

Bank merger proposed locally

(KAIR)--An application to merge two banks will be submitted to the Federal Reserve Board for regulatory approval.

According to a news release issued by St. Joseph, Missouri-based Pony Express Community Bank, that bank plans to merge with First Option Bank, which is headquartered in Osawatomie, Kansas.

Pony Express Community Bank has offices in St. Joseph, as well as in Kansas, including Elwood, Horton, and Troy.

The merger application is the first step in the required regulatory process.

According to the release, the First Option Bank CAO Steven Handke will coordinate the merger. Handke has 35-years of community banking experience serving customers in Brown, Atchison, and Doniphan Counties. If the merger is approved, Handke will be based at the Horton branch, and the Pony Express name will change to First Option Bank.

First Option Bank currently serves over 20,000 customers, with offices in Miami and Linn County, Kansas. Pony Express Community Bank's primary trade territory covers Buchanan and southern Andrew counties in Missouri, and Brown, Doniphan, northern Jackson, and northwestern Atchison counties in Kansas.

According to the release, final regulatory approval and the merger are expected in the fourth quarter of 2019.

If the merger is approved, First Option Bank will have more than \$400 million in total assets.

Pony Express Community Bank President Robert Means, in the release, said the merger will mean "enhanced product and service offerings" that will benefit customers.

First Option Bank President and CEO, Blake Heid, said the bank plans to "maintain a strong commitment to our communities and to meeting the customer's needs in all of the locations we serve."

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