

Banks + Banking

BofA Opens Ben Lomond Branch Office

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About 500 persons welcomed the Ben Lomond branch of Bank of America into the San Lorenzo Valley business community Monday night during an open-house reception that was highlighted by presentation of Bank of America's traditional gold key to branch manager Donald W. Bailey.

Fifth District Supervisor George Cress welcomed the bank by saying, "You were a long time coming. Now we hope that your stay will be extended and profitable. I commend you on your choice of this community. Ben Lomond is a very beautiful town and the very center of the valley. All of us in the valley are proud and happy you are here."

A bomb scare delayed Cress' welcoming speech by about 35 minutes. At 7:55 p.m., five minutes before the ceremonies were to begin, the \$200,000 building was cleared by Sheriff's Deputy Ken Foster because of a telephoned warning that a bomb had been planted in the building and had been set to explode in 15 minutes.

About 200 persons filed in orderly fashion out to the street and stood deploring the incident while sheriff's deputies, California Highway Patrol officers and members of the Ben Lomond Volunteer Fire Department searched the building. No bomb was found.

Most evacuees returned to the building after Foster announced over a public address system that, "You may come back in if you wish. There may be a bomb in here. We think the building is clear. If you wish to return, it's up to you."

After other welcoming remarks by Carl Conelly, a SLV business leader, and Mrs. Alice Earl Wilder, a community planner and longtime Ben Lomond resident, a wry chuckle was brought from the crowd by Samuel V. Stewart, vice-chairman of Bank of America's board of directors, when he said of the bomb scare:

Oldest person in attendance was George D. Cress, Boulder Creek pioneer and father of Supervisor Cress. Cress, 92, said after the bomb scare had evacuated the building, "Why, I've never been run out of a bank before."

Other valley figures attending included Vincent Locatelli, former county supervisor; John Montanari, former partner in Grove-Portola Savings and Loan; and George Dobbell, Robert Gray and Dudley Mikesell, officials of SLV branch offices of County Bank of Santa Cruz.

Other Bank of America officials present included James Wiesler, regional vice president in charge of the San Jose-Santa Cruz area; Edward Sousa, regional vice president; and Ben Pino, vice president and manager of the Santa Cruz Main Office. Master of ceremonies was J. W. Robasciotti, district administrator.

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"We didn't know that our entry into San Lorenzo Valley would be quite as exciting as it has been."

Stewart said that although the bank was the first ever to be established in Ben Lomond, it was actually the 976th Bank of America branch to be established in California.

"The Bank of America has had its eye on Ben Lomond for a long time," Stewart said. "Carl Wentz, our honorary chairman of the board, was a Ben Lomond resident for 42 years."

Stewart said that bank officials had watched Ben Lomond grow first as a recreation and resort community and then as a home for many people involved in space vehicle and electronics work. He said the university of California at Santa Cruz has already attracted to the county about 10,000 persons, and he cited projections that call for UCSC to attract about 60,000 persons to the area by 1980.

"A lot of these people will live with you here in the valley," Stewart said. "Though you may not think so, many of these are nice people and we know you will enjoy having them here. Looking at all this, we knew it was time for us to be here."

Wentz presented the bank's gold key to Bailey with the words:

"When I first came to the valley in 1928 there were about 450 mailboxes. Now there are about 5,000. I have seen many changes. I don't see that we've gained a lot with longhaired men and shorthaired women, but I would say that most of the changes have been for the good. Although I sold my home here in June, I'm tickled to death to see our bank here in Ben Lomond. I think we make a good selection when we picked out Don Wilson to be our manager."

Conelly, a Ben Lomond resident for 37 years, called the bank's arrival "a great occasion for Ben Lomond and our valley. I remember when the railroad trains ran by here, when the railroad station was only about a hundred yards from here. I can see a great future for the bank and for the valley."

Mrs. Wilder said, "It is a great pleasure to see the bank come in here. It will be a business asset for the community."

The crowd filing through the building and partaking of refreshments and picking up souvenirs was one of the largest anyone could remember having attended a business reception in Ben Lomond.



Manager Donald W. Bailey officially opens the door to this new Ben Lomond branch of the Bank of America. Several hundred persons attended the bank's open house Monday night. Bailey served at the main Santa Cruz branch of the bank before being named manager at Ben Lomond.