

Welcome to the SEACOMM Podcast, your place for the latest on what's happening at SEACOMM and helpful tips on saving and protecting your money.

Dave Cohen:

I am Dave Cohen. This is the SEACOMM Podcast. And with us today is our branch manager from our Essex location, Joe Feltz. Joe, how are you doing today?

Joe Feltz:

I'm great, Dave. Thanks for having me over.

Dave Cohen:

Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for being part of the podcast. You know what? Let's dive right in. Can you give us a little bit of a background on you and your education?

Joe Feltz:

Sure. So I actually grew up and attended high school in Southern Vermont. Attended the University of Vermont studying business and economics and graduating with a bachelor's degree in economics. Taken many, many courses over the years of my 30-year career in finance and in banking and it's been a ride. So I've enjoyed every minute of it.

Dave Cohen:

You've talked about a 30-year career. So what did you do before joining SEACOMM? What kind of positions have you held?

Joe Feltz:

So basically I started at Chittenden Bank, which was a local bank back in the early days of my career. As a teller, I worked my way around and pretty much held every position in the branch network, from FSRs to assistant managers, branch managers. I also did about six years doing mortgage origination and doing mortgage loans. But really I've always come back to the branch management area because it's been my focus over my career.

Dave Cohen:

What made you want to come to SEACOMM?

Joe Feltz:

It's funny. I was actually driving down Shelburne Road and I saw them putting the finishing touches on the SEACOMM branch in South Burlington. And I said, "Geez, I should check those guys out, see what they're all about." I had never heard of them before. I did some research and I just really liked the mission and the history of SEACOMM. And I decided to interview for the Essex branch manager and haven't looked back since. Just love the company and love the credit union and their philosophy and their mission.

Dave Cohen:

We at SEACOMM, we service a very large area geographically, from Watertown on the St. Lawrence River, all the way to Plattsburgh, here in Vermont as well in South Burlington and in Essex. So how do you feel that SEACOMM is structured to really support that large geographic area?

Joe Feltz:

I think the biggest thing that I've noticed is SEACOMM's small. We're really able to look at individual needs and really kind of uncover the stories that people have. The great people have bad things that happen to them. So we kind of look beyond those credit scores and those numbers and really try to understand what obstacles are in people's way and really try to facilitate them attaining their goals. And I think being small gives us that individual capability, at the same time being large enough to provide the necessary products and services to help people.

Dave Cohen:

That's something that I've seen as well looking through our membership, our different branches, that we have the size and capability to provide a lot of things, but we also have that small town, backyard, very... It's not necessarily a big bank feel that a lot of organizations have. SEACOMM, like you said, is still very small town, very member focused. You had mentioned the products or services that we have for our members. What are some of the ones that you are really excited to share with our members?

Joe Feltz:

I think all of our products and services are just so fantastic. And we really do tailor them to the individual. But quite frankly, in each quarter, we do what we call our spin the wheel for our Moola Moola account members, which are our miners. And they come in and they spin the wheel and they're able to win prizes and gift cards and free deposits. And to see the kids, just so excited to do that and basically just for doing well in school. We take a peek at their report card, but it's more about the smiles and really giving kids a chance to really learn about money. And I think that's the goal. And I think it's very exciting for me to watch.

Dave Cohen:

Sure. I do think it's important to start with our younger members to give them that kind of financial education, to give them experience with their finances, having their parents come in and show them what they do. Not a lot of us had that growing up. And I think that that's something that's really important. And for those people who didn't have that experience growing up, I think it's great that SEACOMM also provides for our regular members, our adult members, a lot of great services. Can you talk about some of those?

Joe Feltz:

Yeah, absolutely. We're really focused on the consumer. I love to sit down with people and are able to kind of figure out what position they're in, whether they're there to buy their first new car or their used car. And we just help them do that. We have great rates on consumer loans, credit cards, and these are things that really enhance the member's financial wellbeing. And I think it's just so much fun to just sit down and really be able to do that with our members.

Dave Cohen:

I think it's important to talk about the idea of people helping people, the credit union motto. And it's something that we do do a lot for our members, but I think it's also good to note that we do a lot for the

community. So here in Essex, what are some of the things that you've seen SEACOMM do for the community?

Joe Feltz:

Certainly on the financial side and supporting local organizations like the local food shelves, the elderly assistance programs through Age Well, also the Essex Police Department and their national night out for the community, as well as our community day in Essex. And just numerous other events that we support through both Essex and Essex Junction's rec departments, we're always looking for ways that we can contribute to help the wellbeing of the community. And I also am a member of the Essex Rotary Club, and that gives me the ability to connect with various fundraising opportunities.

Dave Cohen:

So you mentioned Rotary, you do attend Essex Rotary meetings. You talk about the fundraising opportunities. Why is it so important for an organization like SEACOMM to be involved with an organization like Rotary?

Joe Feltz:

I think Rotary gives me a way to connect to the community's needs. It gives me an avenue. Rotary is pretty much on the pulse of the community as far as what's needed at any particular time. And it's just great to be a part, a very small part, of just making a big difference. And I think the Essex Rotary is just a wonderful club. And I think that having that connection is invaluable to me as a branch manager.

Dave Cohen:

Having that connection to the community through Rotary, what are some of the things that you've seen within the community that's happening now? What are some trends, whether it's business or finance that you've seen that it's important for a financial institution like SEACOMM to be aware of?

Joe Feltz:

It's kind of numerous and it goes... The club does lots of fundraising obviously throughout the year. At various times, certainly food insecurity has been a real big issue and a hot button issue in the community recently. Certainly different programs that we've worked through, the high school and the different schools as far as needs with snacks and those types of things. But there's a whole variety of things that we could be here pretty much all day. And I think that's the real message that you get through Rotary. And that is that there is tremendous need within the community. And whether it be fuel assistance or any of those things, depending on what season you're in, and it really just kind of brings to the surface what the Rotary Club does.

Dave Cohen:

You have been an employee, not just of credit unions, but of banks as well. Have you felt a difference between the organizations as far as within?

Joe Feltz:

I think I've always been intrigued by credit unions throughout my career. Most of my career has been in commercial banks. And I think the biggest thing that's different is that I know that the mission of the credit union is really to help its members, as opposed to making money for shareholders. And there's

nothing wrong with that model, but I do think that things get put aside sometimes in banking where people don't necessarily fit the box. And I think the credit union fills that void and is really able to bring those members in and hopefully facilitate their financial wellbeing.

Dave Cohen:

What is one thing that you would like people to know about SEACOMM that maybe they're not aware of, even the members?

Joe Feltz:

Well, I think a lot of it here has been obviously our brand recognition is key. We want people to know that we're here, but I also think that some people think, "Hey, we're only in Essex in South Burlington," but in fact, we run across Upstate New York, as you mentioned at the top. And I think it's that diversity and growth and our ability to provide modern day products and services to all of our members. And I think some people, without actually researching it, don't necessarily know how diverse SEACOMM is.

Dave Cohen:

You have vast experience, like we covered in the financial institution world. There are so many options, different banks, different credit unions. There's so many places that people can go for their finances. Why do you think people should choose SEACOMM?

Joe Feltz:

I think SEACOMM, again, it goes back to that size, to providing individualized service to our members, looking beyond those credit scores and numbers to really help members achieve their goals. I think you're not just a number, you're a person with problems that everyone has, and we're just here to try to help. And I think that really separates us from a lot of the financial institutions because they're either too big or their philosophy is really more focused on making money.

Dave Cohen:

Well, the man knows what he's talking about. Joe, thank you so much for joining us, not just the podcast, but also the credit union. I think you are an invaluable member of our organization. If you haven't been to our Essex branch and you're in the area, Joe, can you let everybody know where we are in Essex?

Joe Feltz:

Yep. We're right at 25 Carmichael Street, right on the corner. You can't miss us and stop by and see us anytime. We'd love to see you and we'd love to show you around.

Dave Cohen:

If you have any questions, you are more than welcome to stop in and speak with Joe or his great staff. You could also head to SeaComm.org if you have any other questions as well. This has been the SEACOMM podcast. Joe Feltz, our branch manager of our Essex branch. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for answering all these questions and giving us a little insight to who you are and why you're here.

Joe Feltz:

Thanks, Dave. I appreciate it.

Dave Cohen:

I am Dave Cohen with SEACOMM.

Thank you for joining us for this edition of the SEACOMM Podcast. We hope you'll listen in again.