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*The September 2018 edition of ICBA Independent Banker features Midwest BankCentre employees who have been integral to the bank's dedicated service to unbanked and underbanked customers in the St. Louis region: (clockwise from left) Mortgage Officer Kathleen Spies, Chairman and CEO Jim Watson, Executive Vice President Alex Fennoy and LaTonya Jackson, who leads the bank's Friendly Temple branch in St. Louis' Wells-Goodfellow neighborhood, opened in April 2017. Paul Nordmann*

## **Midwest BankCentre Featured in September Issue of *ICBA Independent Banker* As National Winner of 2018 National Community Bank Service Awards**

St. Louis' **Midwest BankCentre** is featured in the September 2018 edition of *ICBA Independent Banker* as the national winner of **2018 National Community Bank Service Awards**, sponsored by the Independent Community Bankers of America®. The bank's impact on bringing mainstream banking services to "unbanked" or "underbanked" families in the St. Louis metro area is featured in a two-page story headlined, "Reaching the unbanked – for everyone's benefit."

"A first-time homebuyer in St. Louis recently broke down at closing. The single mother of two had come to Midwest BankCentre with a dream of owning her own home. She took the bank's financial empowerment and education classes, and attended homebuyer classes from a local



housing partner. And as she signed the papers, she became the first person in her family to ever own a home," the article began.

"That's why we do what we do," said **Alex Fennoy**, executive vice president of community and economic development at Midwest BankCentre. "It's all about giving those families that have been historically locked out an opportunity to make their lives better."

Since a 2009 FDIC survey of the most populated U.S. cities found that St. Louis had the greatest disparity between unbanked African-American households (31 percent) and unbanked white households (1.1 percent), the bank's multifaceted efforts have helped reduce the percentage of unbanked African-American households in St. Louis to 13.3 percent.

The bank has opened branches in African-American-majority neighborhoods, hired African-American and woman-owned contractors to build its branches, and staffed banks with neighborhood residents. The bank has greatly increased the diversity of its staff and legal board to be more representative of the communities it serves. "That has really helped us – from making connections in the community, to sorting out the best strategic partners for us to further develop our franchise, and even down to product development and tracking our progress in the community," said Chairman and CEO **Jim Watson**.

The bank's next goal is to help grow African-American-owned businesses by working with the Heartland St. Louis Black Chamber of Commerce, a unit of the US Black Chambers of Commerce. **Veta T. Jeffery**, senior vice president of community and economic development at the bank, was recently elected to the US Black Chambers' board as national director of chamber relations. In that role, she will work to connect top African-American-owned businesses with Fortune 500 companies to generate economic growth.

Midwest BankCentre was selected from more than 100 nominees for the ICBA honor.