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Westfield bucks mortgage trend with experienced officers

INDEPENDENCE, Ohio – For many banks, the mortgage department is a place for junior associates to get their feet wet in the finance business. Westfield Bank has taken the opposite approach, looking to service its clients with seasoned professionals through its Westfield Mortgage subsidiary.

“Our strategy is to get experienced bankers and mortgage professionals to provide a high level of service to our clients,” said Tom Fraser, director of Westfield Mortgage. “Because of our expertise we are able to offer a variety of mortgage products, allowing us to combine the strength of a bank with the flexibility of a mortgage broker.”

That dedication to quality service caused Westfield to recruit veteran loan officer Bob Schmieler, who spent 17 years at Freedom Mortgage before joining Westfield this summer. During his time at Freedom Mortgage, Schmieler handled more than 3,000 loans totaling more than \$300 million.

"I'm not just an order taker," Schmieler said. "Buying a home is the biggest purchase my clients will ever make and I feel it's my responsibility to educate them about all of their options and the implications of their decisions."

For example, he said, when a client sells a home, the instinctive inclination is to put all the proceeds of the sale toward the down payment on the next house.

"In most cases it makes sense to hold onto a portion of those proceeds," Schmieler said. "It is important for people to have some liquidity. I think liquidity is key to being financially sound. Once

you put money into your down payment you're not going to get it back. Discussing issues like that is important to be sure that a borrower makes the most intelligent decision possible."

Taking the time to fully review a client's situation and offering sound advice and options makes a difference to clients.

"Many of my clients are surprised that I take so much time to review their options so thoroughly because other loan officers haven't done that," Schmieler said. "In 17 years my business has been built 100 percent on referrals. That's because of the trust my clients have placed in me."

Schmieler brings to Westfield a long reputation of honest service and integrity throughout Cuyahoga, Medina and Lorain counties.

"When a real estate agent gets a pre-approval from a less experienced loan officer, or from an online mortgage broker, sometimes it isn't worth the paper it is printed on," Schmieler said. "When I provide a pre-approval, they know it's a guaranteed deal. That's what comes from 17 years of experience and a solid reputation in the business."

At Westfield, Schmieler is able to offer commercial loans, but his specialty is in working with home buyers, particularly first time home buyers and move-ups.

"I also provide bridge loans for people who want to buy a home before they have sold their current home," he said.

Westfield's strategy of servicing the residential mortgage market with seasoned professionals is indicative of the foresight that has caused the company to grow from a new division of the Westfield Insurance Group, with \$11 million in assets in 2001, to one of the region's fastest growing banks, with \$250 million in assets.

Schmieler is one of 16 loan officers operating out of Westfield Mortgage's headquarters in Independence. While focusing on servicing the local market, Westfield is licensed to offer mortgages in 48 states.

Schmieler, who earned a B.S. Degree in social ecology from the University of California, got started in the lending business as the neighborhood improvement manager for the city of Long Beach, Calif. In that capacity, Schmieler provided low interest home improvement loans to economically challenged residents. A native of North Olmsted, Schmieler and his wife, Kathy, are 17-year residents of Strongsville. The couple has three daughters. Schmieler is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

A part of the Westfield Group., Westfield Mortgage is affiliated with Westfield Bank, Westfield Title, Westfield Escrow and Westfield Insurance. The Westfield Group is headquartered in Westfield Center, Ohio.

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Note to editors: High resolution photo of Bob Schmieler can be downloaded at www.recycle.cc/schmieler.jpg, or by email by sending a request to ken@thewriteco.com.