

# KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Five questions with Sunflower Bank CEO Mollie Hale Carter



Mollie Carter, CEO, Sunflower Bank

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*Sunflower Bank is merging with El Paso-based Strategic Growth Bancorp. The deal will create an entity with about \$4 billion in assets, doubling the size of each operation.*

*Mollie Hale Carter, CEO of Sunflower will become president, CEO and co-chair of the combined holding company and CEO of the combined bank.*

*We talked to Carter about the merger and what the company will look like afterward.*

**Q: What's the driving force behind this merger?**

Really what we liked about our organizations coming together is that we're both at similar stages of development. We've been building our core businesses. We've been investing heavily in a lot of our infrastructure to prepare us to be a much larger bank. We've been targeting growth to become a \$4 billion to \$5 billion bank for several

years now. We've built out our wealth management process, we've developed de novo markets and have been really getting our growth engine going. Strategic Growth has done all that, as well. They've acquired various banks and a mortgage company, doing many of the same things to grow in ways that we found would be complementary. Combined, we'll have a larger geographic footprint and we'll be able to bring the resources that we have each built into that larger platform. So we're very complementary without much overlap, which is nice because it makes for a smoother transition.

**Will this result in new services for your clients?**

It will be more about enhancing the services we both already offer. We both offer wealth management and we believe our Logia Portfolio Management platform is a nice service they can expand through their client base. We have a really good mortgage operation today, but their company, Guardian Mortgage, has built a substantially larger platform. So we'll be able to bring those products and services to our client base. Now, we'll have stronger infrastructure to support our operations and we'll be able to provide better services through all that. This isn't really about changing our space as (much as) it is about accelerating the growth we've been planning for all along.

**Will you come together under one brand or operate as separate entities?**

I think people worry too much about the brand and name. The nice thing about not having too much geographic overlap is that we don't have to worry about the brand right now. It's an important issue to have an identity, but we're putting off that discussion until 2017 and instead focus on bringing our organizations together and on executing for clients. Then we'll determine if it makes sense to bring

everything together under one brand or to continue operating with separate brands.

That said, it's really important that we emphasize with our team that we're going to be one company. We're coming together under one charter, we'll have one set of policies and procedures and one reporting structure. So we'll be one company, but we'll just happen to have different names on our offices for the time being.

**What does this merger mean for Kansas City?**

Kansas City has been a tremendous success story for us. Our type of community banking has been very well received in Kansas City and the area remains a huge piece of our future. We have a great team there and want to continue building there.

The key piece of being a regional community bank is that you have many communities, both large and small, and they are all of equal importance. They have different levels of opportunity for growth, but it's very important that we understand all of our communities. We're a regional community bank and we bring our experience into each market we're in. We can bring the strength of a much larger platform, but deliver it in a community bank model.

**Will you be going after relationships with even bigger companies now that you're doubling in size?**

While we will now have the capacity to service larger clients than we have in the past, our success rests on maintaining existing relationships. We like the types of clients we've had in the past. While we can go after bigger clients, we've grown and become who we are with the clients we're currently serving. So we have every expectation that we'll continue to be our same humble selves, just with a larger family.