



Opportunity Through Connection: Leadership Maryland Inspires Shore Bank's Expansion to New Territory

When Tom Mears and Rich Hunt met as Leadership Maryland classmates in 2013, they discovered they had a lot in common. Both had more than 20 years of experience in Maryland's banking industry. Tom was president and CEO of Shore Bank on Maryland's Eastern Shore; Rich had served in executive roles at several banks in the Greater Baltimore area.

Not only did they have similar professional backgrounds, but as they completed their Leadership Maryland sessions, Tom and Rich also found themselves to be like-minded on a wide variety of matters as they discussed the state's most critical issues. One conversation in particular would significantly impact the direction of both men's careers.

"Following our Leadership Maryland session at Deep Creek Lake, Tom and I had dinner that evening, and our conversation carried over from earlier in the day," said Rich. "We just started talking about the issue at hand and how we would solve it and that lead us into what was going on in the banking world, because that's our common denominator. We started talking about what worked and what didn't work in our experiences with our previous banks. As we got to know one another, I remember saying to myself, 'Boy, I'd like to work with Tom one day.'"

Little did Rich know that his chance to work with Tom would soon present itself. As it turns out, Tom had been looking to grow Shore Bank into the Baltimore area, but hadn't found the right opportunity to make the expansion a reality. But, that dinner conversation with Rich gave Tom an idea.

"Rich and I had dinner one night in Western Maryland, and I'd just come from a board meeting where we had talked about our strategy for moving Shore Bank into Baltimore, and my boss had asked if I had any good connections," said Tom. "The more Rich and I talked, I realized that not only was Rich a great lender, but he had an entire team of commercial bankers who might give us the experience and presence we needed to be successful in the area."

A little less than a year later, in July 2014, that idea came to fruition as Rich and his team of lenders officially became the Greater Baltimore Division of Shore Bank. Now a team of seven, the group targets small- and middle-market companies in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Carroll, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. And one year later, the move has been beneficial to everyone involved.

"I often brag that Rich has the best team in the field across the company at the moment in terms of just being a cohesive group, and their experience really differentiates them from other competitors in the market," says Tom. "Although we've only known each other for a couple of years, I feel like I've known Rich for 35 years because we're so similar in how we think about

our industry and the way we go about doing business. If I had not met Rich, I don't know that I would have been able to find the team that we have now. It's been a tremendous benefit for us because we clearly have the right folks in the right seats in that particular location. It's been a really great fit for us."

Rich says the move to Shore Bank has been rejuvenating and inspiring for both him and his team.

"Our team members are out there every day calling on prospects and customers, and they're doing so with a smile, and with an enthusiasm that I haven't seen since 2008," he says. "It's neat to see that camaraderie, and our customers can see it. I think that enthusiasm comes from the culture that Tom and executive management have created. It's just been wonderful."

Both Tom and Rich give Leadership Maryland credit for their recent professional success, and continue to be active members in the organization. Beyond the fortuitous connection they made with each other through the program, both men say they also gained a priceless education about the numerous factors that impact people within each of the state's diverse regions.

"We've all done a ton of different programs in our careers, but to me, Leadership Maryland is the one that has been the most impactful," says Tom. "I left the program thinking that any freshman delegates or senators should be required to go through this course, because it gives you a broad perspective of the issues across the state. I think many times we live in our own bubbles in our own communities, and we don't have a full appreciation for the issues in other communities. This helped educate me. If I pick up any Maryland newspaper paper now, I read it differently, because I understand what the key issues are and how they affect that part of the state."

"Leadership Maryland is probably the number one best thing I have done professionally in my career," says Rich. "I'm a life-long Maryland resident, I've been in the business community for 28 years, and I thought I understood how the state worked. I thought I had a good grasp on all parts of the state and how they all interacted from an economic, social and political perspective, but I was completely off-base. And the connections that you make from your classmates and other folks that you meet along the way as you learn about these counties are invaluable. Leadership Maryland has been very rewarding for me, personally and professionally."

To learn more about Shore Bank, please visit ShoreBank.com. To learn more about Leadership Maryland, please visit LeadershipMD.org