

Barnett Bank's caring spirit lives on with reunion, hospice fundraiser

Barnett Bank may be long gone, but its caring spirit is still alive and well. Close to 300 former Barnett bankers are expected to gather March 6 for "Barnett Alumni 4 Hospice" and raise funds for Community Hospice of Northeast Florida. The goal, in addition to reconnecting with former associates, is to raise \$40,000 for the organization.

"This is a great way for former Barnetters to reconnect while raising funds for Community Hospice, a cause that was always important to Barnett," said Allen Lastinger, former president and COO of Barnett Banks, Inc.

Throughout the years, Barnett bankers were serious about giving back to the communities where they worked and lived. The bank's leaders lived and raised their families in local neighborhoods. Charlie Rice, who served as president and CEO of Barnett Banks, Inc. resided in Ortega. Lastinger, who had a knack for remembering the names of thousands of employees throughout the state, lived near Episcopal High School.

Avondale resident Bill Barnett, great-grandson of the bank's founder, said that the community support started by his ancestors continued largely because the bank's senior leaders led by example.

Bill Barnett started his banking career in 1958 and saw it grow from 200 employ-

ees to 20,000 in 1998. He's looking forward to the upcoming reunion so he can see old friends and show support for Community Hospice, which helped his family when his parents were in their final days. "I am forever grateful to Hospice," he said.

Barnett Bank of Jacksonville was an early supporter of Community Hospice of Northeast Florida. In the mid-1980s, the bank's finance department held numerous spaghetti dinners and other fundraisers. Proceeds were used to purchase a much-needed phone system and computers for the association. In the mid-1990s, Barnett was the catalyst for building the Earl B.

strengthened the bank's community commitment and its employees as well.

"When you learn to do things unconditionally and expect nothing in return, it nourishes your soul and your heart is made stronger," he said. "It's a magical thing."

Jones retired in 1993 from Barnett and went on to serve as president of the Baptist Health Foundation. These days, you'll find him helping out at the Sulzbacher Center and being involved in a program that helps first-time juvenile offenders turn their lives around.

"Barnett helped start a number of non-profits that today are integral to the well-

community," Hall said. "It was a culture where you were valued as a person and where you valued others."

Talk to most former Barnett bankers and you'll hear similar sentiments.

"You couldn't open the paper without seeing something about Barnett reaching out to help the community," said San Marco Resident Susan Burns, who served as a branch manager for Barnett Bank of Jacksonville for several years.

Burns jokingly said she and her Barnett colleagues "bled green," a term used by many employees to describe their loyalty to the company. "Barnett encouraged us to make decisions. We could do what we needed to do to serve our customers. I felt like I owned my bank branch." She currently serves as retail banking manager for EverBank Community Bank.

Barnett Bank was purchased by NationsBank in 1998. At the time, it was the most expensive bank acquisition in the history of banking.

Barnett Bank Alumni 4 Community Hospice will be held March 6 at 6:30 p.m. at the TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse in Ponte Vedra. Tickets are \$75 and can be purchased online at www.communityhospice.com. Former Barnett employees, their family and friends are invited to join the reunion evening. Further information is available by calling (904) 407-7189.

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Hadlow Center for Caring, named after Barnett's General Counsel Earl Hadlow — a longtime San Marco resident who passed away in the early 1990s. The center has been a "home-away-from-home" for approximately 9,000 patients.

"The local hospice organization was struggling and we were in a position to help," said Avondale resident Hugh Jones who served as Barnett Bank of Jacksonville's CEO. Jones' personal beliefs about the importance of community service

being of our community — the Sulzbacher Center, the Ronald McDonald House, and Community Hospice," said Judy Hall, a Riverside resident who worked for Barnett Bank of Jacksonville overseeing community relations. Hall now serves as senior major gifts officer for Community Hospice Foundation and looks back fondly on her Barnett days.

"Barnett was much more than a company — we had a culture of teamwork to get the job done and give back to the com-