Independent Banker  
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Columns

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The passion I have for community banking was born at ICBA LIVE 2011, which was my first ICBA convention as an adult. I thought I already loved community banking, but I didn’t realize how much until then. Thousands of community bankers convening in one room; motivating videos playing; leaders of the association delivering speeches of who we are and why it matters; keynote speakers inspiring with stories of beating the odds and thriving. It gets your blood pumping, and once you go to one, you’ll never be the same.

Because when community bankers assemble, remarkable things happen. We realize that we’re all facing the same challenges and opportunities and recognize that we’re all part of something bigger. We share firsthand experiences, advice and support to help each other succeed.

For example, when my bank was looking to replace our core, we spoke with potential partners in the expo hall, but we also talked to bankers who had used those solutions. In fact, a casual conversation between our bank’s CFO and another banker led to us leaving LIVE with the name of a consultant we ended up using to assist us with the core search. We’ve also found social media monitoring and rewards checking products through recommendations from our peers at LIVE.

There also is no better educational event for community banks. It’s an opportunity to continue training up the next generation, so I would encourage community bank leaders to join us and bring your rising community continuators with you.

From a business perspective, the experiences you have at LIVE ensure your bank grows and evolves. The ideas we pick up from the program, lessons-learned conversations and new knowledge of today’s landscape all stem from LIVE’s educational sessions and networking events. There simply is nothing better than being together in person, and the convention is carefully crafted to set us up for success.

But above all, ICBA LIVE is like a homecoming. I think back on my own journey, walking into that first convention knowing no one except people from my home state, and now I have banker friends throughout the country. It’s like a big family reunion that grows each year. It helps me remember that we are all connected, standing for a mission bigger than ourselves, serving as protectors of Main Street. It makes me proud to be a community banker.

So, when you attend LIVE in Hawaii this year, make sure you look me up. I’ll be the guy exuding enthusiasm for this community, and I would love to meet you. I look forward to seeing you there!

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Connect with Brad @BradMBolton

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*My top 3*

**Ways to make the most of ICBA LIVE**

1. Attend all social and education events to meet your peers and learn.
2. Download the app and plan your schedule in advance.
3. Purchase your auction ticket and support ICBPAC.

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