

Kelly Miller, Highmark FCU – CU Professional Spotlight – May 31, 2019

by Shawn Marie Brummer

Kelly Miller grew up in western North Dakota, in the city of Williston. When he was just five years old, his father was tragically killed in an auto accident, leaving his mother to raise three children alone. She did eventually remarry, to a man with four children of his own, creating a blended family of seven children. A majority of the time, however, it was Kelly and his older brother, and one younger sister that lived together in the family home with the parents.

Kelly's stepfather was the manager of a block plant, and both Kelly and his older brother worked for him at various times. In addition, he mowed lawns, and worked at the local movie theater. Kelly says that his parents always taught the kids to be respectful of others, and to value family time. They enjoyed camping, boating, fishing, and just being outdoors together.

There was also plenty of hunting time with grandparents and other extended family members in the fields around Williston. Many of his friends lived in the country on farms, and Kelly enjoyed helping out, especially baling and stacking the old-style square hay bales. He graduated from high school in 1976, and decided to go to work, earn some money, and gain life experience as opposed to attending college.

At this time, he was working at the Red Owl restaurant, which was just across the street from the Williston Coop Credit Union, now known as Western Cooperative Credit Union. He had been a member for years, and knew many of the credit union staff that walked over to the restaurant quite often for coffee or lunch.

One day, as he was talking to some of the managers (Carl and Sylvia Larson) as they were enjoying their meal, they asked if he would be interested in cooking for them at their home. He declined that offer, but suggested he may be interested in working for them at the credit union. They all laughed as if it were a joke, but just a few minutes later, Sylvia walked back over to the restaurant and asked if he was serious about working at the credit union. He was offered a teller position, and began his long career in the industry in 1977. For the next 20 years, he rose through the ranks and held many different positions, including loan officer, collections officer, loan manager, and finally Branch Manager of the Dickinson office.

From here, Kelly moved to Lemmon, South Dakota where he worked for Dakota Plains Federal Credit Union as a loan officer for a short time. Then, he was offered the opportunity to be the AVP/Loan officer at Dacotah Bank in Mobridge, South Dakota, where he worked for about six years. A short-lived career change occurred when he accepted a position as the Receiving Manager at One World Distribution in Mobridge. He was promoted to Warehouse Manager



after a brief time, but then he saw an employment ad in the Rapid City Journal. Highmark Federal Credit Union was looking for a Branch Manager to open a new office in Custer, South Dakota.

Kelly was hired and began his career with Highmark FCU on May 1, 2006. Through the years, not only has he helped open the new Custer location, he has helped to launch new branches in Spearfish, South Dakota and Gillette, Wyoming, assisting in all of these markets and attending many functions in each city. When the opportunity came up to be the Regional Manager in 2017, he gladly took on that challenge and assumed the title of AVP/Regional Market Manager.

In September of 2018, Simply Service Federal Credit Union merged with Highmark, which created two additional offices: One in Belle Fourche, and one in Sturgis. This past April, his title was changed to AVP/Community Relations Director for Highmark Credit union.

In his role, Kelly primarily works with staff in the Custer office to ensure that branch runs smoothly. With the additional Community Relations Director part of his position, he attends and assists with various community events in all of Highmark's market areas. This includes ribbon cuttings, chamber mixers, and special occasions that take place within Highmark's field of membership.

His visual presence in the community puts him in contact with many members, and many prospective members. "I have always enjoyed helping people," stated Miller. "Through the credit union, I can help people buy that special auto, their first home, or their first business. I find that very rewarding," he added.

In addition to helping his members, Kelly enjoys volunteering in the greater community as well. He has served on many boards throughout the years, including the Jaycees as a past president, Lions Club as past president in several towns, as well as being the District Governor of the 5NW Lions. He has served on many chamber boards in multiple communities, including Dickinson, Lemmon, Mobridge and Custer. He is a past treasurer for the Mobridge Regional Hospitals Board, and has served on the boards of Ducks Unlimited, Oahe Pheasants Forever, and the NRA, just to name a few. He is currently the President of the Black Hills CED, which handles SBA 504 loans in 21 communities.

Over the years, he has received many awards and recognition, as well as praise for his leadership, resulting from his work with the many organizations he gives his time to. And while Kelly may not have attended college, he has continually improved his knowledge through educational opportunities offered through the industry. He has completed a vast amount of training in compliance, truth in lending, bankruptcy strategies for creditors, along with many other courses. Through CUES, he also completed Business Lending I, II and III, finishing their entire lending program.

"Starting with my parents believing in me, then all my bosses, I was so lucky to have good relationships with them, and the opportunity to grow," reflected Miller. "Whether it was at the

show hall, the restaurant, or with the credit unions, I have always been blessed to be able to expand my knowledge and move up within the organization. Watching our credit union grow from one office and one branch in Rapid City to six offices in six unique communities has been so rewarding! I'm grateful to have been a part of that growth, from the remodel of the building in Custer, to our first out-of-town branch, to helping with the merger of the Simply Service branches, it's been a great journey," he concluded.

In his personal life, Kelly has been married to his wife, Debbie, for more than 26 years. They have one grown daughter, Alyssa, and one five-year-old grandson, Kash. Rounding out the family are one small dog and one spoiled cat, who essentially "run the house."

In his free time, Kelly continues to enjoy the outdoors, much as he did as a child in Williston. Whether it be camping, boating, or just spending time at the lake or in the yard, he especially enjoys the time with his family and his grandson – and is working on learning to say "no" to a few of the many requests that he receives from so many community organizations, asking for his assistance.