

Del Norte Credit Union breaks ground on its largest branch yet

By Bruce Krasnow

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As financial institutions move to close branches and consolidate offices, it might seem odd that Del Norte Credit Union has embarked on what will be its biggest branch office yet on San Mateo just off St. Francis Drive.

The two-story steel structure, which is a complete renovation, rising at 604 W. San Mateo Road will include a 6,150-square-foot branch and a 13,000-square-foot second floor with conference space, training rooms and offices.

It comes at a time when more and more customers are using websites and new technology to manage their finances. Del Norte's newest smartphone app allows customers to take a photo of a check for instant deposit. It has so far resulted in 2,000 check deposits a month for its customers without ever walking into a building.

"For 30 years we've been hearing that branches are obsolete," said Deb Salazar, chief operating officer for Del Norte, the largest credit union in Northern New Mexico.

"They still want to be able to walk in. They love the mobile but they want to be able to walk in and talk with someone when they need it."

The new offices also represent something more important for Del Norte, established in 1954 and now with 45,000 members and \$535 million in assets. It sends a strong message it is here for the duration. The long-term business plan for the nonprofit credit union is centered around getting out of leased space and on to property it owns.

That has already happened at Del Norte's new branch in White Rock and its offices at 3286 Cerrillos Road.

"One of our strategies is to go from leased locations to owned locations," said Del Norte President and CEO Chuck Valenti. "We plan on being in business for decades and decades to come, so it didn't make sense for us to continue leasing."

And despite the fact that members of the millennial generation are the largest consumers of technology, surveys show that the top characteristic they value in a bank branch is proximity.

"The important thing to them is the mobile technology, but the number one reason they pick a bank is the proximity of the branch. They want to be able to problem-solve," Valenti said, even if that involves having



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An artist's rendering of the south entrance of the new Del Norte Credit Union building on San Mateo. The two-story steel structure will include a 6,150-square-foot branch and a 13,000-square-foot second floor with conference space, training rooms and offices, along with a drive-thru. Courtesy photo

an employee help them set up online banking and resolve technical glitches.

He added the lease on the Cordova Road branch ends in June 2017 and that office will probably close when the new building opens in June or July 2017.

The exterior of San Mateo building features stacked stone silos that are a nod to Anasazi culture, according to spokeswoman Andrea Clark. The interior has a contemporary open design with three pod teller stations to create a more interactive environment. Also included in the redesign are a tech station for member use and a sitting area with a fireplace.

The facility will also have four drive-thru lanes, an ATM service lane and bring an additional 400 safe deposit boxes to the community.

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