



# Small Town Small Bank Big Ideas

## *UBank and President/CEO Allen McClary helping meet needs big and small*

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PHOTOS BY KEITH MILES AND COURTESY OF ALLEN McCLARY

**UBank's Allen McClary plays a prominent role in the economic and civic life of Jellico, a small town north of Knoxville that borders the Kentucky state line.**

He knows the names of all of his employees, their spouses and children, the bank's shareholders, and most all of his customers—one of whom comes in every morning as soon as the bank opens just to get a cup of coffee and a bottle of water. He often gets involved in transactions and answers customer or employee questions that never reach most CEO's desks.

He's as likely to lend someone \$10 out of his pocket as he is to make a \$50,000 loan.

And he wouldn't have it any other way.

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As a third-generation banker in the small town of Jellico—population 2,500—Allen McClary enjoys the challenges and successes UBank provides.

With \$66 million in assets and 17 employees, UBank is one of the smallest banks in Tennessee. (In fact, it is the second smallest, just ahead of Citizens Bank & Trust in Atwood.) The bank, named Union Bank for most of its 100-year history, has been part of the community's lifeblood for all the decades, through thick and thin.

"The name UBank was first used in an advertising campaign about five years before we changed the name," McClary said. "We called it U Banking and the slogan was 'Everything we do begins with U.' We decided that kind of worked, so we changed our sign out front and said, 'OK, let's make it official,' and we did."

### Proving a point

McClary is a third-generation banker who was determined not to be one.

His grandfather, Jake McClary, came to work at the Union Bank in 1934 after the Etowah, Tenn., bank he'd worked for closed during the Depression. He became president in 1952, and continued working until he was 88, the last 10 years as a teller. His father, Pat A. McClary, who still serves as UBank's chairman of the board, went to work for Hamilton National Bank in Chattanooga when he got out of the armed services in 1954 and later joined the elder McClary at Union Bank with a plan for him to assume leadership. McClary's mother also went to work at the bank in human resources and management.

When his parents moved from Chattanooga to Jellico, Allen McClary, then 15, remained behind to finish high school

at The McCallie School, living with his grandmother and making the drive to Jellico on weekends.

McClary went to the University of Tennessee, working at Union Bank in the summers, and he received his degree in civil engineering in 1982. After graduating, he landed a job at an engineering firm in Williamsburg, Ky., just north of Jellico. His wife, Diane, is a Jellico native, and they bought a house there and started a family.

Still, Pat McClary persisted in guiding his son to a destiny of joining the family tradition.

"Even when I was in college, my dad would say, 'You know you only need to finish college, and then just come back to the bank,'" McClary said. "Dad was always encouraging me to come to the bank, so I decided if I'm going to be in Jellico, that's probably where I need to be. I did everything I could to prove that I could be something besides a banker. And I proved that."

McClary was familiar with the bank from his work there as a student. He knew everybody and knew what was going on behind the scenes; but he still had a learning curve to go through.

"For the first five years, I learned to do everything, which almost hinders me to this day because I still know a little bit of everything, and people still come to me with their minor problems; but I let them. As I tell my staff, I'm not going to ask them to do anything I have not done or not willing to do myself."

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# A Video Star Is Born



**As UBank's 98th anniversary approached in late 2016, Allen McClary and his team decided to make a video to mark the occasion and share it on the bank's Facebook page.** It was then that McClary became a video star of sorts in the small town of Jellico, using a self-deprecating sense of humor that plays well on social media.

"Here at the U, we are proud to announce we are celebrating Annie Versary's 98th birthday," McClary deadpans. "Cut," the director says off-screen. "We're not celebrating Annie Versary's birthday," he bellows. "Well, whose birthday is it?" McClary asks. "It's UBank's 98th an-ni-versary," says the director. And so on.

Then there's the one about celebrating Community Banking Month, which McClary garbles as community "baking" month as he stands wearing an apron and holding a mixing bowl and an egg beater.

Some feature customers, such as the couple George and Ethel, in which he assures her he can pay the bills through online banking even though she has no envelopes or stamps. Others are more serious in tone, such as his interview with one of the founders of the Jellico Rescue Squad in the 1950s. All of them have proven to be highly popular,



Allen and his wife, Diane

with hundreds of likes; a few of them had 4,000 views—an impressive amount for such a small town.

“I got the idea, I believe at an ICBA convention, during a panel on marketing,” McClary said. One banker showed some Facebook videos his bank had done that mixed comedy with messaging. That gave me the idea.”

UBank has posted about 25 videos in the past two years. “We haven’t been as active lately, but we’re going to kick it back up,” he said. “We’re also going to add Instagram and Twitter, because that’s where the young people are.”

For McClary, it’s a great way to reach people in a town that doesn’t have its own local newspaper or TV station. Instead it has just one radio station and one billboard.

“UBank is a great example for other banks to follow of how you can serve a small area but have a big reach using social media,” said Stacey Langford, TBA executive vice president and chief operations officer. “They are showing you don’t have to have a huge budget or an in-house marketing team to be effective and fun in engaging your community through social media.” 📺

