



Banking Overview: Local credit unions grow through recessionary struggles

Author: Adam Van Brimmer

Savannah's four largest non-occupational credit unions have largely avoided the tough times encountered by their community banking peers.

Three of the four grew in assets and profitability in 2010's first quarter in comparison with the first quarter of 2009. Savannah-based Workmen's Circle Credit Union quintupled its earnings, while Hinesville-based GeoVista Credit Union went from losing \$671,012 to making \$16,775 as of the end of the first quarter.

These credit unions are open to local residents who join via a minimum deposit. The lending focus is on mortgages, credit lines and vehicle loans to members. Credit unions have minimal exposure to the construction and development sector that has plagued community banks.

The credit unions have seen a rise in loan delinquencies, however. Georgia's Heritage had the highest percentage of non-performing loans in their portfolio at 1.84 percent followed by Georgia's Own Credit Union, the area's largest credit union with \$1.56 billion in assets, at 1.34 percent.

The average for the local community banks, by comparison, is around 7 percent.