business banking himself. It was a slow journey but one that he is very proud of because in his own words, "I'm not passionate about the numbers. I'm passionate about the people." His experience with outreach and organization lent themselves well to sales and marketing in the banking world. Mr. Bonlender soon found his place in this world of numbers after being in the top 2% of business bankers with his company by the end of his first year. The bad side of banking (the side we hear about so often in the news currently) started to creep up on him a little less than ten years ago so Rick Bonlender decided to transition into community banking.

He wanted to make sure he could still help the community in more than just a financial way. Mr. Bonlender hopes this is his last position in banking and is really enjoying the possibilities that Bird Island has to offer. He emphasized that Frandsen Bank and himself truly care about the community and while of course retail presence is necessary, they want to be a part of the growth that this area is capable of. Frandsen Bank and Rick Bonlender are here to stay and their goals for Bird Island and Renville County truly encompass community outreach. Mr. Bonlender wants to be an encouraging force in this area and to let people know he's here to help grow our quaint, little town. He has many ideas and projects that he's brainstorming to keep Bird Island and Renville County people-focused and as Dennis Frandsen, long-time entrepreneur and founder of Frandsen Bank, would prefer: finding a need and going above and beyond to meet that need.

We'll be putting out more information on these various community outreach possibilities and programs as they come together so be on the look out. Stop by Frandsen and join me in letting Rick know we're more than happy to have him! I'm sure if you have any ideas or just want to spitball and brainstorm Rick would love to meet you!