

Milk-Bone Dog Treats

Carson Wang

Maggie L. Walker Governor's School

Village Bank

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Milk-Bone dog treats: a cornerstone of my Bank Day experience.

Why dog treats? During my visit to Village Bank, I talked extensively with bank officer Ms. Hall about the responsibilities of banks, but what was most memorable was our conversation about the dog treats on the reception counter. Ms. Hall's eyes lit up as she explained how their pet-friendly policy created an inviting space for customers, which made me realize that banks are much more than financial institutions. They are buzzing communities that facilitate heartwarming connections and prosperity for the people within them. Small conversations like these, in addition to the informative discussions throughout Bank Day, truly reshaped how I will manage my financial future and furthered my understanding of how banks support the community.

To begin with, Mr. Lambert and Mr. Mann from the cybersecurity department suggested several actions I should take immediately to protect my money and privacy. My passwords should be changed every ninety days, and I must avoid using public networks to log in to my bank account. Furthermore, Mr. Lambert described his first-hand experience dealing with identity theft. He locked his debit card after he received a suspicious spending alert, which saved his checking account funds. His story pushed me to enable notifications for my debit card charges. Mr. Mann also stressed that educating friends and family is the key to combating digital theft. That night, I steered the conversation at my family dinner table to phishing emails and credit monitoring, sharing the tips I learned from Bank Day with my parents.

Although I'm not yet financially independent, the "Villagers" described crucial topics I must begin thinking about. The branch manager, Mr. Smith, introduced me to traditional and Roth individual retirement accounts (IRAs). Contributions to a Roth IRA are made with post-tax dollars but have tax-free withdrawals, which generally benefits individuals who anticipate retiring in a higher tax bracket. On the other hand, a traditional IRA consists of tax-free deposits which are taxed upon withdrawal. Regardless if I pursue an IRA or another retirement investment strategy, Bank Day highlighted that retirement isn't a distant fantasy but rather a goal I should start working towards right as I enter adulthood. Finally, I learned from Mr. Winn, the President of Village Bank Mortgage, that I should aim to build a credit score of over 750. As a result, I will be able to obtain a lower interest rate when I apply for loans in the future.

However, teaching students how to lay crucial foundations for financial success isn't the only way banks serve society. In the past few years alone, Village Bank has helped over 1,000

families acquire mortgages and become first-time homeowners. Since banks focus on building trust in our communities, Mr. Winn and his team have worked tirelessly to get every customer approved for a mortgage, no matter their circumstance. Banks also innovate during tough situations to continue helping customers manage their money. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Village Bank offered contactless drive-throughs and virtual appointments to provide resources and guidance for loans, deposits, and more.

Additionally, banks place a heavy emphasis on direct community engagement. Village Bank not only encourages every employee to take two volunteering days per year, but they also fund and serve with local non-profit organizations, such as purchasing school supplies for Communities in Schools and building benches with ToolBank. I was especially inspired by their team's commitment to community improvement, so I shared several volunteering opportunities from a non-profit that constructs wheelchair ramps, in which I am heavily involved. The bankers' enthusiastic questions about how they could collaborate with the non-profit and help disabled Virginians further displayed to me the dedication and empathy which banks represent.

Looking back on Bank Day, I can confidently say that it was a transformative experience. When I first pulled into the parking lot and saw the Village Bank's sign, I thought their slogan, "You're a neighbor, not a number," was just a snappy catchphrase. However, as I exchanged bittersweet goodbyes with my peers and "Villagers" at the end of the day, I finally understood the deeper meaning of the slogan. Whether that's Mr. Winn's talk about assisting first-time homeowners or my chat with Ms. Hall about dog treats, Bank Day showed me that "You're a neighbor, not a number" is a mentality banks live by, supporting our communities with enthusiasm, trust, and compassion. Although my college education and business ventures may be full of unknowns, one thing's certain: I will embody these values and imprint them on those around me, one *Milk-Bone* dog treat at a time.