

**Rhodes McCranie  
Community Banking Company, Fitzgerald  
2025 J. Steven Walraven Scholarship Winning Essay**

Scholarship Essay

Community Banking has played a significant role in my life. Ever since I can remember I have consistently grown up in the community banking world. From running around my dad's office to working at the bank, When I was young, I realized that I wanted to be a banker. My dad is certainly my inspiration, from helping people start their businesses to buying their first house I always knew that's what I wanted to do. One story that stood out to me is while my dad worked at Community Bank, he helped one of his customers a World War 2 veteran with all of his VA issues, took him to appointments, and made provisions for him to get into a nursing home. Stories like that help me strive to do good work while working for a community banking company. When I started working at the bank, I realized that I wasn't just a coworker I was a part of one big family. From having countless people asking me how's my day been and what are my weekend plans, I knew I was right where I wanted to be. Working at the bank has been a great learning experience for me, from learning all the different types of checking and savings accounts to learning about time deposits and certificates of deposits. Also working at the bank has given me a little insight into all the specific jobs within banking. From a teller to a customer service representative, to a loan officer and all the people working upstairs. As I've worked at the bank for almost a year now, I've seen how Community Banking impacts the community. From sponsoring school athletics to most of the events in Fitzgerald. After Hurricane Helene, we organized a community cookout event to celebrate getting through the tough times. That day I was in charge of going around and buying ice, so all the drinks were kept ice cold. Even though I wasn't at the cookout for the whole day I saw first-hand how it changed the mood in Fitzgerald. There was laughing live music, and great camaraderie. One thing that I realized that day, a community bank is more than just a bank, it is a hub of interaction, a place where relationships

are built on trust and mutual assistance. Community banks are not just financial institutions; they are pivotal to fostering economic growth.