

Richard C. (Rich) Emery left an indelible mark on the business community of the Tri-Cities and throughout the state of Washington.

His longstanding career in the financial services industry included his role as one of the original founders of the American National Bank in 1981. Headquartered in Kennewick, WA, American National grew to primarily serve local small businesses and quickly became central to the foundation and growth of many of the well-established companies located in the Tri-Cities today. Rich and his team held firm to tried-and-true business practices, took appropriate risks, and helped guide many a young entrepreneur to success.

After 15 years at the helm, American National Bank was eventually sold, prompting Rich to bring his expertise to several other financial institutions throughout the state of Washington. In each case, he brought the entities he ran back to a more stable foundation of classic community banking, and in 2002, he was called back to the Tri-Cities to take on the role of CEO of Community First Bank. During a time when the organization needed him most, Rich's leadership steered the bank away from a sideline business that had led it down a perilous path and brought it back to its core roots.

Under Rich's leadership, Community First Bank established numerous policies, procedures, and cultural habits that still support the company today. In short order the bank was back on sound footing and stronger than ever. His efforts included educating the company's Board of Directors on their role in overseeing the company—a key component to ensuring the company stayed true to its purpose both at that time and in the years to come.

With all of the success Rich had a hand in over the course of his career, perhaps most notable is his legacy of mentorship and unyielding support of countless bankers over his tenure. His retirement from Community First Bank is a prime example of Rich's commitment to developing young talent and to doing what is best for the company even when it may not be in his best interest personally.

After multiple meetings between myself, Rich, and the bank's Board of Directors, the decision to hire me was made in 2006. The plan was clear (to me, at least) that I was being brought in as part of a succession plan and that I would eventually become CEO. However, Rich understood that, while I had a strong grasp on the front-end aspects of providing for the client (client services, deposits, loans, financial advice, etc.), I had almost no experience in the back end of the business. Operations, technology, compliance, accounting, and all things regulatory are critical pieces to a successful banking entity.

Rich would not allow the company to be mismanaged. I was to gain enough understanding of the components of the business for which I had no experience, *or I would not be able to*

take over the company. He saw to it that I not only learned what I needed to know, but that he assembled a great team of professionals to directly manage the back-end functions and to provide me with a tremendous amount of support.

Because Rich was successful at ensuring my professional growth, it became apparent to him—sooner than it did for me—that I was ready. Without any prodding from outside influencers, Rich concluded that it was in the best interest of the company to begin a transition plan. While he still loved what he was doing and would have happily continued to serve as CEO, he felt it was in the best interest of the company to allow for a transition to occur and to not risk losing the opportunity. He announced in 2008 that he would retire at the end of the year, and in January of 2009, he handed the keys to me.

Rich went on to serve as the CEO of Bank CDA in Coeur D'Alene, ID where he brought yet another institution back to health and mentored another young CEO. During this time, Rich also consulted with numerous financial institutions through the financial crisis. I am convinced that no bank ran by Rich Emery would have ever succumbed to the plight that so many endured during the crisis. He understood where to draw the line.

One of Rich's favorite words was "remarkable." He wanted our company to be remarkable in every way—and the legacy that Rich has left truly is just that. I am forever grateful for the opportunity and education he has given me. For this reason, I am so excited that we get to continue to honor Rich's remarkable legacy with the Richard C. Emery Business and Finance Scholarship Fund. This fund will enable numerous young people to develop as business professionals, and it will enable Rich to continue make a profound impact on the lives of future leaders.

Beginning in 2022, the Richard C. Emery Business and Finance Scholarship Fund will award scholarships in amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 per year to students on track to receive a four-year degree in the areas of business, accounting, finance, economics, or a related field.

Along with Community First Bank & HFG Trust, the Emery family welcomes all those who wish to make a contribution in Richard's memory, and, together with the 3 Rivers Community Foundation, have made online contributions available [HERE](#) through their Make a Donation link.

Eric Pearson

Chief Executive Officer, Community First Bank | HFG Trust