



Klein retires from AFCU

IN SHORT Credit union executive leaves the Jacksonville financial institution after almost 18 years, helping it grow and fighting predatory lending. Walter L. Biernacki, Jr., succeeds him.

By **JOHN HOFHEIMER**
Leader staff writer

Members of the payday lending industry would be ill advised to celebrate that Hank Klein stepped down Friday after serving nearly 18 years as president of Arkansas Federal Credit Union.

Klein, who will turn 65 Tuesday, said he would travel, spoil his grandchildren, volunteer at the Clinton Presidential Library and work as a volunteer to curb what he calls the illegal lending abuses of the high-interest, storefront money lenders.

When Klein arrived in Jacksonville, the credit union had only the main branch, located at Jacksonville. Next month, it will open its eighth location, this one in Cabot.

Meanwhile, the affable bear of a man founded Arkansans Against Abusive Payday Lenders. His group includes representatives from AARP, Arkansas Coalition for Families and Children, Acorn, the Better Business Bureau and the Consumer Federation of America among others.

He has worked with Fort Smith lawyer Todd Turner, who has repeatedly and successfully sued the lenders and with lobbyists and lawmakers trying to hamstring payday lenders and so-called check cashers with new laws.

Arkansas Federal Credit Union, founded in 1956, serves more than 59,000 members and is the state's largest credit union. It has assets of more than \$406 million and branches in Jacksonville, Little Rock, North Little Rock, Conway and Fort Smith, with another slated to open July 11 in Cabot.

"I worked at four credit unions and my goal was to make each a whole lot better off."

He said he's leaving Arkansas Federal "financially well off, providing good services and with beautiful branch offices.

"We paid bonuses to members eight of the last 11 years," said Klein, who lives in North Little Rock.

He said he was surprised that

the payday-lending problem was still unresolved.

Walter L. (Larry) Biernacki Jr. will replace Klein at the credit union starting Monday.

Biernacki has 26 years experience in the financial services industry, most recently as senior vice president and lending division manager at San Antonio Federal Credit Unit, with assets exceeding \$1.7 billion.

In an open letter to credit union members, Klein wrote, "When I arrived, there was one location and 20,018 members. Now there are seven locations (soon to be eight with our new Cabot Branch) and more than 59,000 members. As many of you probably know, I will be retiring at the end of June, in what will be a bittersweet end to an amazing journey."

"I have worked for 38 years in Credit Unions, all Air Force based. I joined the Credit Union movement in 1967 as Collection Department Supervisor at Patrick Air Force Base Credit Union (now Space Coast Credit Union) in Melbourne, Fla. In 1971, I moved to Eglin Federal Credit Union in Fort Walton Beach, Florida and was promoted to Assistant General Manager. In 1979, I took over the management of Tyndall Federal Credit Union in Panama City, Florida and was instrumental in developing many new and progressive member services and organizational policies. I made the move to Arkansas Federal Credit Union (formerly Little Rock Air Force Base Federal Credit Union) in November of 1987.

"I have appreciated the Board allowing me to have a bigger perspective than just our Credit Union, or the Credit Unions in our state. That bigger perspective has allowed me to bring unique technology, products and services to the members of this credit union."

Klein said he and his wife Muriel will stay in Central Arkansas, but

will probably spend the winter months in Fort Walton Beach, Florida visiting children and grandchildren.

Klein also serves as a board member of the Better Business Bureau of Arkansas and the Jacksonville Museum of Military History. He is a past board member of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce.

Klein has been active in the broader credit union movement through national associations. He serves on the board of directors of the Credit Union Executives Society and is past chairman of the National Association of Federal Credit Unions among other offices. He also has served as a member of the Thrift Institutions Advisory Council of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

He has won both the National Association of Federal Credit Union's Professional of the Year and Executive of the year.

In 2002 he was selected as one of the 10 most influential individuals in the federal credit union community over the past 35 years.

Craig Savell, the credit union's executive vice president, left his job as president of the Arkansas Credit Union League in 2000 "to come here and work with Mr. Klein," he said, "in large part because of his reputation around the nation.

"He's been a wonderful mentor. "He's held in regard as a forward thinking, progressive thinking CEO," said Savell. "He always been the consummate professional, always recognized as a person who operated an efficient, effective organization.

Of Klein's work toward closing down the payday lenders, Savell said: "This should have been a credit union movement issue, but he had to take the lead and involve others." He credited Klein with bringing the issue to the forefront of Arkansas consciousness.

He said Klein's retirement party would be attended by some of the biggest names in the national credit union movement.



Klein