



The Many Caring Sides of 2023 Sentinel Frank Gaudio

By ANNE W. SEMMES

Greenwich Sentinel Awardee of 2023 Frank Gaudio, who serves as president and CEO of the First Bank of Greenwich, has been noted by the Sentinel for his qualities of compassion and empathy in his bank leadership and with his wider community. One thing is for sure, Gaudio grew up with a lot of love. “I was born on my grandmother’s birthday,” he tells. “I was the first boy in an Italian family... My father and mother were in love, and I had all my grandparents loving me.” (Add that later Gaudio learned as an altar boy his last name in Latin translated to “love and joy.”)

Gaudio also grew up with three sisters, then married, then had three daughters, and now has four granddaughters, so has lived “surrounded by amazing women” that he says provided him with a “comfort level,” having been “very helpful” in his life. Add to that “a lot of mentors” he received “through the universe.” His first was “a famous tax accountant,” Anthony D’Esposito, who taught him in his beginning career as an accountant a valuable thought process. “I would go to him with a question, and he’d say, ‘Frank, you need to go read.’ He wouldn’t tell me the answer until I’d go research. Then he would tell me why and how.”

Gaudio was living out his dad’s wish that he be an accountant but when his dad suffered a massive heart attack at age 60, he reached out to his son to take on the family’s retail business,

which he did for ten years. He would wind up wearing a number of hats before he entered the mortgage banking business that would lead to that call from “a young gentleman by the name of John Fareri,” the president and CEO of Fareri Associates, a real estate development company.

“Do you want to come to this small community bank [First Bank of Greenwich] in Cos Cob?” And Gaudio and Fareri met up, Gaudio tells. “And I went home, and I said, ‘I really love this guy and I want to go work with him... And ever since then I’ve been here for the last 12 years. But I had all these experiences that really helped me develop what I do now, which is being able to talk to people one-on-one, being able to sit with financial people and understand the finance part of it... So all these things have really helped me develop into this person that you see.’”

Inspirers

Gaudio chokes up when he speaks of other inspirers in his life. “George DeAngelo, who was the chairman here at the Bank, was one of the people that brought me into the bank. He had a lot of faith in me, along with John Fareri. George always wanted my opinion. I always gave him an honest opinion, and he always gave me his honest opinion, and I really value the time that I got to spend with him here at the Bank. I couldn’t have asked for two better people to come into my life at one time. I love what they brought to the table,

“My greatest awards,” he tells, “are from people, the everyday people that come and write me beautiful things or tell me thank you for something that I’ve done for them... The gentleman that just came into this office to say thank you and how many years we’ve known each other, and what we’ve been through. That to me is, I get an award every day.”



Frank with volunteers at a Greenwich paper shredding and food drive.



Frank with artist Michael Spezzano, Jr. who Frank refers to as a local legend. Spezzano has been the feature of two art shows at the First Bank of Greenwich in Cos Cob. Photo by Bob Capazzo.

weighs in on Gaudio. “He is certainly a big personality. And part of that is he really cares about people, and he cares about doing the right thing. He’s always there. He is always accessible. The door is always open and that’s very rare for a bank president. And that’s a big part of business.”

Mark McMillen is Gaudio’s chief operating officer, and he brings a special perspective on the banking business. His Greenwich roots extend back to his great-grandparents. “The way that Frank sees the bank’s role within the community is what I remember when I first started banking. That’s what community banking was all about. He has an office that’s right on the main floor of our main branch. He is physically opening doors... helping with our customers. Our customers are an important part of our community.”

Supporters

“Frank is a tireless, endless advocate for the bank and the community,” shares First Bank Director Barry Small. He had witnessed Gaudio operate during the pandemic, when the government authorized the PPP loans, which allowed many small

what they’ve done for the community, their love for it, their love for business.” Fareri, who is a director at First Bank,

businesses to stay open. “And all the big banks, JP Morgan and Citi - you couldn’t get a person on the phone. And Frank himself, as president of the bank, and his whole senior staff were up until 3 and 4 am, filling out applications, submitting them, getting people their money, so their businesses could carry on.” Gaudio understood how important these loans were to his customers because he knew them all personally.

For Small, “It was one of my proudest moments being associated with the bank, watching how these people serve the community. And it wasn’t about making money, it was about serving their friends and their neighbors and the business people that drive our community.”

“I was on the verge of pretty much going out of business after 40 years,” recalls First Bank customer Sophia Scarpelli of that COVID time. As the owner of Sophia’s Costume Rentals, she tells, “Nobody was renting costumes,” and her former bank was “not participating” in offering PPP’s. “I was devastated...Nobody wanted to help unless you were their customer.” A friend suggested she call Frank Gaudio. She did. “And if it wasn’t for Frank, I’d be out of business...Frank talks the talk, and Frank walks the walk.”

“Isn’t that what banking is supposed to be about? Giving you comfort and care and confidence that you’re taken care of?” confirms Bruno Gioffre, who chairs First Bank and is often there overseeing. “Frank does that, and frankly, he doesn’t work from nine to five. He’s there weekends, if necessary. He’s there at events that are going on in the evening. He attends luncheons and if you’ve spoken with him, he’s what you call a hail-fellow-well-met.”

Formative Influences

So, just how did Frank Gaudio become such an enthusiastic supporter of others and such a people-friendly person? Look to his college days. He chooses a college close to his mom, Iona College in New Rochelle, and needs to be resourceful to work his way through college. His college friend comes up with an idea. “We know a lot of people - we should do events and charge people to come. And we did,” he tells, “And we were very successful in it. That’s how we got through school...We started off with a few hundred people and worked our way up to 5,000 people, at these country clubs in New Rochelle.”

Yes, that college friend he names, Louis D’Esposito, “runs Marvel Studios today,” he shares. And Gaudio now runs three First Bank of Greenwich banks, while creating the B2B business networking group that now counts over 2,000 coming to B2B events. “So, it comes very easy for me to host a party for 2,500 people, because I’ve been doing it since I was a kid.” And in the doing he says was how he “learned how to do business, by social interactions...And that’s how all the business started coming into the bank.”

Perhaps that working his way through college, including working in a mailroom



Former Mayor David Martin of Stamford, Former Greenwich First Selectman Peter Tesei, Bruno Gioffre from the First Bank of Greenwich’s Board of Directors, and Frank at the opening the new Stamford location in 2017.



First Bank of Greenwich Assistant Branch Manager Amy Huertas, Frank, EMS art teacher Benjamin Quesnel, FBOG Business Development Specialist Anthony Cortese. Seated is Victoria Sirito, who was co-founder and co-president of the EMS Curator’s Club. “When you walk into the bank, it’s like you’re walking into a group of friends. Everyone is so accommodating and they’re at every event in town,” Quesnel said. Richard Kaufman photo.



Frank Gaudio has helped many young entrepreneurs including Spencer Grabel who, along with fellow classmate Kai Sherwin, started Aerial Greenwich LLC in 2015, which specialized in aerial photography for Realtors in Fairfield and Westchester counties. When he walked into the First Bank of Greenwich in Cos Cob with his father to open up a business account, Frank came out to meet him. “I was very impressed with [Spencer],” said Frank. In typical Frank fashion, he hired Spencer to help film various bank networking events, introduced him to potential clients, and called the *Sentinel* about doing a story on Spencer, which we did. Richard Kaufman photo.

for \$2.54 an hour, has inspired his programs for financial literacy beginning with his “Start to Save” program for kids 12 and under. Kids are given saving boxes, a custodial bank account, and the fun of spinning that wheel in the bank lobby for a prize. Other programs in the works will address junior high and high school kids financial literacy.

Outreach

Gaudio’s compassion has no doubt primed his embrace of the non-profit world in his community. “Anytime that I can do some good for an institution is big for me,” he tells. One close to his heart is Abilis. “I have a really good friend that has Williams Syndrome,” he shares. “He’s 58 years old...So he loves people...Being with him helps me more than I help him. So, when I get an institution like Abilis here in town, I enjoy that so much. I do so many different charities here, whether it’s for old people, young artists, music artists, wherever I can help.”

Coming up on June 7 is the annual Art Show taking place at First Bank, this year featuring Greenwich artist Carolyn Gamanos. That Art Show idea came to Gaudio on his arrival at the bank, finding empty walls. But how to get people into the bank, he thought, “to actually see the bank branch, and meet the people?”

Have events like an art show. “We need art. There’s no art here,” he recalls. “And I was very fortunate, because as luck may have it, and I don’t know if it’s a spiritual thing, but the gates open up for me and people come into my life, and I was very fortunate to get three local artists that were very ingrained in the community. Frank Smurlo, Mike Spezzano, and Lucie Anderes.”

Perhaps the most visible display of Gaudio’s sense of humor is found in his First Bank of Greenwich billboard ads seen around town. Who hasn’t locked eyes on that billboard showing Gaudio as an astronaut in a space helmet advertising First Bank as “Best Bank in the Galaxy.” The idea was sparked tells Gaudio by John Farier after learning First Bank was named Best Community Bank in Greenwich. “John said I should think bigger!”

Other ads show Gaudio as an animal lover, especially dogs. “What other business in Greenwich, other than a pet store, welcomes dogs,” attests Gaudio friend Scot Weicker. “Dogs are welcomed with open arms and treats by Frank and his dedicated staff.”

“That’s one of the ways that Frank is really able to connect with people is through his sense of humor,” tells Evan Corsello, chief lending officer at First Bank. “Frank could walk into a room with a hundred strangers and leave that room with everyone being his best friend.”

Leadership

Corsello had followed Gaudio to First Bank in 2011 as both had worked at the now defunct USA Bank. “The main reasons I followed Frank,” he tells,



Undies Project co-founders Laura Delaflor and Lucy Langley with the staff at the First Bank of Greenwich. Langley and Delaflor co-founded The Undies Project in 2015 to provide new underwear to men, women and children in need. Support from Frank and the First Bank of Greenwich started when Langley and Delaflor met with Frank, hoping for guidance from Frank on how to enlarge their reach. They were offered an exhibit at the bank’s B2B event, where they were exposed to over 2,000 attendees. The bank was eager to become one of the first drop-off locations for donations and FBOG has supported and sponsored various fundraising campaigns for The Undies Project. Richard Kaufman photo.



Members of the curators club with Frank Gaudio in the back, artist educators Stacey Cleary, Ben Quesnel, and Michael Manning.

“were his leadership, his loyalty. He’s a very caring person. He’s very energetic, certainly full of life. You can see that just in his interactions on a daily basis with customers, with vendors, with employees, he genuinely cares about people, and that’s certainly one of the things that has stuck with me, and I see that on a daily basis. We’ve built this bank tremendously over the course of the last 12 years, and it’s just amazing to see how his involvement in the community and his concern for the people of the community has really benefited the bank in the long run. It’s brought everyone together.”

Barry Small, as the retired founder of Weeden & Company, wraps up with his view of Frank Gaudio as a born leader. “He is everything you’d want a leader to be. He leads by example, but he leads with insight, with empathy, with determination, and with tremendous concern for the community. And it’s a special combination. We’re very lucky to have him.”

Sentinel Award

It was time now to address Gaudio about his Sentinel Award to be presented to him in June. He responds, “I’m a little

shy when it comes to awards and getting it myself. I don’t mind being second and helping somebody in the number one position get an award. This is new for me.”

“Frank is a truly exceptional individual,” says *Sentinel* Publisher Beth Barhydt. “He possesses that rare quality that allows him to improve the world around him as effortlessly as taking a breath.”

But he’s grateful to have recently been recognized by the Connecticut Bankers Association as its next chairman which is a “big honor” he says. There is though one award he says his mother never lets him forget. “I won the religion medal in grammar school, and my mother to this day remembers it and says, “Frankie William [Gaudio] Religion Medal.”

The Greenwich Sentinel Award will be presented to Frank Gaudio on Thursday, June 29 at 6:30pm at the Audubon. Tickets and congratulations ads can be purchased at <https://www.greenwichsentinel.com/sentinel-award/> or you may email beth@greenwichsentinel.com for more information.