



“We’re relationship people. If you can’t trust the people, you can’t trust the process.”

With Bank of Texas, Empire Baking Company found not just a financial services provider—but also an ally to help them grow.

When Robert and Meaders Ozarow, the owners of Dallas-based **Empire Baking Company**, found out that their landlord was planning on selling their building in 2016, they knew that moving wasn't a viable option. Weighing more than 20,000 pounds each, Empire's ovens were too large to move easily. Plus, moving to a new location could disrupt the client and vendor relationships they had forged over the previous nearly 15 years.

So, they decided to buy the building and become their own landlord. However, in order to do so they needed a loan and a financial services provider they could rely on to work with them and meet their needs.

“When you're a small business, it takes a banker who will understand your character, to see growth,” Meaders said.

Meet Empire Baking Company

FOUNDED: 1992

OWNERS: Robert and Meaders Ozarow. This husband-and-wife duo left successful careers—he as an investment banker and she in high-end furniture sales—to pursue their dream of bringing European-style artisan bread to the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

“That kind of bread was not available in Texas at the time, although it was being done on both coasts,” Meaders recalled.

HOW THEY MADE THEIR MARK: Although they also create made-from-scratch pastries, Empire Baking Co. is best known for the naturally leavened bread they bake. Today, around 80% of their business is wholesale to places like fine-dining restaurants and hotels. The remaining 20% is retail through their two storefronts: their original location in Inwood Village (5450 W. Lovers Ln. #132) and a newer location in East Dallas (5614 E. University Blvd.).





A BANKER WHO GIVES SOLUTIONS

Unhappy with the customer service at their old financial services provider, the Ozarows went by mutual referral to **Bank of Texas**, where they met Melissa Keeling, Dallas-Fort Worth commercial banking market manager. With Keeling, they found the relationship-focused (rather than transaction-focused) banker they were looking for. "She was the only banker who gave us solutions," Meaders said.

Aware of Empire Baking's short deadline for purchasing the building, Keeling immediately got to work. She met with the Ozarows many times and also took a credit officer to the bakery to meet them and get to know their needs. Aware that the husband and wife had never purchased a commercial building before, she worked hard to support them each step of the way. "I was very available throughout the process to answer questions and provide guidance," Keeling said.

The result: Bank of Texas was able to help the Ozarows secure an **SBA (Small Business Association) loan** in an astounding 41 days, from start to close. "That's the fastest we've ever closed a SBA loan," Keeling recalled. During that time, Bank of Texas provided Empire Baking Company with information explaining the terms of the loan and walked them through the entire process, so they completely understood it.

Plus, she and Bank of Texas were able to deliver the customer service that the Ozarows wanted, leading to a relationship based on trust that continues today. "We're relationship people. If you can't trust the people, you can't trust the process," Meaders said.

3 things you need to know about SBA Loans

- 1** The SBA partners with SBA-approved private lenders such as Bank of Texas to provide loans to businesses that want access to the longer repayment terms and lower down payment options available through SBA loan programs.
- 2** There are multiple types of SBA loans. For instance, SBA 7(a) loans, which are the SBA's primary lending program, are ideal for buying a business or refinancing debt. Meanwhile, SBA 504 loans are ideal for purchasing and renovating commercial real estate. **To learn more about the possible uses of these two options and the terms available, go online.**
- 3** Bank of Texas provides competitive interest rates on our SBA loans that are comparative to non-SBA loans of the same size. More importantly, we have the ability to fix the interest rate for a period of time, giving business owners the certainty in monthly payments so they can better manage their cash flow.



“It’s a real team game, which helps us be a more vibrant business.”

Meaders Ozarow
Founder and owner of Empire Baking Company



A PARTNER FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Today, Bank of Texas provides Empire Baking Company with not only the loan, but also Treasury, 401(k) and payroll services. However, what matters most to the Ozarows is having Keeling by their side to respond to their ideas as their business grows.

“We’re entrepreneurial. We come out with ideas that we want to pursue, and she lets us know very realistically if we should pursue them,” Meaders said. “It’s a real team game, which helps us be a more vibrant business.”

Shared values:
Determination and
dedication to getting
the job done right

When Bank of Texas' Melissa Keeling was striving to get Empire Baking Company's SBA loan completed in a little over a month, she worked late and on weekends to get the job done.

Similarly, baking and delivering naturally leavened bread is a 24-7 business. Since natural bread has a short shelf life of two-to-three days, Empire Baking delivers the bread to its wholesale customers themselves—on the very same day that it's baked. That way, the customers get the maximum shelf life from the bread. In order to make this possible, there's usually someone in the bakery working day and night.

Bank of Texas has been there for Empire Baking Company during challenging times as well, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. As soon as the pandemic started, the Ozarows called Keeling and asked what they should do. Not only did she provide advice, she also helped Empire Baking Company secure PPP loans as soon as they became available.

Plus, even when Keeling can't provide solutions herself, she connects the Ozarows with people and companies that can. For instance, she introduced them to a payroll automation company and referred them to a Bank of Texas mortgage banker when they wanted to refinance their home mortgage.

Throughout these interactions—not just with Keeling, but with Bank of Texas as a whole—one of the things that's impressed the Ozarows the most is "just how friendly and helpful they've been about everything." It's no wonder that, when asked which three words she would use to describe the bank, Meaders responded with: "Solutions-orientated, knowledgeable and partners."

Meanwhile, Keeling and the Ozarows have a solid banking relationship that's not built on transactions alone. "With your doctor, banker, tax accountant and lawyer, you want a relationship of trust, not just a business transaction," Meaders explained. "Trust feels like a friendship."



“Solutions-orientated,
knowledgeable and partners.”

Meaders Ozarow

Founder and owner of Empire Baking Company



Meet Melissa Keeling

Dallas-Fort Worth Commercial Banking Market Manager

JOINED BANK OF TEXAS: 2008

EDUCATION: BBA - Finance, Texas Christian University

WHAT MAKES BANK OF TEXAS DIFFERENT? “The people and the collaboration that we have. You work with people you like. I think that shows with clients and prospects.”

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO WORK AT BANK OF TEXAS AS OPPOSED TO ELSEWHERE? WHAT MAKES OUR CLIENTS SPECIAL? “The people are fantastic. My manager always goes above and beyond. Our clients are really nice, easy to work with and fun. If they’re a good fit, they stay for a long time.”

