Independent Banker  
May 2024  
Portfolio

[tag] Innovation Station

**[dek] How community bankers are leading the financial evolution**

[byline] By Charles E. Potts

[body]

If you know me, you know that one of my favorite reads is the story of Ted Turner’s rise, aptly titled *<i>Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way<i*>. On the surface, it speaks to my work philosophy, but as I dive deeper, particularly in today’s environment, I’m struck by how it points to exactly the path community bankers are taking to drive the future of financial services.

[subhed] The LIVE experience

You need look no further than ICBA LIVE this year to see my point. We overtook Orlando with a passion for innovation. Building on past successes with the ThinkTECH Showcase; ThinkTECH in an Instant, a bustling exhibit featuring community-bank-tailored solutions; and innovation-focused Learning Labs, we introduced new offerings and furthered discussions on industry developments to level up our support of community bank needs.

We provided a dedicated space in the Expo hall for community bankers in search of solutions to hear directly from their peers about their experiences, use cases and meaningful results. This forum helped solidify the successes of community-bank fintech partnerships through concrete, real-world examples.

In addition, we launched future programming plans, including our Innovation Bootcamp for Bankers. To be hosted in our Center for Innovation in Atlanta, this program will create a way for community bankers to cultivate an innovative mindset and culture, with best practices for how they can evaluate and successfully deploy fresh solutions. It’s something bankers have been asking us to provide, and we’re amping up plans now. Keep an eye out for more information on this exciting new offering.

[subhed] Knowing who’s on first

For broad planning purposes, we also rolled out an annual agenda that highlights upcoming ThinkTECH innovation initiatives (*icba.org/innovation*). Lovingly dubbed our “baseball calendar,” this handy reference tool sets the stage for the season. You as a banker can see all of the different innovation initiatives warming up, helping you to better prepare and schedule personnel resources in your bank.

This new schedule not only includes the ThinkTECH Accelerator but also details alumni programs. In addition, we have mapped out initial plans for other sessions of our Demystified Webinar Series and will build on the success of past Solution Forums, which are topically curated, two-hour, quick-pitch sessions that have a Shark Tank vibe to help community bankers to find solutions for hot areas like faster payments, cybersecurity and AI. And we’ve emphasized the ongoing nature of innovation with on-demand sessions—like [April’s ICBA ThinkTECH Connect](https://www.icba.org/all-products/product-details/icba-thinktech-connect).

With this lineup, it may seem like there’s a lot at play—and there is—but as community banks take the lead in advancing financial services, we realize that innovation doesn’t sleep. And, at ICBA Innovation, we’re here to support that drive. As [Ted Turner](https://www.azquotes.com/author/14873-Ted_Turner) famously pointed out, “To succeed, you have to be innovative”—and succeed we will.

***Charles E. Potts*** *is ICBA’s executive vice president and chief innovation officer.*

[ends]