





Ogletree Deakins

**BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR**

# A MAN AGAINST COMFORT

CEO Contributes Mightily  
to Ascendence of Bank, City

By Matt Ottinger

There's a sentiment ascribed to stoic philosophers, namely Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, that "comfort is the worst addiction."

When speaking with Old National Bank Chairman and CEO Jim Ryan, it's a concept that's certainly apparent when hearing him reflect on his impressive career. He has consistently rejected such impulses to stand pat and instead embraced the unknown – whether it be to relocate or take on challenging tasks.

Ryan is now being honored as the Indiana Chamber's 2025 Ogletree Deakins Business Leader of the Year in the same season that saw Old National become the 25th largest bank in the U.S. with over \$70 billion in assets following a recent merger with Bremer Bank.

### Midwestern roots

While Ryan is a native Michigander, he recalls trips to the Hoosier state as his mother hailed from Indianapolis. He reflects on his upbringing in his Catholic family, noting the benefits of an "old-fashioned" way of growing up and spending time outside.

"We roamed the streets probably way too late," he quips. "Our parents rarely had any ideas what we were off doing, but everybody in the community was watching over us. So, if you got in trouble, it wasn't too hard for that information to find its way back to mom and dad."

Ryan shares that his parents were both in the business world and he considered it a favorable path for himself. A professor of his at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan would ultimately connect him with a paid internship at a bank, thus launching his career trajectory.

"I've literally never stopped working for a bank since," Ryan notes.

### All about business

Although he was academically strong, Ryan's penchant for wearing ties to class likely helped set him apart, too.

"When I got to college, somehow I immediately decided I needed to wear khaki pants, sport coats and ties," Ryan recalls. "And so I could often be seen around campus as maybe the best-dressed freshman, showing up with pressed pants."

Ryan supposes it likely stems from



Giving back to the community he's come to love is a major emphasis for Ryan and helps the bank serve southwest Indiana in a variety of ways.



when his father made him wear a sport coat on an airplane when he was just eight or nine years old.

But it's not fashion sense to which he ultimately credits his parents' contribution to his success, but to the value of hard work they instilled in him.

"I think sometimes in today's world, (people) look for the easy ways to accomplish our goals – and sometimes good old-fashioned hard work is very helpful; it certainly can't hurt you," Ryan asserts. "And I think a natural curiosity about how things work and how to make things better (is good too)."

Another notable strategy he's employed is "taking on the messy assignments nobody else wanted," he imparts.

Ryan credits an Old National Bank

colleague who consistently offers the mantra, "You own you."

He offers, "Sometimes I think we wait for things to happen to us, versus maybe making things happen for us."

### Family and fellowship

Ryan now enjoys life with his own family that includes his wife, Tricia, and two daughters (22 and 25 years old, respectively), who live in Indianapolis and Evansville. He adds that his family owns a town home in Indianapolis to visit his daughter there and credits her participation in the Orr Fellowship for helping to launch her career. It's a program about which Ryan is so passionate, he's helped to bring its impact to the Evansville area as well.

His peers in the community credit the move for helping spur talent development in southwest Indiana.

“Jim encourages everyone to think bigger,” offers Lloyd Winnecke, CEO of the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership (E-REP) and former Evansville mayor. “In fact, it’s Jim’s bigger thinking and tenacious personal advocacy that landed the Orr Fellowship in Evansville.

“The first cohort of fellows is impressing community leaders so much that Jim is already encouraging other business executives to increase their future Orr Fellowship investment,” Winnecke adds. “He is definitely an outspoken leader in our region’s effort to attract and retain top talent.”

### Engaging Evansville

Ryan’s professional endeavors brought his family to Evansville just over 20 years ago. He reports initially being impressed by its storied past.

“This town has an amazing history, and you could see it when you drive, especially where we’re downtown here. You drive along the (Ohio River) and you see the impressive history and you learn that Old National started its operations 191 years ago in 1834, and today we’re on the exact same spot,” he stresses.

He discusses recently finding an old postcard on eBay depicting one of the original Old National Bank buildings as inspiring nostalgia.

“I think the bank must have had these printed for clients to send with a picture of the bank on it, and so you think about that history that you just feel when you’re here.”

Then in getting to know the community, he became even more impressed by the collaborative atmosphere amongst the citizenry and community leaders.

“I think we’re successful in collaborating together because we like each other incredibly well,” he posits. “We just had a meeting with some CEOs, and we had the current mayor (Stephanie Terry), who’s a Democrat, who just came into office, who the business community has embraced and supported. Former mayor (Winnecke), a Republican, was also in the same meeting.

“Even though in today’s world that seems to be ever so divisive, there’s this very friendly, thoughtful collaboration between business leaders, between parties, really to help benefit everybody – every single person in the region here. And I think that’s unique. We don’t have those same types of sometimes really divisive conversations.”

It’s camaraderie that inspires, and Ryan is cited as someone who truly brings locals

together through his leadership and genuine disposition.

“Jim Ryan is one of the true leaders of our region,” asserts Ron Romain, executive chairman of Evansville-based United Companies. “He is grounded in deep knowledge, extensive experience and an unwavering passion for both Evansville and our state.

“Likewise, his passion for Old National Bank is unmistakable,” Romain adds. “Under Jim’s leadership, the bank has risen to become one of the leading financial institutions in the U.S. He has guided it through both success and tragedy (referencing the 2023 shooting at a Louisville ONB branch that killed five workers), with a style that is uniquely genuine and deeply inspiring.”

### ‘Old’-fashioned

Guiding the bank through its ascendance has indeed been meaningful for Ryan. He estimates that when he started, the bank’s assets were well under \$10 billion, and about \$20 billion when he took the helm six and a half years ago. Now sitting at over \$70 billion, he calls it a “radical transformation.”

“We were this southern Indiana-based company with operations in southern Illinois and western Kentucky, and so we’ve expanded, and I was the corporate development person and worked on mergers and acquisitions for



Ryan was among Old National executive leaders invited to ring the bell at the Nasdaq Stock Exchange in New York in November 2022 to celebrate the completion of a merger with First Midwest Bank.



Ryan beams when discussing the collaborative attitude that permeates the Evansville area, as well as the joy of helping to build Old National’s culture through the years.

many parts of my career here,” he reflects, noting he had a “front row seat” for its growth.

Old National now has 350 locations, with about 700 employees in Vanderburgh County. Its largest market is now Chicago, with Minneapolis/St. Paul second.

“This little southern Indiana bank came out of nowhere to now be one of the 25th largest banks in the country – and probably nobody predicted it, least of all the people that were involved with the bank when I first got here,” Ryan relays. “It’s fun to see the evolution of the organization, and that’s why part of the reason why I travel (frequently) is that so much of our operations are really outside the state and concentrated in a handful of big markets across the Midwest.”

Ryan points to a mentality of “old-fashioned, basic banking” as a foundational business model for Old National.

“We try to use this term, like ‘boring’ is the new ‘sexy’ ...,” he expounds. “It’s borrowing money from depositors in your footprint here and turning around and lending it out in that same footprint. We think that model, coupled with our culture and our ability to be this organization that embraces those somewhat old-fashioned values and embraces people, (knowing) individuals still matter.”

For that reason, he conducts his fair share of interviews for potential colleagues because he likes testing for a cultural fit.

“We’re that place that individuals can still come make a big difference inside our company,” Ryan lauds. “We’re not so big that we forget that this is a people business.”

### Man about town

Ryan is a passionate community advocate, serving on several boards in the area. These include as vice chair for the Deaconess Health System and on the executive committee for the Economic Development Coalition of Southwest Indiana. Furthermore, he also recently received the Business Leader of the Year Award from E-REP.

Winnecke calls Ryan “the region’s most genuine cheerleader,” and declares, “He will talk to anyone about the merits of investing here.

“Jim and his team ensured that bank financing was available in a timely fashion for The Vault – a new \$60 million mixed use development now under construction on Main Street in the heart of Evansville,” he notes. “This project will greatly enhance the vibe of downtown.”

Winnecke continues, “Jim is extraordinarily approachable and serves as a mentor to many. I’m sure that I have consulted Jim on every project of significance over the last 14 years (between the Mayor’s

Office and E-REP). I'm always grateful for his insightful, constructive counsel."

For Ryan, it's about seeing the big picture and helping to keep all aspects of the region moving forward.

"An airport is critical to our success; universities are critical to our success; a thriving public school system is critical to our success," he asserts. "But what I've also come to appreciate – and (the COVID-19 pandemic) really helped bring this home for me, was having quality, local healthcare (which we do)."

### Something always cooking

While he may be a numbers guy, Ryan also has an appreciation for culture. He enjoys directing his creative energy toward the kitchen to challenge himself in the culinary arts.

"Cooking is my creative outlet," he shares. "I replicate dishes from around the world – Indian, Italian, barbecue, anything. We have a huge spice closet organized by cuisine."

Cooking has become a family tradition, especially around the holidays, where culinary competitions have become a household norm.

"We cook together; we eat together; it's one of the ways I stay grounded and connected."

He adds, "I love spending time with my kids and family. I'm really focusing on that."

Ultimately, it's his not-so-secret sauce of hard work and galvanizing people that make Ryan an award-winning business leader.

"You look at the past recipients, and it's humbling just to be even mentioned in the same breath as so many of those past leaders," Ryan praises. "So for me, this Michigander turned Hoosier, to come to this place and have it become a home for me and a home for our family – it's just humbling to be a part of." ■

ESTD • 1946  
**SOUTH CENTRAL**  
INCORPORATED

Congratulations to Jim Ryan  
for being recognized as a  
leader of courage and vision

**BUSINESS IS AN HONORABLE CALLING**

# Congratulations!

FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT

## Golf Gives Back

for KIDS

**Jim Ryan**

### 2025 INDIANA CHAMBER BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR

Congratulations on your recognition as the  
2025 Indiana Chamber Business Leader of the Year!

**MBCA**  
MID-SIZE BANK COALITION OF AMERICA

The **Mid-Size Bank Coalition of America** proudly extends its heartfelt congratulations to **Jim Ryan**, a valued member of our Board of Directors, on being named the Indiana Chamber's 2025 Business Leader of the Year.

*Jim, your steadfast leadership, unwavering support, and deep commitment to the mission of the Mid-Size Bank Coalition of America have left a lasting mark on our organization and the member banks we serve across the United States.*

*We are sincerely grateful for your contributions and proud to celebrate this well-deserved recognition with you.*