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## COMMUNITY BANKING

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# Thrift Founded in 19th Century Freshens Brand

■ BY BONNIE McGEER

Youthful enthusiasm and fresh ideas.

That's what a 138-year-old Massachusetts thrift that just completed its first acquisition hopes to convey with its new name, Avidia Bank.

The name change followed Westborough Bank's sale in August to Hudson Savings Bank and its parent company, Assabet Valley Bancorp, a transaction that created one of the state's largest thrifts, with \$1 billion of assets.

The Avidia signs went up in late October when the two thrifts converted to the same system and began operating as one bank.

Mark O'Connell, Avidia's president and chief executive, said the name combines the words avid and idea.

"I think it's distinctive from the old traditional name of a town with the word bank at the end of it," he said. "It's a little bit more creative, and it's a little bit more attractive to the younger customer."

He acknowledged, however, that older customers in particu-

lar would have preferred that the bank keep the Hudson name.

Assabet Valley agreed to rename its thrift subsidiary as a condition of its \$20.6 million deal for the \$300 million-asset Westborough, which was announced in November 2006. Both Hudson and Westborough were founded in 1869.

The deal was not without controversy. Some Westborough shareholders felt the price was too low and in July filed an injunction to block the deal. A judge denied the injunction and the sale closed Aug. 26.

Months earlier, another Westborough shareholder unhappy with the sale price made a bid of his own that was about \$4 million more than Assabet had offered, but Westborough's board rejected it.

Mr. O'Connell, who had been Hudson's president and CEO, said closing the deal was "a struggle. But we were committed to moving forward. We were able to cross the finish line and complete the deal."

BrandEquity in Newton, Mass., created the Avidia name and logo,

which is being introduced in a marketing campaign that includes cable television, newspaper, and direct mail. The company has worked with banking companies before and came up with the names for OneUnited Bank, formerly Boston Bank of Commerce, and Apple Bank for Savings, formerly Harlem Savings Bank, in New York.

Ted Selame, BrandEquity's president and CEO, said the name Avidia stands out in an area where bank names lean traditional.

Avidia chose orange as its corporate color, which also helps distinguish it in "the sea of greens and blues" that its rivals use, Mr. Selame said. "Orange has been a really 'in' color lately," he said. "It's warm, too."

Combining the two banks gave Avidia nine branches plus a reduced-hours office in an assisted-living center.

Mr. O'Connell said that though Avidia would consider "the right opportunities" to acquire another bank or build more branches, it is in no hurry. "I think we need a breather here," he said. ■