### 20 Under 40 **Keepsake Edition**

HEADERSHIP & GROWTH

Veronica Sapp



**Matthew Mueller** 



Welcome to our keepsake edition of the "Fremont's 20 Under 40" presented by RTG Medical. Through the nomination and selection process at the Fremont Chamber of Commerce, the Tribune newsroom put together a series of stories highlighting up-andcomers in the local business world.

Our 20 Under 40 series started July 11 and ended on Nov. 21. It achieved the aim of celebrating young business leaders in Fremont. All of them have worked hard to get where they are and will continue to work hard to help Fremont grow. Some of them grew up here or attended Midland University, while others live outside the area and make the commute to Fremont. Regardless, they all love Fremont and want to see the community thrive.

It has been an honor for us to meet these individuals we've profiled and share their stories. All of the stories can be read on our website at fremonttribune. com, but we also wanted to make a keepsake edition and provide readers a second chance to catch any stories missed along the way. This is the first of two pullout sections of our "Outlook" edition and highlights the first 10 individuals we featured in the series. The second pullout section will publish on Jan. 30 and highlight the next 10 individuals featured in the series. On Jan. 23, look for in-depth stories in our Progress section as we look at what will be taking place in Fremont and the area moving forward.



**Taylor Jeppesen** 



**Brandon Peterson** 



**Brenda Wilberding** 

We thank the Fremont Chamber, RTG Medical and all of the local businesses who have supported the series, which enabled us to help the community get to know some of the individuals who will shape the future of business in Fremont.

**FREMONT TRIBUNE** = PRINT = DIGITAL = SOCIAL = MOBILE

**Nichole Owsley** 



**Nick Vrba** 



**Chase Dillon** 



**Brea Paulsen** 



**Paul Von Seggern** 

Sponsored in part by





Taylor Jeppesen sits at his desk at Pinnacle Bank in Fremont. Jeppesen has been vice president of commercial lending at the bank since he was hired last May. **COLLIN SPILINEK**, FREMONT TRIBUNE

## 'I get just as excited'

Taylor Jeppesen helps businesses with loans in Pinnacle Bank role

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

s he was about to finish his senior year at Midland University, Taylor Jeppesen realized that being an accountant just wasn't for him.

After taking an internship with Koski Professional Group in Omaha and deciding he wanted to be around more people, he soon found that his passions lay elsewhere.

"So I got into banking, and after talking with some people, I realized that I can use my accounting background, be it underwriting and so forth," he said, "but then I can also be in a commercial lending role and work with business owners on a daily basis and business development, which helps with the social aspect of that."

Since May, Taylor Jeppesen has vorked at Pinnacle Bank as vice presi-



dent of commercial lending. In his role, he works on commercial loans with local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Born and raised in Fremont, Jeppesen attended Fremont High School, where he was involved in mostly sports, including basketball, track and field and bowling. There, he met his future wife, Madeline.

#### More on his plate

After his graduation in 2008, Jeppesen started his undergraduate in accounting and management at Midland, where his interests shifted from sports to other student organizations.

Jeppesen was involved in the Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda, where he placed in nationals with accounting and financial services and was a student orientation director his junior year.

"I was the student government president also my junior year, I was part of the bowling team and I sang in chapel choir," he said. "I went from not a lot in high school to a ton in college."

Jeppesen said he took just about as much from his organizations and peers as he did from his classes at Midland, learning planning and organizing from orientation and how to make sure everyone's voice is heard from the government.

"So I was able to take a lot from that, but being involved in so much, you really learn time management," he said. "Having a course load and being involved in all these organizations as well, time management is really key."

During his last semester in the spring of 2012, Jeppesen started his internship at Koski with his heart set on being a helped out in filing tax returns after class until the tax season ended in April.

"With my tax internship, that's when I really realized and changed course and realized that maybe accounting, with the long hours and the tax season and all that, really wasn't for me," Jeppesen said. "It's a lot different doing a 50-minutes class during the day in accounting versus going and doing it eight hours, 10 hours a day."

#### A shift in plans

Jeppesen graduated that May and was awarded the John R. Prauner Memorial Scholarship. Soon after, he started work at a Fremont bank, where he said he ning on teaching at that, something knew he made the right decision.

"I've always been a numbers guy, I've

Taylor Jeppesen sits with his family, from left: 6-year-old daughter, Vivian; wife, Madeline; 2-year-old son, Noah; and 7-year-old daughter, Neva.

thing is, I'm also a people person. I'm real social."

Jeppesen first started off work as a credit analyst at the bank, where he underwrote loans for other commercial lenders, spread the financials and added narratives.

"You're basically doing a lot of the background work for the lenders, and so that really piqued my interest," he said.

There, Jeppesen met Ron Weaklend, who he said pushed him to be better at his position.

"He was my mentor, and I would be in Ron's office well after 5 o'clock, and he would have to kick me out because I would just be asking him questions and trying to be a sponge and gaining as much knowledge as I could from Ron," he said.

Madeline in September 2011. They live in Fremont together with their three children: 7-year-old daughter, Neva; 6-vear-old daughter, Vivian; and 2-year-old son, Noah.

Additionally, Jeppesen received his Master of Business Administration at Wayne State College in 2015. Since certified public accountant. There, he then, he's also attended a few banking schools throughout his career, most recently graduating from the Graduate School of Banking at Colorado in July 2019

> During his time in Fremont, Jeppesen has also contributed to various organizations. He is treasurer of the Fremont Midland Entertainment Series and has volunteered at Uniquely Yours Stability Support and LifeHouse, where he taught a budgeting class.

> One spring semester, Jeppesen also taught as an adjunct faculty professor for an accounting class back at Midland.

"They had somebody that was plancame up and they could no longer teach in the spring," he said. "And so

always enjoyed math," he said. "But the Nick [Schreck] reached out to see if it cited as the entrepreneurs and the folks was something I would be interested in, and it was, so I just taught that one semester night class."

> Before leaving the bank after seven vears of work there, Jeppesen also had the role of vice president of commercial lending. For a short time, he recently worked in a Valley bank as well.

> "About early April, Pinnacle reached to come back to Fremont," he said. "And so that's kind of how the ball started rolling."

#### **Starting work at Pinnacle**

Pinnacle President Scott Meister said Jeppesen had an impressive resume with excellent education and prior work experience.

'After interviewing him and getting While at the bank, Jeppesen married to know him a little bit as a person, we felt he was a great fit for our culture at Pinnacle Bank," he said. "He's a smart young man that has his priorities in place."

> Part of what drew Jeppesen to Pinnacle was not only its large corporate branding but its ability to allow the Fremont location to work as a community bank in the market.

> "And so they give us the flexibility to make decisions locally, all those things," he said. "And so it's a community bank, but with a large backing of a corporate bank, so it allows us to do bigger deals, larger deals and so forth."

lending, Jeppesen said a majority of his portfolio is investment property real estate. He said his favorite part of the job is getting to see people with ideas coming into his office, such as entrepreneurs wanting to start a new business

pride in," he said. "And I get just as ex-

that are on the other side of the desk."

#### **Connecting With** The Community

At Pinnacle, Jeppesen said he's made long-lasting relationships with the people he's helped.

"In a position like this, you really get out to me and asked if I'd be interested to know the customers really personally, and you kind of become friends with some of your customers, you really get to know their family. They allow you to be in their personal life," he said. "And so I've seen it where companies have come and small businesses especially get started, and then they grow and they have a presence on the street, a frontage, a building."

Pinnacle Senior Vice President Amber Barton said Jeppesen has brought great business to the bank with his network of relationships. She said his customers see a likable and smart personality and see value in his business.

"Despite his relatively young age, Taylor handles himself with poise and confidence," she said. "His success in his education and previous work pursuits indicate he is someone who is driven to excel and grow."

As banking is a relationship-driven career, Meister said Jeppesen will continue his success with these.

"His engaging personality and intel-As vice president of commercial ligence set him apart from others at his stage of life," he said. "Taylor will undoubtedly be a future leader within the Fremont community."

> Jeppesen said he just loves giving back to Fremont, which he said hopes it will always be his home.

"The growth that Fremont has en-"Helping and assisting with the fi- countered the last three to four years nancing with that business and seeing has been great," he said. "Fremont is a it grow and establish into a really suc- very giving community as well, and so cessful business is something that I take I'm just real happy and excited to be a part of it."

## Bridging connections

Brenda Wilberding helps connections between Midland, businesses

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

s business development manager at Midland University, Brenda Wilberding often speaks with many alumni from the school.

An alumna herself, Wilberding said they often share experiences spent at the Fremont college.

"Then I get to share with them the experiences that our students are having right now," she said. "So to really funnel that all together is what my job is, including just making sure that the people that are supporting Midland know that we appreciate everything that they do for us."

For the past three years, Wilberding has worked at her alma mater in connecting the university with its various business partners. Two years prior, she joined the college as an admissions counselor.

Wilberding is a Fremont area native, marrying her husband, Brian, in 2012 at St. Patrick's Catholic Church. The two have two daughters: 6-year-old Kalife and 2-year-old Revlyn.

Born and raised just north of Fremont, Wilberding, the youngest of four siblings, attended kindergarten and first grade at Rosedale Elementary School, a two-room schoolhouse that closed in 2002.

From there, Wilberding transferred to Linden Elementary School before attending Logan View High School. There, she acted in one-act plays, had the lead role in musicals and was a member of the dance, track and volleyball teams.

"I always like to say my one claim to fame is that I was Jordan Larson's setter for three years because she also went there," Wilberding said of the standout Husker and USA volleyball player. "All that in a fun, small school."

Loving the small school feel, Wilberding came to Midland on a volleyball and theater scholarship after graduating in 2004.

"I studied journalism and then had an emphasis in advertising and public relations," she said. "So I knew that I kind of wanted to be



Brenda Wilberding, business development manager at Midland University, stands in front of the Cross at the Center fountain. She has been with the university since 2015.



"I didn't know if it would be my long-term position, but knew that I was really interested in coming back to Midland and helping students find the right school for them and really talk to them about what a small school can offer you and being able to continue to pursue your passions," she said.

Wilberding joined the Midland team in 2015, working in the position for about a year-and-a-half. Toward the end of her role, she started helping someone transition away from the business development manager position.

"They were like, 'You know what? You should definitely just apply for it because I think you'd be great. You love Fremont and being connected to Fremont, and that's what this position needs," Wilberding said. "So that is when I started as a business development manager at Midland."

Around the same time Wil

and what we're needing are mutually beneficial," Wilberding said.

For Wilberding, she said her favorite part of the job is to see the students come back to campus in the fall and attend the Back to Business Bash, which she said allows them to get to meet new people in the community.

"Our businesses get to meet a lot of our students for the first time and then also get to see some of our returning students that might be looking for jobs," she said. "And so I think the fall, the buzz of energy, the opportunities for networking and building those relationships between businesses in Fremont and our students is probably the coolest part."

Wilberding said her position has made her feel more comfortable with public speaking, which she said has been a "gamechanger."

"I think if you would have taken me five years back and told me I was going to speak in front of a group of people and tell them about what I do and what our needs are, I wouldn't be able to do it, as much of an extrovert as I have always been," she said. "All the activities that I'm involved in has made me feel a lot better about public speaking, and it's just made me a more competent person."

Janssen said Wilberding has done a fantastic job in her position of connecting community businesses and nonprofits to the Midland campus and its students.

"Since joining the advancement team, Brenda has taken our business supporter program to new levels, and has written grants that have supported projects like our campus arboretum," she said.

Wilberding said she was also glad to have so many other young professionals in the Fremont area to work with.

"I feel like I can call on so many people in Fremont easily to ask a question, and they can do the same with me," she said. "Not only have I gained this professional ground with having those relationships, but also just on a personal level with how many friends I feel like I've met."

During her time in the Fremont ommunity, Wilberding has joined

around people and help people, so that's the direction that I went."

Midland brought many opportunities for Wilberding, including a full-time position as assistant manager for Hy-Vee, a freshman volleyball coaching position at Logan View and an internship at Eagle Distributing.

While at Eagle Distributing, Wilberding helped the company with marketing for its nonalcoholic categories of beverages, including Jones Soda and Monster Energy, which she called a "competitive market."

After graduating a semester early in 2007, Wilberding took a full-time position at Eagle Distributing, doing both sales and marketing and traveling throughout its seven-state territory.

hard and make sure that I was and catering departments. treating my customers incredibly well," she said. "So customer service was a really big takeaway portant lessons about customer from that that I felt was really im- service and hard work at Hy-Vee. opening for an admissions counportant to make sure that I built Additionally, she learned that she selor at Midland.

COURTESY

Brenda Wilberding stands with her family: 2-year-old daughter, Revlyn; 6-year-old daughter, Kalife; and husband, Brian.

I spoke with that were ordering and making sure that we had a to treat them well."

Following this position, Wilberding returned to Hy-Vee as an assistant manager of wine and spirits in Omaha for three months. As she had worked in the floral shop in Fremont in high school, she took the position of manager of the department for three-and-a-half years before "I always had to work really managing the wine and spirits

> Like at Eagle Distributing, Wilberding said she learned im-

connections with the people that always had to do her homework and know her product.

"When people came in and good connection, that I was going they had a special occasion, they had a birthday they were celebrating or an anniversary and they needed your help picking out a product, you're able to do your best to fulfill their need," Wilberding said. "So I felt like it was very hard work, and I think that's just kind of something that my parents and family instilled in me at a young age."

After 13 total years with Hy-Vee, Wilberding said she decided she needed a change in her path in order to spend more time with her family. Soon, she found a job

berding came to Midland, Jessica Janssen, vice president of started her position, hiring Wilberding to her team in 2017.

"Brenda has an enthusiasm for Midland and the Fremont community that is truly unmatched," she said. "She is smart, friendly and an amazing team player."

In her position as business development manager, Wilberding works with about 120 businesses that partner with and give monetarily support to Midland and its students.

While many of the businesses give internship opportunities to Midland's students, Midland is also able to give back through fundraising tailgates and golf tournaments, as well as offering volunteer support to nonprofits.

"I think the biggest thing with my position now and what's led up to it is just the idea of providsure that what they're needing those opportunities happen."

the boards for the Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce and Freinstitutional advancement, also mont Area Veterans Coalition. She is also a former chair and active member of the chamber's diplomats and is a member of the Fremont Area Young Professionals.

"Brenda is an incredible professional that has given so much to the Fremont community through her work and volunteer service," Janssen said. "She represents the Fremont community well, and will continue to do great things."

With her position, Wilberding said she's also been able to create relationships with people in the community, something she loves to do.

"The coolest thing really about my job is that I get to kind of be the helper to connect everybody and to really strengthen the relationship," she said. "Because really, Midland needs Fremont, and I feel like Fremont really ing really good customer service needs Midland, and so it's fun to to our business partners, making be that bridge, to make some of

### **URGENT CARE IN FREMONT HAS A NEW HOME.**

Methodist Urgent Care is now open in its new location at 1240 E 23rd Street (formerly MedExpress), with expanded hours and services.

**Methodist Urgent Care** 1240 E 23rd Street, Fremont (402) 815-7100

Weekdays: 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. Weekends & Holidays: Noon – 6 p.m.

No appointment is necessary, but patients are encouraged to call ahead to ensure timely service.

The care you need, when you need it.



#### FREMONT TRIBUNE

## Finding the bright side

Von Seggern reflects on service to community

#### NOAH JOHNSON FREMONT TRIBUNE

aul Von Seggern believes it's important to find the bright side of everything.

He's a funeral director at Moser Memorial Chapel. Grief comes with the job. Von Seggern often finds himself placed in the position of comforting a family going through one of the most difficult times in their lives.

Individuals with introverted or "bland" personalities might not be cut out for this line of work, Von Seggern said. For him, he believes his outgoing and lighthearted touch brings an air of comfort to the families he works with.

"Having the kind of personality that I have, I'm outgoing and enjoy meeting new people and sharing conversations about their loved ones and the memories they had of them, is kind of uplifting and comforting in a way for me," he said.

Von Seggern has spent the majority of his life in Fremont. He started school at Howard Elementary before eventually graduating from Archbishop Bergan Catholic School.

It was there where Von Seggern was exposed to his future line of work. Through a career development class, he was able to work at the local funeral home for a couple of credits.

"It sounds funny, but I literally just flipped through the book, I closed my eyes and I just pointed my finger and it had mortuary science," he said. "I thought that sounded really interesting and decided to take a little trip over there and check it out."

There, he gained valuable experience about the day-to-day activities of a funeral home.

Von Seggern later went to attend college at Midland University. He wanted to explore other career options, such as podiatry and optometry. After going back and forth with his college roommate about what they wanted to do in the future, mortuary science kept creeping up in the back of Von Seggern's mind.

"I enjoyed mortuary science and, after a lot of personal reflection, I just stuck with it," he said.

So, Von Seggern moved to Kansas City to study mortuary science for the funeral business, from both a protwo years. He ended up living in the fessional and personal standpoint. oldest funeral home in Kansas while attending school.

Following his time in Kansas City,



Paul Von Seggern

appreciate life.

"I see everything in this job with children and just younger people that have passed away and it's just something that hits home," he said. "When you have your own children, life is precious. Anything can happen at any time."

Von Seggern often finds himself committed to working for long periods of time, so having a strong support system around him is vital. That's where his wife, along with his mother and mother-in-law have played an important role.

"They have been a godsend for taking care of the girls while I'm working," he said.

Robynn Ewing works in the office at Moser Memorial Chapel. On top of that, she's also the wife of Mike Ewing, one of the home's funeral directors.

"You know, it's a 24/7 job," she said. At any moment, that pager could go

work closer to home and helps him with the care he shows for the people they have is amazing." he works with, represent Von Seggern's strong character.

"He's compassionate," she said. "He's sincere and he's a hard worker with a sense of humor."

Von Seggern said the Fremont community is "amazing." He has been an active member of the community since returning, whether it be coaching Special Olympics teams at the Fremont Family YMCA, serving on various boards, or contributing to his church, Sinai Lutheran, he's found a way to make his friendships thrive.

"It's kind of like where you have a store in town and you know the mabigger city, you wouldn't really see too many people you know."

Of all places in Fremont, if you don't find Von Seggern at Moser Memorial Chapel, he's likely at the YMCA. He said it's the best place in town to de-That means she's seen all sides of compress from a demanding day of work.

"I could probably live there if I had to," he said. "You know, the [YMCA] days of the funeral home."

**COURTESY PHOTOS** 

Von Seggern said one of the most rewarding parts of his job is honoring

veterans. Both Von Seggern's father and grandfather served in the military, so he said providing military honors at funerals is a "definite privilege."

'It's just a privilege that I can be there for families during the most difficult time of their lives," he said.

Von Seggern said he didn't want to seem boastful about the award, but he felt that it was an honor to receive the recognition.

"It means something," he said. "It's definitely a complete honor."

Von Seggern said some may not jority of the people," he said. "In a realize the amount of time required to do his job. He said there are often times where he loses his weekends or misses out on opportunities to visit friends or travel with family.

"Sometimes you're on the job and we never know what's going to happen on a day-to-day basis," he said. One day, we can have four people pass away and they can all happen in the middle of the night. Then, there's "Even if you're 'off,' they're still on." itself kind of relieves the stress of the some times you can go maybe four or ve days without anyone even passing On top of that, the job requires fupants in the Special Olympics, but he neral directors to arrange transportation for deceased residents to the funeral home, perform embalming procedures and handling all the logistics of the funeral. "We're constantly busy at what we do," Von Seggern said. "We don't just do one little thing, so having the recognition of this is kind of fulfilling to know we're a great job."

Von Seggern worked out of a funeral off, meaning it's time to drop everyhome in Columbus from 2006 to 2008 before ultimately returning home to Fremont with his wife, Kylie.

"My heart always brought me back to Fremont," he said.

Von Seggern also has two daughters, four-yearold Maris and oneyear-old Skylar. He said having children definitely brings his

thing and get back to work.

"You could just sit down and the pager goes off, or just get to your child's activity and it goes off and you have to go," she said.

She said Von Seggern's sense of humor plays an important role in keeping everything light-hearted around the funeral home. That sense of humor, along

Having kids of his own has limited away." his involvement in coaching particihas previously helped coach basketball, softball and track.

Von Seggern said the excitement and dedication each child shows in their respective sport is "amazing."

'They make have some disabilities, but I'm there to help them and it's all about teamwork and just the joy of the game," he said. "The passion that

Von Seggern poses for a photo with his wife, Kylie.

# Coming back home

### Mueller returns to Fremont to help community

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

hen Matthew Mueller found out he had been hired at First National Bank of Omaha after leaving the Fremont community more than 15 years prior, he could finally let his parents know.

Having kept the job interviews a secret from them, Mueller decided to break the news to them on Christmas Day in 2015.

"We had my son, Jaxson, make a card that said, 'Roses are red, violets are blue. We're moving to Nebraska to be closer to you," he said. "And they just went bananas, because they had been asking us to come back: 'When are you moving back? When are you getting close? When are you coming home?"

Having lived in Kansas City since 2003, Mueller finally came home that next month as a commercial lender for the bank with his wife, Melanie, and their son, Jaxson, and daughter, Kennedy, who are now 11 and 7, respectively.

Mueller was originally born in Fremont, attending elementary school at District 11, a little farm school south of Fremont. In junior and senior high school, Mueller attended Archbishop Bergan Catholic School, where he met Melanie and took part in theater, football and other sports.

"Being in a smaller school, you kind of get involved with a lot of different activities," Mueller said. "So I really got a well-rounded education."

#### **Stepping out**

After graduating high school in 1999, Mueller attended Doane University in Crete. As another smaller school, Doane allowed multiple opportunities for him, including theater, fraternities and being head of the radio station. Mueller graduated in 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts in organizational communication, with minors in business and mass communication.

University.

"She still had a year left, so I



Matthew Muller, director, commercial lending at First National Bank of Omaha in Fremont, sits in front of his desk in his office.

"I think everyone that is a their weekend visits to Fremont go home. banker, it just kind of falls in your to see his children's grandparents lap," he said. "You're out and you're meeting with people with other jobs and professions, and an opportunity will just kind of show up."

In Kansas City, Mueller worked for a couple of banks as a small business banker and as a commercial banker. In 2007, he received his Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

But with his banking positions, Mueller said he had lots of opportunity to train.

"Just getting your foot in the door, whether it's starting as a teller or a personal banker, there's a huge career in banking for anyone," he said. "And that's kind of what got me in."

Mueller said he worked well in still attending school at Rockhurst and insurance agents. He said with FNBO's philosophy. these partnerships, he was able to fully realize his work in the field.

would have to be put on hold.

"We would come back maybe once or twice a month," he said. "So they'd still see their grandparents, but we just kind of wanted

that relationship to be a bit stronger." In the fall of 2015, Muller found the perfect opportunity to build

that relationship: a job opening at FNBO in Fremont. "I was like, 'Wow, that's a pretty good deal," he said. "'That's right

back at our home town, which would be pretty cool. I know a lot of people there, and so does Melanie?"

Mueller applied for the position and had several interviews with Fremont Market President Barry Benson, who has been with the bank for 20 years. Benson said he Even though Mueller had grad- the small business space and had respected Mueller's integrity and uated from Doane, Melanie was "centers of influence" with banks values, which he said matched

> sation with Matt, I liked his posi- want to do." "And that's kind of the aspect tive energy and self-motivation," he said. "His outgoing personality and drive seemed contagious and I thought he would be a great member of our team." With the interviews, Mueller said he had to have them done in private from his parents to avoid disappointment in case he didn't get the position. One of these meetings included a "super-secret" dinner with his wife and heads of the bank at J's Steakhouse, which included getting a hotel room in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and letting his niece in on it. "We were like, 'Hey, can you come watch our kids for a few hours while we go have dinner in Fremont?" Mueller said. "So we get to this hotel, get my niece to come out, watch the kids for two or three hours, we hop in the car, come to Fremont, have dinner, meet everybody and then come back and go to Kansas City the next day?

#### Back in town

Despite a house to sell, on Jan. 4, 2016, Mueller started work at FNBO as a senior adviser in commercial lending.

"I moved in with my in-laws at the time for about two months or so while we got the house sold in Kansas City," he said. "And ulti-mately, the kids came up after that and Jaxson started Bergan in first grade here in Fremont that spring." Mueller has had his position in commercial lending since starting work, having been promoted to a director last year. With his role, he said it's not unlike the television series "Shark Tank," in which contestants pitch their business ideas to several investors.

"People come in, they have ideas about businesses and we kind of just talk it through," Mueller said. "So they'll come in, they'll have either a business plan "From my first phone conver- or some different things that they

during the flooding last March made him realize how special of a community Fremont was and made him feel like he was a part of something bigger than himself.

"We always talk about buying local and supporting your small town and your small business, and I really feel Fremont does try very hard to do that," he said. "And I think that's what I love about this town, is that it really is a close-knit group of business professionals, and other citizens are getting together to really help this town."

#### Helping the community

Since Mueller's addition to the FNBO team, Benson said he's been led a number of initiatives for its business team and have been a mentor to others in the Fremont market.

"Matt goes to great lengths to take care of his customers and will do whatever it takes to find solutions for their financial needs," he said. "He values relationships and works with his clients to build a team of advisers to help them be successful, which has allowed him to grow his customer base year and after year every year since he came back to Fremont."

Mueller said in moving from Kansas City to Fremont, he's been able to grow as a lender. While he was working in Kansas City, his loan sizes would typically range from \$250,000 to \$2 million, while Fremont's loans range from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

As a result, the banks in Kansas City aren't as big of an asset to the community and aren't able to make more of an impact to the community, Mueller said.

"They're so big and there's so many banks that one bank won't really float the town or the city," he said. "You've got some pretty big players here in Fremont between the local banks that are here, and so being able to kind of support the community in that regard I think really helped."

In his work, Mueller said he's been fortunate to get to help businesses in his home town.

"It just feels really good to help remont grow," he said. "I think

moved to Kansas City to be with her with like \$500 in my pocket of graduation money," he said. "So I had enough to put down for an apartment, no real job."

The summer after graduation, Mueller's father helped him get a job siding houses. But hungry to use the degree that he had worked so hard for, he ended up finding a job with Enterprise Rent-A-Car in the fall.

"I did some of that rental business stuff, and that was where I kind of earned my chops in terms of sales activity," he said.

In the mid-2000s, Mueller moved on from his position and started work at Gateway, where he worked as a sales manager before massive layoffs. During his time working at ADP, he started partnering large banks, where he got his first taste for banking.

#### A start in banking

With banking, Mueller said he believes very few people come out of college knowing they want to be a banker.

that they were looking for, was just finding someone that really wants to help people," Mueller said. "I never thought of it as being a salesperson. I'm a helper, and I want to go out and I want to help people to get to that next point."

#### **Coming back home**

In 2015, both Matt and Melanie Mueller lost grandparents in Fremont whom they were close to.

During the multiple-hour drives to the funerals, Mueller said he and his wife would have deep conversations about their home town.

"We were just talking about how we loved growing up next to our grandparents and how it was great to spend the weekends over at their place and hang out with them and have them come to sporting events and that kind of stuff." he said.

With Jaxson reaching the age where he was going to be involved and finally breaking the news to in multiple sports, Mueller said his parents, Mueller was ready to

After receiving the position

through the five Cs of credit, which includes character, capacity, collateral, capital and conditions, to get them set up with a loan.

"It's really kind of trying to figure out what's best for each one of our customers and know that each one is different and that we just have to handle them differently as well," he said. "Day to day, it's really neat because it just changes every day."

As each person and business he talks to is different, Mueller said his job brings a unique challenge.

'Really, I guess my job is just to learn and understand my customer and really what they want to do in the end, and then figure out a good game plan together on how to get there," he said. "And I think that's really what my dayto-day job is, is just to continue to have those conversations with people I run into here in the community."

Mueller said several events like the volunteers placing sandbags

Together, Mueller said he goes coming back and being from here and knowing what it can be and knowing the good people that are here and having that ability to be a part of it and really help bring Fremont up is really a great thing for me, and that's what I love doing here every day."

Whether it's Mueller's involvement in the community through nonprofit boards and committees or with his family, Benson said he's accomplished so much in his four years at the bank.

"At FNBO we encourage our employees to give back to our community," he said. "With Matt's caring heart, he doesn't sit back and wait to be asked to help, he jumps in feet first and wants to know what more he can do."

But for Mueller, it's just all part of the job.

"That's really what I try to do, I just try to help people," he said. "The best that I can do will ultimately serve the bank really well, but most importantly, it'll serve the community of Fremont even better."



We are proud to honor our very own Mandy Ostdiek and Matthew Mueller as two of the best and brightest emerging leaders in Fremont.

> () fnbo The great big small bank

> > Member FDIC

PROGRESS 2021

# Taking the lead

### Brandon Peterson enjoys leadership opportunities as COO at DPA Auctions

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

randon Peterson comes from a family of entrepreneurs. His grandfather, Del, started 36 businesses, including DPA Auctions in 1972. His father,

Steve, started more than a dozen and his mother, Paige, owns several Anytime Fitness locations in Nebraska

Although they all found success, not all of their endeavors succeeded, and Peterson himself has experienced failure with one of the six businesses he's created.

"But that's one of the things about entrepreneurship: You have to go in with just a boundless amount of optimism that this is going to work," he said. "And if or when it doesn't work, then you have to go, 'Well, we tried. What did we learn?' and move on."

After work as an entrepreneur, Peterson found himself at DPA Auctions in 2017, revamping the marketing and sales teams. The Fremont auction company is currently located at 419 W. Judy Drive.

Today, Peterson is COO of the company and lives in Bennington with his wife, Karlee, and 14-month-old son, Pax.

#### Life growing up

Peterson was born in Omaha and attended school at Oakland-Craig Public Schools. While in high school, he said he tried to get involved in as many activities as he could, including speech.

"I did have some health issues," Peterson said. "I had a C1-C3 spinal fusion, so I was limited on the different sports I could do, so I ended up doing cross country and track and golf and basketball."

Peterson said he learned lessons from each of his extracurricular activities, including pushing to the end with cross country.

get over your fear of public speaking and to practice and to understand what you're saying so that you can captivate your audience," he said. "And then of course, golf ways sit and talk about what we there was just kind of this spark and track and those types of things, and all of them really, is that team up with fun ideas and then work but didn't quite know it was there," effort of working together."



DPA Auctions COO Brandon Peterson poses by a construction sign for the business's new building at 900 Bud Blvd. in Fremont. Peterson has been with the company since 2017, revamping the sales and marketing teams.

when I was able to start it and have that create the foundation, then it was a little bit different. I could take something, and I could create a new perception on it."

In 2012, Peterson was recognized nationally with the fraternity's 2012 John Cosgrove Spirit and Leadership Award.

career, Peterson met Dallas Polivka, who later became his roommate and now works at DPA Auctions as a financial and operations analyst.

Polivka, a business administration and political science major, said he was drawn to Peterson by his positive energy, saying he always saw the bright side and shot for the top.

"We kind of had similar family "And speech, it taught me how to makeups; he was the oldest, I was the oldest," he said. "We were able to connect on that, and we both wanted to do something kind of entrepreneurial, so we would alwanted to do in the future, come that we knew was kind of there, on trying to implement them."

to the hours he spent putting in work.

"It's discipline and working hard and understanding that long-term goals are a thing you've got to work for," he said. "Don't complain, just do, and that's the mentality you've got to have."

In May 2014, Peterson gradu-At the beginning of his college ated from Wesleyan and became a regional director for Anytime Fitness, where he looked over its multiple locations and ran sales and retention training.

Peterson also became closer to his future wife, Karlee, as the two started dating in February 2016. The two had originally met during middle school track, as she attended Pender High School.

Although the two had gone their separate ways, they still kept in touch through Snapchat and decided to go on a taco date in the winter of 2015.

"We ended up doing that, and Peterson said

of the stereotypes," he said. "But in five months, which he attributed usually farther out and it usually costs more."

> Especially with technology companies, Peterson said he learned the importance of being first-to-market.

> "I don't care what kind of (intellectual property) you've got, you've got to be first-to-market," he said. "Because if somebody else has done it first and before you, you're pretty much out of the running unless you have this crazy quality that's going to be different."

> Peterson said another important lesson he took from his grandfather was the importance of hard work, including long nights of creative sessions.

"You have to take a lot of people saying, 'That's a dumb idea,' or 'That won't work' or what have you," he said. "And you have to take those words with a grain of salt, say, 'OK, some of that stuff's valid. I'm going to dig into that a little bit? and not take it emotionally like they're targeting your personality or who you are as a person."

While business owners in the viable of an option anymore.

last year. The company also plans to expand to 100 employees with a new building at 900 Bud Blvd., which is set to finish construction in fall of 2021.

With so much expansion, Peterson said he's also worked to have an open-door communication policy with the employees to share ideas that fit with DPA's values of family and simplicity.

"I think that's kind of been the secret formula for our growth, is that we stick to our core values, which is family, good communications and customer service, those types of things," he said. "But we can change and adapt and grow and give more."

Between the businesses DPA works with and its employees, Peterson said he's always excited to hear new ideas in his role.

"Our employees are hardworking and passionate about what we're doing, and passionate about helping families and other businesses succeed, and that's attracting more people," he said. "We're growing so much, we're building this brandnew office on the southeast side of Fremont because of it."

Peterson said he's learned the importance of understanding his team as he leads them forward. Many people have areas they can excel in, but he said they need that opportunity.

"If you compartmentalize people and put them in a box and you don't let them succeed and give them the tools to be successful, what a disservice," Peterson said. "And so that's where we kind of think outside the box and do different things to make sure our people feel valued, that they have freedoms, that they can really shine."

Despite high expectations of its employees, Peterson said he's worked to make DPA an enjoyable place to work.

"The culture is, we are disciplined, hardworking people, but we are also super family-oriented, we have fun, we support each other, and it just makes everything full circle," he said. "It's an environment that people are really attracted to."

Polivka, who has been with the ast could take many roles. Peter- company full time for a couple of

Peterson also took academics seriously at Oakland-Craig, graduated as one of the school's four valedictorians in 2010. During his time in high school, he shadowed dentists, helping take his brother's wisdom teeth out at the age of 17.

With scholarships to both Creighton University in Omaha and Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Peterson started school at Wesleyan in the fall, choosing to go into pre-dental to become an oral maxillofacial surgeon.

After attending his first zoology class, Peterson said he felt confident with his choice. But during his chemistry class, he said his professor started talking about all of the requirements and gave the students an important piece of advice: "You've got to love this."

"And I sat there, and it just hit me, and I go, 'I don't love this. I don't love this at all," Peterson said. "And I got up right in the middle of her talking and I walked out and went straight to the register's office, and I switched my major."

Although he had his heart set on dentistry and based his school around the decision, Peterson said he was following his gut and heart toward what would make him happy in life.

"That was one of my really big moments where I felt that feeling and I listened to that," he said. "And that was the best decision I've ever made in my entire life."

#### A new direction in life

With his love of math and love of people, Peterson decided to go into business administration and psychology. While at Wesleyan, he continued his passion to become involved as a leader to give back.

"In high school, I was always involved in extracurricular activities that could reach out and help people, if that was in the church or if that was through the school or outside of school," Peterson said. "And then into college, it was kind of the same deal."

Peterson was one of the founders of the university's Phi Kappa Tau chapter, where he also worked on its early stages, recruitment and main focus: "Work as hard as you can, be an exemplary person and always give back."

"I was never going to be a frater-

For the fall semester of his senior year, Peterson decided to take his studies abroad to New Zealand.

"I just wanted to see different cultures," he said. "I always like to put myself in other people's shoes and see how they live their life, how they do different things, and what better way to do it than to go into another country and see."

Peterson said he not only enjoyed the country's beautiful landscape by visiting filming locations for the 'Lord of the Rings" film series, but also appreciated the people there, whom he compared to Nebraskans.

'Nebraskans are kind, they'll take you in if you're hungry, if you need help, if you need someplace to stay, you've got that neighborly type of people," he said. "That's exactly how the Kiwis are, and so that was really fun."

#### Hitting the gym

At the same time, Peterson said he was becoming interested in helping his mother with her Anytime Fitness locations. After the death of Peterson's uncle, his mother honored his memory and the family's entrepreneurial spirit by starting a location in Oakland and purchasing three in Lincoln.

"And I knew that when I got back from New Zealand, I wanted to work in those gyms, as fitness was always a big part of my life. I loved working out. I got to help people get happier and healthier," Peterson said. "That was just something I was very much attracted to."

Peterson got an internship at an Anytime Fitness location in New Zealand to prepare and get a feel for the business. Upon his return home that November, he interviewed with his mother and started work at one of the Lincoln locations.

During his last semester, Peterson balanced 16 credit hours of school and managing the gym. He said his day would consist of waking up early to go to the gym to clean, answer emails and perform other managerial duties.

"I'd leave to go to class, come back, work, leave again to go to class, come back and work and stay there until about typically 10 or 11 at night," Peterson said. "And then I'd go home, I'd sleep, I'd wake up early and start the day again."

Peterson would end up increasnity guy, I had no desire because ing profits for the location by 20%

#### Businesses of his own

Working at Anytime Fitness, the entrepreneur bug soon bit Peterson, and he was itching to start something of his own. He eventually found that outlet after being texted by Ashley Hauser, a friend from Wesleyan, about a business idea she had.

"At the time, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I've never started a business before," Peterson said. "'I manage businesses, but I've never started one?"

During their meeting, Hauser told Peterson said she had an eating disorder in college and wanted to provide support for young women struggling with the same issues.

In 2016, the two created SELFiD, which stands for "Self Image Defined." The nonprofit has events for young girls to help with their mental, physical and emotional health and help them find happiness in their lives.

The nonprofit was also created by Kayla Ott, another friend of Peterson's from Wesleyan. Prior to having an event in Lincoln, the two ran into each other, and Ott offered her marketing skills to the project.

"From that moment, we created SELFiD at my kitchen table, and in my basement, we just brainstormed," Peterson said. "And from there, we have a board of directors, we have people that have come across the state and across the United States that have come to support the event, we've had donations. It's been phenomenal."

SELFiD has featured a variety of keynote speakers, including authors, psychologists and American Ninja Warriors. It is currently in the process of shifting resources online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That was my first experience ever starting a business," Peterson said. "And I'm so glad it was a nonprofit, I'm so glad that people supported it and it was just so many learning experiences that came from that."

Since then, Peterson has created five more companies, selling one of them. Polivka also became involved in the ventures and said he took much from the experience.

"I learned that it's usually harder than you expected it to be," he said. "The payoff doesn't come when

"If you don't have a team helping you and getting it off the ground fast, fast, fast, you're basically putting the nail in the coffin," he said. "Because you have to move quick, and you've got to have a team that you trust, and you've got to work together for the common goal."

#### Work at DPA Auctions

Wanting new challenges working at Anytime fitness and realizing that his startups weren't going to pay the bills, Peterson joined DPA in early 2017.

The auction company was founded in 1972 by Del Peterson, who named it Del Peterson and Associates and made a name for the business through the Midwest.

After Del Peterson's retirement, his son, Steve, took over the company and brought it to the digital era, building its customer service as well.

"I came in and I said, 'You offer a great service, you became a national company by not quite all of the innovative marketing techniques. Let me come in and just be more of a kind of a consultant-style employee to help revamp this side of things," Brandon Peterson said. "He said, 'OK, let's give it a shot?"

At DPA, Peterson brought in new digital marketing and enhanced marketing efforts, growing the team from 20 employees to 35 in a few years.

From there, Peterson also revamped the sales team by increas ing its staffing size, setting up departments and roles and teaching them techniques of good customer service, and ultimately, sales.

"And so that got up, and then I put a lead in front of them and taught them how to manage," he said. "And now I'm in a chief of operations role where I'm running financials and kind of overseeing everything from an operational standpoint."

On Feb. 6, 2017, Peterson proposed to Karlee, a year from when they first started dating, and a year before their wedding. Their son, Pax, was born in June 2019.

#### Growing into the future

DPA has continued to expand, with the company launching you think it's going to come. It's marketing agency DPA Impact

son said he's learned that isn't as months and part time for about a year-and-a-half, said he joined the team as Peterson enjoyed his insight on financial and operating during their time together.

"We'd be working on stuff together, just helping each other set budgets," he said. "And then once I was ready to leave my last position, I put together a proposal and applied for a position here."

Since taking the position, Polivka said he's enjoyed the sense of community and atmosphere at DPA.

"It's very supportive, and it just encourages your own personal growth as well," he said.

With Peterson, Polivka said he admires his hard work and dedication toward everything he works on.

"He wears a lot of hats, and he's got about every hat I think a person could imagine," he said. "And he always does it with positivity."

#### **A part of Fremont**

In being a part of the Fremont community, Peterson said he just enjoys the support that is given between people.

"They want to see each other thrive, and they'll go out of their way to make sure that happens," he said. "And I've seen that time and time again from so many different people, and it's really just a neat thing to see that."

With the decision on where the new DPA building would go, Peterson said he knew he wanted to be a part of Fremont's continued growth, which has allowed multiple businesses to start and thrive.

"That doesn't happen on its own. It has to happen with the support of a community," he said. "And so there's a lot of different things that go into it, but the underlying factor was, we just really appreciate the people here in Fremont."

In his role as COO and everything else in his life, Peterson said he just wants to inspire others to strive to be the best versions of themselves. He said he's often approached by others who are fearful of an idea they have.

His answer? "Screw it. Just doit."

"If you shoot for something better than what you're doing right now, you're going to hit something," Peterson said. "Something good is going to come out of it, so why not go for it?"

## A leader in all places

### Vrba shows leadership at First State Bank, the Fremont community

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

rom a bank teller to a credit analyst to now executive vice president of lending, Nick Vrba has had just about every position under the sun at First State Bank and Trust.

"If you're working at a larger institution, you get a little siloed, where you can kind of be stuck in one area. Like let's say you're in lending, and that may be all you do, or you're a teller, and that may be all you do," he said. "Well here, we allow people to learn all aspects, and so I feel like I've got a lot of depth and a lot of broad knowledge that you can't just get at any organization."

Vrba has been with First State Bank for 18 years, joining the team the summer after his junior year at Midland University in 2002. He's been with the bank ever since, taking new positions as they come in his career.

#### Getting involved

Vrba wasn't always a member of the Fremont community, as he was born and raised in Columbus.

"It's a great community, very similar to Fremont," he said. "I have a lot of friends and family still back there."

Vrba attended Columbus High School, where he was involved in National Honor Society, student government and multiple business clubs. He also took part in sports like basketball and track.

But Vrba's main sport was golf, which he participated in all four years of high school and his first two years of college, where he said he made strong relationships and learned the importance of overcoming obstacles.

'Golf is a sport where if you do well, it's great for you, but if you do poor, it's on you as well, and so it's very individualized to some degree," he said. "And so I think I learned a lot on how to deal with adversity and challenges through that."

With the golf team, Vrba said he took away good memories and experiences.

'Then the other side, I think I really enjoyed my time in the business organizations at the high



Nick Vrba, executive vice president of lending at First State Bank and Trust, has been with the bank for 18 years. Since joining the bank in May 2002, he's held various positions.



school," he said. "And so really Nick and Tracey Vrba with their three daughters, from left: Brielle, 8: Elin, 5: and Allie, 12

tive management role."

Vrba said he's grown in his banking skills since joining the First State Bank team, which he attributed to its strong leadership.

"You have a great track record of good leaders in the community and good bankers, and so I feel like they've taught me how to be a good banker, what to learn," he said. "And they've provided me the opportunities to touch so many areas of banking."

At First State Bank, Vrba is also a member of its executive leadership team and secretary of its board of directors. He said in his 18 years at the bank, he's always been allowed to set goals for himself and reach them.

"I've had opportunities to go elsewhere, tremendous opportunities, but at the end of the day, First State is very loyal to their employees and just provides you great opportunities to grow and to learn," he said. "I think also why

everything I was involved in I enjoved."

After graduating in 2000, Vrba had decided he wanted to become a certified public accountant and took an internship that summer at an accounting firm in Columbus.

'So I decided, 'You know, I think I'm going to stick with numbers and business," he said. "And then I just decided that wasn't for me."

At the same time, Vrba was working at Hy-Vee, a place he had worked since the age of 14. Although he had started off bagging groceries and pushing carts, he was soon given a management role with a friend of his.

There, Vrba said he learned invaluable lessons, including how to deal with people, both employees and customers, and how to solve problems that came up.

"To this day, I'll walk into the Hy-Vee here in Fremont and just remember the experiences I had there," he said. "And so that kind of crafted for me the fact that I wanted to be in business, I wanted to be working with people, helping that daily interaction."

In this role, Vrba said he knew he **A start in banking** wanted to be in a job where he had more interaction with people.

"Nothing against CPAs, they're awesome people and super important, but I needed to be out more, I needed to be out with folks and having conversations and so forth," he said.

#### A new path in life

Although he started his Midland career with some accounting classes, Vrba soon went into business administration with concentrations in marketing and management.

At Midland, Vrba continued his pursuits in student government, holding various roles on the student senate and acting as president of the student body his senior year.

In student government, Vrba said he continued to learn about problem-solving and organizing teams for a collective effort. As president, he and his team worked to change the way the senate functioned.

We reset the committees, we reset kind of the processes and how

so we did a lot of work on that, so that was interesting," Vrba said. "I kind of got to get my hands dirty in restructuring the student senate at that time, so I learned a lot from that."

Vrba was also involved in stuorientation committees, dent including Student Ambassadors, which would provide tours for prospective students and their families to the university.

"I was kind of a salesman at that point, trying to sell the university and share with them all the positive things that it would offer," he said. "And so I really enjoyed doing that, meeting people across the state, families and prospective students and learning where they're from and trying to relate to them."

While at Midland, Vrba was also a member of the student body for Augustine Hall and the Blue Key Honor Society.

"I would have kept playing golf, but after my sophomore year, I felt it was important to start focusing on what my career might look like," he said. "And so I thought it was people to some degree and having important to make a change there."

At the end of his sophomore year, Vrba started to look for a place to work in Fremont during the summer.

"I had been investigating banking and what those careers offer, and I thought, 'You know, I really think that this would be a great career for me because it's numbers-driven, I like to be analytical, but yet I also like to work with people."

After applying to banks in the area, Vrba was hired on as a teller at First State Bank's main drive-up. There, he worked part time for the bank, commuting back to Columbus to work at Hy-Vee.

As a teller, Vrba said he was able to get his foot in the door and learn the first steps to banking.

'Our main bank drive-thru is pretty busy, and you get to see a wide variety of customers, a lot of our commercial customers," he said. "And so I got to know a lot of our clients on a regular basis, so that's kind of how I started at the bank."

First State Bank President and

they report to the university, and CEO Chuck Johannsen said Vrba business and so forth." was a perfect fit for the bank's team.

"It just seemed as though he just had the right work ethic and the right interaction not only with customers, but with management that would allow him to progress as he committed his time and efforts to the bank and to our customers," he said.

As he was preparing to graduate from Midland in March 2004, Vrba was offered a full-time position with the bank as a lobby supervisor and head teller.

"So I basically transitioned into that role," he said. "I supervised some tellers and some new account staff and then was in the teller window still, but was the vault teller at the main bank."

#### To stay or leave?

At the beginning of 2005, Vrba was at a crucial point in his life.

He was engaged to his wife, Tracey, with the two preparing to marry that June. As the two were both from Columbus, the couple were prepared to move back, as Vrba had accepted a job offer from a bank there.

After informing human resources of his intentions to leave the bank, Vrba was approached by former First State Bank President Ron Kranz, who asked him to give it 24 hours before accepting his notice to leave.

"Lo and behold the next day, the bank came back and they provided me with an opportunity to move up into the loan department, and so instead of going to work in Columbus, we decided to stay in Fremont and take this opportunity," he said. "I go back to that day as pretty pivotal in my banking career I think here in Fremont, because First State gave me the opportunity to stick around."

In March 2005, Vrba took the role of credit analyst, where he analvzed financial statements, looked at credits and reviewed files with loan officers as he got his start in his lending career.

"That's an important job, because it really allows you to get to understand lending," he said. "And I think anybody who's a really good lender has spent time in credit analysis, where they get be-

Vrba has had various promotions since then, now working as executive vice president of lending.

COURTESY

"If you're looking for a history of how one would break into the industry, Nick has taken the path that is probably one where he's been able to experience literally every job that has been available at the bank," Johannsen said.

#### Growing as a lender

Although Vrba's main focus is now in commercial lending, he said he has various roles in his current position

"Mostly, I'd say the majority of my time is spent lending, working with the loan department, making loans, servicing loans," he said. "But in addition to that, I spend time monitoring the loan portfolio, making sure we have good, quality loans that we're lending to the right borrowers."

Johannsen said although Vrba handles the bank's more complicated loans, he is still able to have good relationships with his clients and identify their needs.

"Nick is one that's very good at expressing his opinion, but in a way that allows other people to understand and other people to buy in to what actually is the overall premise of what the bank wants to do," he said.

Vrba said he loves getting to make loans, but also loves being analytical and looking at the data as to how the loans are performing and how productive the bank is.

"When you're working for First State and working in a community bank of our size, is you wear a lot of hats," he said. "And so we don't just do one thing every day, and so I think that's what I love about the job, is one day I may just be lending money, and the next day I may be doing something different."

Johannsen said Vrba has been able to work his way up the professional ladder during his time at First State Bank.

'He's really, at this point in time, one of our executive team top members," he said. "And the reality being is, he's been able to, through starting at an entry point, he's been able to see all of the dynamics of a bank, and he's been able to move hind numbers and learn about the into what I would say is an execu-

I stuck around here is Fremont is just a great community, and I love what our bank offers the community as well."

#### Still getting involved

Vrba currently lives in Fremont with Tracey and their three daughters, 12-year-old Allie, 8-year-old Brielle and 5-year-old Elin. In the community, he said he always loves getting to help small businesses start up.

"Then you're at the football game or you're at the grocery store or you're at school, and you come across that business owner, and they're excited to talk about their business and they tell you about the successes that they're having," Vrba said. "I love to do that, I love those conversations, I love to see the excitement of business owners."

In Fremont, Vrba is chairman of the Fremont Area United Way Board of Directors and is president and leader of the Fremont Area Habitat for Humanity's executive team. He is also involved in the Fremont Area Young Professionals, Midland University Alumni Board of Directors and First Lutheran Church.

"My wife will joke with me, 'Sometimes Nick, you're going to have to say no. You can't be involved in everything," Vrba said. "It's true, but I've learned so much about this town being involved?

While other individuals are just starting in leadership roles, Johannsen said Vrba has proven his abilities as a leader in Fremont.

"And I expect him to continue to do that, and I have no doubt that he's totally committed to our community, to his clients," he said. 'Nick's probably my go-to person at this point in time if I have a need for help, and he's just a genuinely compassionate guy."

But Vrba said he's seen growth in Fremont with its other strong leaders, and said he was proud to work with its various organizations to make the town a place where its people and businesses can grow to their potential, much like First State Bank has given him.

"It's a great place to raise your kids, my girls love it here, my wife loves it here," he said. "I just think Fremont has a lot to offer folks."

## Making the connections

Owsley using fundraising skills to help Archbishop Bergan move forward

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

lthough she's only been at Archbishop Bergan Catholic School and St. Patrick's Catholic Church for just under three months, Nichole Owsley said she's been able to satisfy the three areas of her life she loves the most.

"I love my family and faith foremost, I love the Fremont community and I love Bergan," she said. "And so for me to be able to grow and unite all three of those things is really what I look forward to in the future."

Since June 1, Nichole Owsley has worked at Bergan as its director of stewardship and annual funds. In her position, she handles fundraising efforts and working with its community partnerships.

husband, Jason, and their two children, Lauren, 12, and Will, 7, who fundraising efforts. are both students at Bergan.

#### A start at Bergan

Owsley's connection to Bergan came from a young age, as she started attending the school in sixth grade.

"My grandpa was a 1955 grad of St. Patrick's here as well, so we had a little bit of family ties to the school," she said. "But I was just excited to start my middle school and high school career here."

While at Bergan, Owsley was involved in multiple sports, including volleyball, golf and track. She was also captain of the cheerleading team and took part in dance and show choir.

With Bergan being a smaller school, Owsley said she learned the importance of taking part in activities in order to have the school be successful in them.

"There was often lots of us in different things, and so oddly enough, I am still to this day a super busy person and I work the best when I'm very busy," she said. "And what I learned in my younger years here at Bergan here is you can be involved in a lot of things, and as long as you're prepared and you have a plan in place, you're able to be involved and be good at different things all at the same time."



**COLLIN SPILINEK**, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Owsley lives in Fremont with her Nichole Owsley, director of stewardship and annual funds for Archbishop Bergan Catholic School, stands in St. Patrick's Catholic Church. She has held the position since June, helping the school and church with

> ized that communications wasn't right for her, which she attributed to inexperience.

"I was the first one out of my family to go to college, and so I wasn't exactly sure the path that I should take," she said. "So I did a couple years of school at UNO and I worked full time while I did that, and then it really just got the best of me."

With this, Owsley decided to move back to Fremont to go into business administration at Midland University in 2007.

"I just thought it was the right time to do so, and I wanted to make sure that I was the first person in my family to graduate," she said. "I wanted to finish that, that was a goal of mine."

At that point in Owsley's life, she was married and pregnant with her daughter. She started work with Verizon as an account executive for businesses in northeast Nebraska.

Owsley worked at Verizon for nearly 10 years, with the company helping her receive her undergraduate degree in 2011, making her the first person in her family to graduate from college.

#### Finding the right fit

In 2014, Verizon presented Owsley with a new opportunity: mov-Owsley said her father, who owns ing to Fort Worth, Texas. As her a small business in town, was in-husband had family in the state, she volved in the community on vari- said she thought the move would be "With the job opportunity down "To him, me being able to give there, we did take the move and the leap and decided that, honestly, the big city was not for me," Owsley said. "I just missed the small-town feel of Fremont, and we didn't last long down there." Upon her return to Fremont after less than a year in Texas, Owsley started work at Midland as director thing," Owsley said. "Father [Walof external affairs and business development. "I would say that is really where slev worked at the KHUB radio I was able to find my purpose," she said. "With that, I was able to unite Fremont businesses with the Midland community." While at Midland, Owsley was also able to direct its capital campaign, raising nearly \$30 million for the university, and work as director of admissions. opportunities for Owsley, including her graduation from Leadership Fremont, certification in fundraising management and Master of Business Administration in 2016. Owsley also joined multi-

ple boards, including those for MainStreet of Fremont, Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce and Fremont Area Young Professionals. She was also previously on the Archbishop Bergan Catholic School Board but left after her employment there.

#### A new role

After five years at Midland, Owsley started a new position at WholeStone Farms, where she worked as its external affairs and member relations manager. In her position, she handled all of the community interaction and communications from the company.

"I love the leadership, like with the CEO, Scott Webb, who is still one of my mentors," Owsley said. "All of the owners have a really, really good outlook for not only their employees but the community in general."

Owsley joined WholeStone shortly after the March 2019 flooding and said she appreciated the owners' willingness to jump in and help during that time.

"Their dedication to investing back in the community was just really amazing to watch," she said. "They are a great addition to Fremont, and I look forward to all the growth that they will have here."

been helping Bergan on a global school and her children attending "I absolutely love to be able to advisory board to help the school with fundraising. With the flood and COVID-19 pandemic, she said it had started to have increasing financial difficulties.

what my purpose is and why I'm here, and I've absolutely loved every minute of it."

Koenig, who is principal of Bergan, said he's known Owsley since high school, as she was a few classes behind him.

"I've been following her career closely, as we always had hoped that Nichole would be one of those individuals that we could have employed at our school system continuing to assist us with our mission," he said. "And it's worked out well that we had a position opening, did the interview process and identified her as the best candidate for the position."

Koenig said Owsley not only had a pedigree of having history at the school, but was extremely knowledgeable of the Fremont and Bergan community, knowing the school's mission and culture.

"She had all that knowledge prior to stepping into her role," he said. "And she's for years assisted us with things as a volunteer, so she was already living out that mission of service through her volunteering, even though she wasn't employed here at the time."

#### Back to Bergan

working at Bergan wasn't difficult, she loves getting to interact with Earlier this year, Owsley had with her being an alumna of the the Fremont community.

having a lot of success in helping us out as we're going through a rough financial situation for the past year."

At Bergan, Owsley also works on recultivating and re-engaging the school's alumni, with her conversations and engagement being her favorite part of the job.

Just in the last week, Owsley said she spent two hours on the phone with an alumnus from Virginia who graduated in the early 1960s.

"He was here around the same time that my grandpa was and went to school in the same building that I went to school in," she said. "And so for him being able to tell those stories and have that connection, even though there were many years between us, the culture and the Bergan family is still something that resides with mostly all of the alum that I talk to."

In the short time that Owsley has been at Bergan, Koenig said she's shown her community-focused mindset that she's had in her previous positions at WholeStone and Midland.

"She's always looking at how we can continue to build partnerships and how we can be strategic in our thinking to make Fremont a better place," he said. "I do believe that about Nichole, and we're just very blessed to have her assisting us with that and continuing to make sure that Bergan is advancing and becoming better every single day."

#### **Giving back to Fremont**

Going back to her father's involvement in the community, Owsley said she's worked on passing that down to her two children. A few years ago, her daughter took part in youth philanthropy project through the Fremont Community Foundation that helped give Fremont families meals to cook.

"Lauren really, she talks about how much she likes being in the kitchen with myself and her grandparents, and so that was really on her heart," Owsley said. "And so just being able to keep that tradition alive of being active in your community, Jason and I both have made it a point to pass that along to our kiddos as well."

Having kept her love of commu-Owsley said her transition to nications near to her, Owsley said

ous boards, an energy that he tried good for the family of four. to instill in her.

back was super important, so I saw that when I was younger and always longed for that in the career that I had," she said. "And so going through all of my different journeys in life, I've always made sure that I keep giving back to the community at the forefront of what I do."

#### **Beginning the path**

With that involvement, Owstation in high school, helping with Joe Spellerberg's program, the Moostash Joe Polka Show, on Sundays.

"I was really involved in anywhere that I could be," Owsley said. "One of my first jobs was actually doing sales here for the radio station too."

Owsley's gig at the radio station influenced her decision to go into communications, and after graduating in 2000, she started classes at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

But Owsley said she soon real-

With these meetings, the school met with the archdiocese and determined it needed a director of stewardship position.

"I wasn't really looking for anyter Nolte] and I had talked at one point, and Dan Koenig and I, and just had told me to pray on it."

Watching her children move to digital learning and realizing how much assistance the school needed, Owsley said she knew she had the skill set to help. She remembered a saying she lives by and tells her children all the time: "Be yourself, everyone else is taken."

"Really, God made each of us on The university brought multiple purpose, for a purpose, and I tried a bunch of different things in my life, and I just know that I've had the most success and the most fun doing what I love, which is fundraising," she said. "And so this really allows me to come back to

there. With her position, she works on applying for grants and working on community partnerships, similar to her work at Midland.

"So we have a lot to do here, and I've only been here for a couple months, but I feel like I was able to hit the ground running," Owsley said. "And I know the backstory, I didn't really have to learn that as I've been a part of the Bergan family for lots of years."

Koenig said Owsley works on engaging the school's stakeholders into sharing their time, talent and treasure.

"Obviously, those two areas, volunteerism and giving up yourself and giving up your time is a huge piece," he said. "And so she's just trying to identify those areas in which people can be better stewards of the resources they have and the gifts that God's given them."

For treasure, Koenig said Owsley is the main solicitor for finding donations, as the school is a nonprofit institution.

contact in that aspect, and she's see where we go in the future."

walk into Hy-Vee or anywhere in town, the bank, wherever it may be, and run into somebody that I know," she said. "I don't care if it's a Saturday or a football game on a Friday night, I just love to be able to connect with people."

Koenig said working at Bergan is not a job, but a lifestyle and vocation, which is something Owsley told him she had found.

"When you're a kid and you're asked what you're going to be when you grow up, you want to be somebody that helps people," he said. "And Nichole is definitely fitting that mold of helping somebody every single day."

With her ability to shape Bergan moving forward, Owsley said she was excited to see not only growth for the school, but for the community as well as it rebuilds from flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I've learned one thing, it's that hard times make you stronger," she said. "And I think that we have one of the best communities here "And so she is the main point of in Fremont, and I just can't wait to

### **Know Us Before You Need Us**

Nebraska Cancer Specialists' physicians and staff provide compassionate care in a community oncology setting. And we're conveniently located, right here, in your community.

Patients here are a part of a family, supported by a personalized community of care. Our researchers have over a hundred trials available giving greater opportunities for care, and life-changing medical advancements, making a positive impact on their lives. Where everyday we are reminded of the amazing privilege it is to have a role in a person's care, fighting cancer along side the people and community we treat.

We invite you to know us before you need us and find out what community oncology means at Nebraska Cancer Specialists.



Diagnosis | Treatment | Research

450 East 23rd Street 402-334-4773 NebraskaCancer.com/KnowUs



## Bringing it back home

Dillon helping customers, employees at family car dealership

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

hether it was his grandfather, Sid Dillon, or his father, Sid Dillon Jr., Chase Dillon said practically everyone in his family is a car person. Although he's more interested in the driving side than the mechanical, Dillon said he's still found enjoyment

since joining his family's dealership. "It's exciting for me when we get something new and different, and you're seeing different stuff every day, so it's cool for me," he said. "But cars are really a small part of it, it's kind of the means to how we run our business, as the people are what really make it fun."

Dillon has been with Sid Dillon since 2014, now employed as executive manager. He lives in Fremont his wife of two years, Sammy, and their 10-month-old son, Kai.

Born and raised in Fremont, Dillon attended Fremont High School, where he was involved in music activities like band and choir and sports like tennis, golf and swim, which he said was his most involved activity.

"Back then, we had two-a-day practices almost every day, so you're spending all of your time with these people before school and after school and stuff," he said. "So it was a lot of fun, and I felt like I was a good swimmer, so that makes it even more fun when you're excelling?

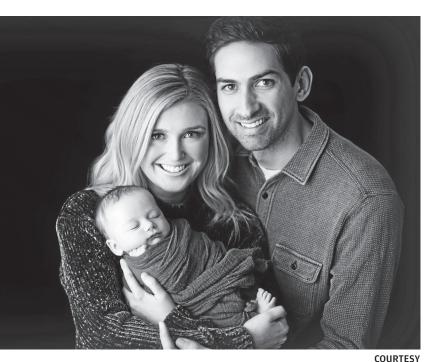
After his graduation in 2009, Dillon said he went to a couple of different colleges before finding his footing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

As well as colleges, Dillon said he also struggled to find a major before realizing his passion lay with advertising and marketing.

"I was kind of thinking that business was what I would study in school, and I liked business, but math and economics and all that was not real enjoyable for me," he said. "Advertising is similar, I think, in a lot of ways, as it's just more creative, as opposed to all the numbers."

Although he was involved in a few organizations on campus, including giving tours of UNL's College of Journalism and Mass Communications, Dillon said the one that made the most impact was his involvement with Young Life, a youth ministry program

ing than showing up to a church, and it's more like you're just hanging out with your friends," he said. "You kind of earn somebody's trust that way, and if you can have a conversation that go on behind the scenes on how about Christianity and Jesus, that's icing on the cake." Dillon said the organization gave him long-lasting relationships to this day with the other members. The organization also allowed him to attend summer camps and work at them as well, teaching ski and wakeboarding and doing maintenance in Colorado and Canada.



Chase and Sammy Dillon pose with their 10-month-old son, Kai. The Dillons, who were married in 2018, live in Fremont.

Young Life."

During his high school and college career, Dillon also worked part time at Sid Dillon, where he would wash cars, drive a parts delivery truck and do other odd jobs.

But after his graduation from UNL with a bachelor's degree in advertising and public relations in 2014, Dillon came back to the family business and started a full-time position as a service adviser.

Sid Dillon founded the dealership in 1973, which has since expanded to two locations in Fremont, as well as locations in Lincoln, Wahoo, Blair, Crete, Elkhorn and Ceresco.

As a service adviser, Dillon said he was essentially the "middleman," as he brought the needs of customers to the mechanics.

"You're kind of the people-facing side of the job, you kind of work between the mechanics and the customer and just figure out how to help the customer out with their car service," he said. "If the car's broken down, you're the guy that gets the frustration taken out on them, or you just answer the phone, schedule service appointments, that kind of thing."

matters. "There's a lot of different things you take a picture of a car and then it ends up on our website and you price it," he said. "And in doing marketing stuff related to that, we worked on where we're going to place ads and kind of what's working, what's not, how we're getting leads on car sales, that kind of thing."

college career, was being involved in while another had to step down due to illness.

> "So there was kind of the need for somebody to step into a management role, and I kind of moved into that sales manager, general manager kind of role," Dillon said. "And it's kind of currently, which is managing all of our along the way." stuff that goes on in Fremont."

mainly works with employees on matters like employment and customers with the service department or sales floor in order to make sure the company runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

"I just kind of have my finger on kind of a lot of different things that go on with the business, just making sure we're getting things done the way they need to be done and that we're not dropping the ball on anything," he said. "And also that we're doing everything we can to help the business grow and help our employees be the best that they can be."

Some of the employees at Sid Dillon have been with the company longer than Dillon has been alive, something he said that's amazed him.

"A lot of guys have spent their ca-After about a year-and-a-half in reers here, working for one car dealwith college and high school students. this position, Dillon started work with ership, which is pretty cool," he said. "It's supposed to be less intimidat- the company's marketing and IT de- "You look at something like that and you're doing," he said. "And not to say partment in Omaha, which handled you think if somebody's willing to I really know what I'm doing. Someall of Sid Dillon's computer-related stay here for a 35-year career, or a times, I'm making it up as I go along, 20-year career, then it must be a good place to work." Dillon said he's also noticed and is that's thrown at me." looking forward to a recent shift at Sid Dillon in the age of the employees.

and we're getting some younger people involved and hiring some younger people in all kinds of different roles, so that's been fun," he said. "I guess I still consider myself a young guy, so it's good to work with a bunch of young people in an increasing amount."

But no matter who works at Sid Dillon, Dillon said he and the others always try to have fun and brighten each other's days.

"The people you work with, I'm with them probably more than I'm with my family, so it's important that you get along, you treat each other well and make sure that everybody's getting taken care of at work," he said. "Because you're with them so much, you might as well enjoy the time you spend together."

Dillon said he's come a long way since joining Sid Dillon, including his marriage and son's birth. But he said he's also come far as a person, as he didn't initially believe he'd be working for the dealership.

"It was always kind of a backup plan, that I could always work for the family business," he said. "But kind of how it turned out, I started working in the service department, and as I've worked through the years, I've kind of realized that there's a lot of things that maybe I've picked up on just being around this business for most of evolved from there into what I'm doing my life that have kind of helped me out

Rich Eyler, general manger at Sid In his current role, Dillon said he Dillon, said he's known Dillon for 15 years, long before working side-byside at the company.

"He has a lot of the attributes that makes this company successful," he said. "He's learned from his family and just does a really nice job of continuing the family philosophy."

Evler said Dillon was a perfect fit for the company, as he is hardworking, compassionate, motivated and self-driven.

"He's done a great job of learning from his family, his father, his grandfather, and learning how to run a business as they have," he said. "And he's done a great job of soaking that in and looking for improvements daily."

Most importantly, Dillon said his time at Sid Dillon has made him feel more confident in his abilities, including being able to solve problems that come up at the business.

"It feels good when you know what

"That was a lot of fun working there, and different groups of high school kids would come every week," Dillon in 2019, one of the company's mansaid. "So that was a big part of my agers stepped into a retirement role,

Dillon spent another year-and-ahalf in this role before returning to Fremont, where he worked as a car salesman for another two years. But

"We're kind of at the point right now where a lot of the guys who have worked here for a while are nearing retirement age or have already retired,

but I've been around long enough that I feel like I can handle any situation

With his time in the Fremont community, Dillon said the area is the perfect place to run a business. He also said he was excited to see growth and changes coming to the city in the future.

"I've been here for a long time, long enough that I feel like I really know the town, but I'm still learning and I'm still meeting people," he said. "It's still changing and growing, and I think there's a lot of opportunity in Fremont, no matter what you do. It's just a good place to live."

SID DILLON

Chase Dillon, executive manager at Sid Dillon, sits at his desk. In his position, Dillon works with both customers and employees on various issues on a day-to-day basis. **COLLIN SPILINEK**, FREMONT TRIBUNE

## Making new connections

Brea Paulsen loves meeting customers as owner of Anytime Fitness

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK** Fremont Tribune

rea Paulsen hadn't been at Anytime Fitness in a couple of years, not by avoiding exercise, but by stepping down from her position.

After two years away, Paulsen worked out a schedule with the current owner and returned to a position at the tanning salon next door in 2017.

"I think it was probably within six months, within four months, he asked me, 'Hey, can you do the gym side too now?"" she said. "So then I went over to the gym, and then that's when in the beginning of 2019, he said, 'Hey, do you want to buy it?"

Starting as a manager with Anytime Fitness, Paulsen has been owner of the gym since the beginning of 2019. She originally worked at the center, located at 2415 E. 23rd Ave. S., from 2013 to 2015.

#### **Finding her fit**

Paulsen attended Archbishop Bergan Catholic School. She had always been into sports, starting in elementary school. At Bergan, she played on the volleyball, basketball and track teams.

During her time with these sports, Paulsen said she learned the importance of teams, as she said they were like families to her.

"That's probably the best thing that I liked about Bergan in general, and then volleyball, being a part of the team," she said. "It wasn't just about yourself, it was about everybody else too."

Paulsen graduated in 2008 and started studying interior design at Northwest Missouri State University for about a year before going to Midland University.

"Then when I went to Midland, I thought I was going to be a nurse because everyone in my family, my mom, my sister, my aunt my cousins, everybody, they're all nurses. My dad was a doctor," she said. "Took one A&P class and never went back."

Paulsen said she immediately changed her major to business, as Paulsen said she felt prepared, she liked the numbers side of the work.



Born and raised in Fremont, Brea Paulsen, owner of Anytime Fitness in Fremont, originally worked as manager from 2013 to 2015 and 2017 to 2019 before taking ownership in 2020.



Brea and Tyler Paulsen pose with their children: 11-year-old son, Tyler, from left; 3-year-old daughter, Piper; 3-year-old son, Briar; and Lennox, who will be 2 in October.

#### "When we hired Brea in 2013, we **A new direction**

In 2015, Paulsen was at a much different point in her life.

That year, she had married her other reach their goals," Heineman husband, Tyler, bringing a new child into her life, her 6-year-old stepson, Nolan. She said her hours had gotten harder, working from but wasn't 100% of the tasks she 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

would have to think about daycares and stuff like that," she said.

she said. "It was kind of like, everybody always called it the flagship, all the other managers did."

Paulsen's reaction when Heineman offered her the gym?

"'Are you serious?'" she said. "I knew that he was selling his other gyms, and Fremont is his baby. Fremont's Anytime Fitness is what he started with, and I just never thought he would?

With Anytime Fitness in talks to be sold, Paulsen said she joked to Heineman that the tanning salon had to come with the gym.

"And he said, 'Oh, sure, you can have that one," she said. "And so we purchased the tanning salon, Tan 24-7, in July of 2019 and kind of drug our feet on Anytime Fitness for a little bit."

#### Owning the gym

Paulsen's first day of ownership of Anytime Fitness was Jan. 1, exactly 10 years after Heineman originally took ownership.

"Brea was the easy choice when selling our business as we knew she had the ability to grow the business ork. would be taking on at the center. "I felt like if we were going to and maintain the many great rela-feel like Fremont is very loyal to "Math was my favorite subject" She worked with the previous start a family, working until 7 tionships that had been created," Fremont, and it makes me proud in high school," she said. "I worked manager on her duties before he o'clock is late at night, and we Heineman said. "We were in the to be a part of Fremont because of process of exiting the fitness in- that," she said. "Because we are a dustry due to other business success and interest."

gyms have appeared in the community, she said Anytime Fitness has had to shift its focus to building relationships.

"When I think about Anytime Fitness as a gym, our gym here in Fremont, we're a family; my members come in and they ask about my kids, they know my kids, how old they are, and I in turn do the same," she said. "It's a community and we're a family, and that's what we've really shifted toward."

Part of that relationship-building has come from the personal training offered by the center, Paulsen said.

"That's one of our really strong points right now and what we're focusing on is that one-one-one training," she said. "We care not only about you, your fitness, we care about your family beyond that, and we check in on you and we want to create that relationship."

Like many fitness centers, Anytime Fitness was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 3, certain businesses in Fremont, including gyms, were ordered to close until May 6.

However, Paulsen said her mind was blown by the response of Anytime Fitness' members and the amount who wanted to support it.

"It really gives me goosebumps just talking about it, because it is more than a gym to them," she said. "It's a relationship with a family here."

Since reopening, Paulsen said Anytime Fitness, like other gyms, has new cleaning measures in place with the pandemic.

"We have virtual training that we're able to do for members that don't want to come in to work out," she said. "But overall, I would say we held up pretty strong when we were closed, and I do think that that's because we're such a community here."

#### A part of something bigger

Paulsen currently lives in Fremont with Tyler and Nolan, now 11. Their twins, Briar and Piper, are now 3 years old, and they have another son, Lennox, who will be 2 in October.

"I love supporting local, and I

at Pinnacle Bank and really liked left to be area manager. what I did there, so working there is what made me really like that part of business."

In October 2013, Paulsen was hired at Anytime Fitness as a manager, as she said she was looking for something different from her usual job positions.

"I have always been active, and so I thought, 'Oh, the gym would be a great place," she said. "'I'm active, it's kind of an environment that I am familiar with?"

Anytime Fitness is a 24-hour gym that allows all of its members to work out at any of its more than 5,000 locations worldwide. It also provides personal and group training to its members of all ages.

At the time, the owner of Anytime Fitness, as well as Tan 24-7 next door, was Sam Heineman, who is now the co-founder and co-owner of Dodge County Realty Group

Jan. 1, 2010, and purchased the building in 2011 from the previous owner, who had opened it a few years prior.

said.

"I just started, and I think that week or maybe the next week, he went on vacation, so I was just here by myself," she said. "And I just remember I was like, 'OK, here we go. We're either going to sail it or we're going to sink this ship?"

felt like she was a great fit because

she had a strong passion for fitness,

and more importantly, for helping

When she first took the position,

the center's day-to-day activities and managed the employees who worked there.

"I definitely thrived off of having responsibilities and completing tasks, and probably my favorite part about it was Sam allowed me to take care of activities or run the business as if it were mine," she said. "And he trusted me, and so I really liked that."

Heineman said Paulsen took great pride in her work, the gym and its members and helped the business grown substantially.

"During her time as manager, we saw our membership peak out Heineman started as owner on at well over double where it was when the club was purchased in 2011," he said. "She was able to do this through hard work, dedication and a passion for helping others"

Paulsen left Anytime Fitness in November 2015 for a new position, but said she learned something soon after.

"That was probably one of the times in my life that I realized, As manager, Paulsen took care of never leave a job you love for a job that maybe you'll like," she said.

> At her new position, Paulsen said Heineman would reach out every so often to see if she wanted to return to the gym. After meeting for lunch, the two worked out a new schedule for her to work at Tan 24-7.

> "I had just had my twins and they were babies, and my work hours were ideal at the time because I could spend time with my kids," Paulsen said. "And he knew that, so I said, 'Yep, I'll come back.'"

> When Paulsen said she joined Anytime Fitness back in 2013, she told Heineman that her dream one day was to own the Fremont location.

> "And we both laughed about it, because Sam owned like seven of them, and this was the largest one,"

In her position, she has new roles such as bookkeeping, taxpaying and advertising.

"I still sign up any new member that comes in, I handle all member questions, I answer the phone every day," Paulsen said. "I work inside of the business in the office Monday through Friday, doing the same things that I had done before I was owner."

In learning from her day-today tasks over the years, Paulsen said she felt much more prepared for the role, as well as the lessons she's learned.

"Respect goes a really long way, and my favorite thing to do is to get out of my office and go talk to my members and get to know them," she said. "Yeah, it's fun to work and to do stuff like that, but the best part is, as a part of my job, I get to walk around and talk to people and help people out and just the simple part of it."

Paulsen said she's also seen changes come to the gym. As more it not seem like a job."

community, we're here to support each other, to build each other up and help each other out, and that's an awesome part of it."

During her time at Anytime Fitness, Paulsen said she's learned important lessons on time management and priorities, as well as to always be there for her customers.

"You never know what somebody is going through, so always put a smile on your face and be there for people," she said. "And there's just been so many members that have come through here, members come, members go, and it's taught me a lot with that."

While Anytime Fitness was closed due to COVID-19, Paulsen said most of the work was still normal, but there was something missing: the members.

"It's people stopping up into my office, just checking in to say, 'Hey, how's it going?' Or as I'm walking through the gym, saying, 'Hi,' and people are waving," she said. "It's definitely the members that make



# Creating a strategy

Veronica Sapp brings recognition, employees to RTG Medical

#### **COLLIN SPILINEK Fremont Tribune**

ven with growing up in south Omaha, Veronica Sapp said community has always been a big deal for her.

When the next chapter of her life brought her to RTG Medical in Fremont, she said the city gave her just what she needed.

"News here – a company do-ing well or someone getting a new job, new promotion - I feel like the whole town celebrates," she said. "So to find success with this company, to celebrate the success of this company, I feel like has radiated throughout this town."

Sapp has been with RTG since June 2016, joining the company as its marketing director. In December, she took a new position as director of business development.

RTG Medical, located at 1005 E. 23rd St. in Fremont, matches traveling medical professionals with facilities across the United States.

#### **LIFE GROWING UP**

Sapp grew up in Omaha and attended Omaha South High School. There, she played vollevball, a sport that continued until her college graduation, playing at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) level.

"I kind of attribute my work ethic from the time I was an athlete, and a lot of my drive still comes from that," she said.

Sapp was also a senior class officer and did a short stint of indoor soccer before realizing how much running was involved. But her roots in leadership came from her time with the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA).

There, Sapp said she learned important lessons, including sending a handwritten thank-you letter after a job interview.

"I think in this time of email, people are so quick to just say, 'OK, thanks for the time," she said. "But I think just about every got the job, they've always made a comment on that, and that goes back to my time with FBLA."

app briefly attended the College Sapp said. "So you learned how to philanthropic work in the Fremont and Omah of Saint Mary in Omaha to major in elementary education. "They put you in the classroom in the first semester, and **GOING FORWARD IN** in my freshman year, I learned education and just being in the classroom was not going to be a strength of mine, to put it in the best way possible," she said. During her sophomore year, Sapp transferred to the College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri, a community just south of Branson.



**COLLIN SPILINEK. FREMONT TRIBUNE** 

Veronica Sapp, director of business development for RTG Medical, stands in front of several awards won by the company. As marketing director, Sapp helped the company receive recognition with awards from both Omaha and Fremont.



COURTESY

Veronica Sapp seen with her husband, Brett, at the Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce's Annual Business Excellence Award Ceremony in February 2018.

person that I have interviewed and ing to investing in a website or on social media employees.

"It was a tough time, and I had



to write my own newscasts, I had Veronica Sapp of RTG Medical accepts the Business Excellence Award After her graduation in 2007, to edit it, I had to shoot it myself," from the Omaha Chamber of Commerce in April 2019 for the company's na communitie

solidated and woven a consistent fabric both within its culture and branding locally and nationally.

"She convinced me that while those perspectives are from different audiences, a transparent and consistent view would serve both best," he said. "I was reluctant to agree initially, but as she developed it out, it was clear that she was right."

In December, Sapp took a new position as director of business development. Although the position's roles are still being worked on, she said it's more business-to-business focused, compared to her previous work as business-to-consumer.

Guenthner said the new position came after Sapp approached him asking for further responsibility and challenges for the growing and expanding company, leading to the creation of the role.

"As with many things, rather than over-engineering and designing the role on the front end, I suggested that we work together and create what we need rather than what others have," he said. "2020 has been a challenging year, as we all know, but she has taken her set of challenges and has only begun to apply the product of those efforts?

#### **LEARNING LESSONS**

With some of the startups she's worked at, Sapp said she's experienced hills and valleys with winning big accounts and losing some as well.

"I don't think those ever stop, no matter how old your company gets," she said. "And that's something that I've enjoyed with RTG Medical, is that I've enjoyed seeing the growth of this industry in medical staffing."

Sapp said she's also had to deal with some of the growing pains RTG has had since doubling its staff, which she said has been a fun challenge.

'You have to learn to scale at this size, and what does that look like with a tight-knit group like we have and in a smaller community?" she said. "So it's just been a huge operational learning experience for me.

"That was when I had the opportunity to change my major to public relations," she said. "And I have never looked back."

#### **A NEW FIELD**

Like others who have entered the public relations field, Sapp said she was drawn to it because of her enjoyment in being around other people and wanting to tell their stories.

"I think at the root of just who I am, that is something that's so important to me. I have always said I work best with business owners," she said. "I want to hear their dreams and their goals, and through marketing, I want to help achieve that for them."

The College of the Ozarks doesn't take tuition from its students and instead assigns a job for them to work 15 hours a week. During her senior year, Sapp worked in the public relations office for the school.

'That was the year that former President George W. Bush came and spoke to our college," she said. "So I got a lot of event planning experience, press releases, photography, some journalism."

After graduating in 2011, Sapp started work in entertainment news in Branson.

"You'd be surprised with the C-list celebrities that come down there, it was like American Idol stars at the time who did a stint down there," she said. "So we would interview them if they were coming to the airport or whatever, and it was all based around tourism."

At the time Sapp entered the field, she said digital marketing was starting to evolve and erupt in the marketing industry. Advertisers were starting to move their

be a one-man team in that situation?

### **ADVERTISING**

It wasn't until 2013 when Sapp said her career in advertising really began when she took a position with AAA in selling print ads for the company.

"My experience was in TV advertising and then print advertising," she said. "And it was one of those things where you're like, 'Wow, neither one of these things are hitting in my target marketing?

marketing, Sapp joined a social media agency in February 2014, working in a full-time sales position for the Omaha startup.

"It was during the time Facebook was launching ads, so part of it was educating business leaders and owners on why they should be advertising on Facebook," she said. "It was very before our time, especially here in the Midwest, but it was a fun challenge."

There, Sapp said she learned the importance of having a strategy not just in digital marketing, but in any position. She said often times, businesses would create a Facebook or Twitter page and be done with it.

"They wouldn't regularly update it, they didn't know who their audience was," Sapp said. "So that's where I came in and was regularly like, 'Well, who are you talking to on the phone every day? Let's take that approach on social media.""

After outgrowing her position, Sapp started work at B2 Interactive, a digital marketing agency based out of Omaha. She said she learned many lessons from the agency, including the constant evolution of the digital era.

"There, their product offering was more than just social media," she said. "They offered full website development, Google advertising, local search optimization and social media marketing."

#### **STARTING AT RTG**

In 2016, RTG Medical COO Jeremy Guenthner said he had been silently vetting a group of talented budgets from traditional advertis- marketing professionals to take her thanking me for the dis-

RTG Medical COURTESY

With her passion for digital Veronica Sapp speaks with Nathan Kalin of the Folds of Honor's Fremont chapter about its partnership at RTG Medical's annual Day of Thanks, an employee fundraising event.

> the company's identity and brand cussion, which unfortunately to a higher level.

"We knew it was a competitive market in our industry, but we also knew growth would come from accomplishing that," he said. "Veronica was number one on my shortlist, and I knew she was 100% unaware of us and likely not looking to make a change."

Initially, Sapp said she was apprehensive about taking the position, as she told the recruiter she would not work in a town smaller than Lincoln, where she lived at the time.

"And he was like, 'Just meet this company, just go talk to them,' and I said, 'OK, I'll go talk to them,'" Sapp said. "And I get here, and I just think this is just Omaha/Fremont/Lincoln's best-kept secret, this company, because it's such an incredible place to work."

Guenthner said in his initial talks with Sapp, he felt she was a great fit for the company and cemented her spot and his interest with two statements.

"One being, 'I am an executioner. If you clearly define what you want, I will get it done," he said. "And the other being, 'I am a networker. If we walk in a room, any room, big or small, and you want to meet someone, tell me and I will make it happen?"

Along with these statements, Sapp's lesson learned from FBLA also helped her get the job as well.

"A couple of days later, I received a handwritten letter from

is all too forgotten and not done enough in today's world," Guenthner said. "It was at that moment I requested that she join our team, and she's been not only a great, but invaluable, asset ever since."

Sapp started work at RTG as its marketing director in 2016. She said that upon taking the job, she was told about the company's clear goals, which included doubling its staff and raising awareness of its working environment and employment opportunities.

"Through that, I put together a significant public relations strategy, so planning community events, introducing RTG Medical to some significant key players like the Omaha Chamber," Sapp said. "Tara [Lea] was new with the Fremont Chamber, so it was perfect timing with that relationship."

Part of that strategy also included applying or getting nominated for awards. From 2017 to 2019, RTG Medical was named one of the "Best Places to Work in Omaha" by the Greater Omaha Chamber. It also was named one of the "Best of Fremont" by the Fremont Tribune.

"We also earned the Workforce Game Changer award in 2018 through the Fremont Chamber," Sapp said. "All of these just helped us build awareness with what it's like to work at RTG."

#### **MAKING A NAME**

Guenthner said since Sapp started work at RTG, she has con-

#### MOVING ON UP

C41 PHOTOGRAPHY

But at RTG, Sapp also said the sky has been the limit with her career, as well as others who work there.

"If there are clear goals assigned and the vision is explained, then it's essentially like, 'Let's do this. Let's take this company to the next level," she said. "And that was not a mindset I've ever had in another role."

As well as growing with the company, Sapp said she's grown on a personal level since joining RTG. When she joined the team, she was only a couple years into dating her boyfriend, Brett.

Now, the two married last year, bought a house in Omaha and are expecting their first child.

"So on a personal level in the last four years, this company has supported me through each chapter that I have entered in," Sapp said.

Guenthner said he knows very few people of any age, industry, or location that are as natural, positive, or talented as Sapp. Most importantly, he said she does not demand respect or appreciation from her peers, as it is earned and given to her.

"She is a natural leader that we at RTG and the Fremont community are so blessed to have working on our behalf," Guenthner said. "She has the unique ability to see a step beyond what you want, and then deliver that. That does not go unrecognized, rather it should be rightfully recognized."

During her time working in Fremont, Sapp said the community support has been not only amazing but twofold. In receiving so much from it, she said the company has been able to give back by sponsoring various programs such as the Special Olympics of Fremont or the Fremont Family YMCA's SwimMates program.

"In other communities, you think you're doing a really good deed, but a lot of times, there are organizations that will just cash your check and the next person's check and the next person's check," she said. "And they do their best to show their gratitude, but Fremont has just always been extremely gracious to us."

## rtgmedical.com • 866.784.2329



### Creating more jobs. Expanding in Fremont. Building a **brighter tomorrow.**

## 

**RTG** Medical

