

A LIFESTYLE OF GIVING

GROWING UP ON A FARM IN MORRIS, IL, Thomas Tesdal, Morris Branch President, Commercial Banking Manager for First Midwest Bank, didn't have much. Life consisted of farm work, raising grain and livestock alongside his five siblings and occasional trips into town to pick up food and other supplies. Yet he learned early on that you don't have to be wealthy to help those who are less fortunate. While his father juggled three jobs, his mother collected donations for United Way and other local organizations.

"That taught me, 'better to give than receive,'" Tesdal recalls. "That's what my mom always said."

The lesson has certainly stuck. For Tesdal, who first joined the bank in 1976, philanthropic work is a passion that he shares with his wife, Cheryl, Assistant Vice President and Business Banking Relationship Manager for the Morris branch. Both are involved in more charitable organizations than they can count, through First Midwest Bank and on their own. If they didn't bring their three daughters to volunteer at events with them, the couple jokes they would never see them.

It's because of this dedication to service that Tesdal won the South West Suburban Philanthropic Network's 2009 Philanthropist of the Year award. "I was speechless, to be honest," Tesdal says of when he found out about the award. "I don't do it for the recognition."

The Morris branch employees have a long history of reaching out to the community, but Tesdal received the award after making one organization – Big Brothers Big Sisters of Will and Grundy Counties – a permanent fixture at the bank.

He was first inspired by another bank employee who was mentoring a child through the organization's Lunch Buddy program, which pairs business people in the community with kids at a local school, who meet for lunch once a week. "This opened my eyes," he says. When he discovered Big Brothers Big Sisters of Will and Grundy Counties was in dire need of office space, he decided to do something about it. Tesdal led the bank to provide the organization with a three-year, rent-free, furnished office space to house their local operations, all utilities covered.

Thomas Tesdal,
President, Commercial Banking Manager
Morris Branch, First Midwest Bank

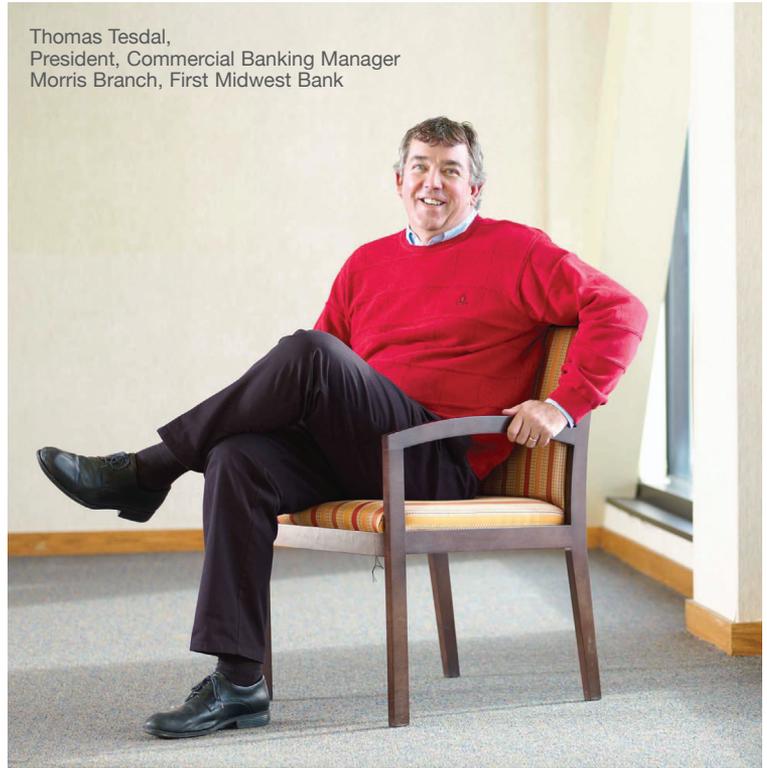


Photo by Andreas Larsson

"The cause hit my passion, which is kids and our future," Tesdal says. "If we don't take care of them, we're in trouble." Last year's economic turmoil made the donation all the more urgent. Without the space, many local participants wouldn't have been able to benefit from the various mentoring programs the organization offers.

Tesdal says he's always viewed his position as branch president as an opportunity to assist area families. His list of achievements ranges from raising \$300,000 for a vocational agricultural program to volunteering as a township supervisor, through which he often met with residents to help them figure out how to pay for their heating and grocery bills.

In their volunteer work, Tesdal and his wife tap into their individual strengths. Tesdal's talent for raising money has assisted countless people through organizations such as We Care of Grundy County. Cheryl coordinates monthly seminars through the bank to help people in the community with everyday tasks such as balancing their checkbook. "All of it is geared toward finance of some sort," she says.

Tesdal has sat on countless boards over the years. Since getting involved in Big Brothers, though, he's been struck by the impact small gestures like taking kids out to lunch can have on their lives. "If all adults would wake up each morning and say, 'I am going to make a difference today,'" he says, "a lot of our problems would go away." ♦