New CEO for SunTrust in N. Florida, David Mann (BSBA ’81)

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David Mann knows how to grow tobacco and corn and he knows how to grow a bank.

Mann’s 28-years’ experience in banking led the former Lake City farm boy into his new role as chairman and CEO of SunTrust Bank’s North Florida region — the area’s fourth largest bank.

Mann, who most recently lead the commercial real estate special assets division for all of SunTrust Bank Inc.’s (NYSE: STI) 13-state footprint, will oversee the bank’s operations and 80-branch network in North Florida.

“He comes across as a North Florida good ‘ol boy but he’s as sharp as a whip. And he has a very easy way of inspiring people,” said Dominic Calabro, president and CEO of Florida TaxWatch Inc. — where Mann is an at-large executive committee member and chairman of the board of Center for Education Performance and Accountability.

Mann, a fifth generation Floridian, grew up on a farm south of Lake City and attended the University of Florida, earning two bachelors’ degrees in finance as well as agricultural economics in 1981.

His first job in banking was in the agricultural lending department at the Exchange Bank in Tampa, which later became North Carolina National Bank, commonly known as NCNB and later, NationsBank Corp.

“When I first started in banking, I didn’t know exactly what time to get in” because I was a farmer, he said. “My first boss said it’s before I get there until after I leave and that has served me well. It’s what it takes to be successful.”

Mann said he chose to go into banking because he wanted to work with people, seeing all aspects of their industry and helping them develop strategies to grow. And he liked to win.

“In banking you know when you’ve won and you know when you’ve lost.”

Mann has had quite a few wins in his career working for SunTrust Bank, which was the forth largest bank in Northeast Florida with $1.7 billion in deposits as of June 30, according to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

In 1984, Mann joined SunTrust as a commercial lender in Tampa and then spent
five years at **Chase Manhattan Bank**, now **JPMorgan Chase & Co.** in corporate middle-market lending before rejoining SunTrust in 1990 as a commercial real estate lending team leader.

Since then, Mann has held various roles including head of special assets in Orlando, market president in Lake County, president of SunTrust’s mid-Florida market and executive in charge of commercial real estate lending statewide from 2002 through 2008.

“In every job he has ever had (at SunTrust) he has been immensely successful in growing the bank, growing the client base and growing satisfied teammates,” said Tom Kuntz, president and CEO of SunTrust Bank, Florida. “His demeanor is such that he’s a steady ship in both calm and stormy waters.”

Mann has experience with stormy waters after spending the past year heading the special assets division out of Atlanta for a company that took a $316.9 million net loss in the third quarter largely due to its provision for loan losses and a drop in fair value of the company’s public debt. “In general, every day we spend a lot of time in what is sort of viewed as a dark tunnel and both parties (the bank and borrower) are trying to get to the other side,” Mann said. “When you can work through it, it is more advantageous” for the bank and the borrower.

While Jacksonville’s marketplace has its challenges, Mann said he is pleased with how well it has held up compared to other parts of Florida.

“This has been a very good market for us,” he said. This is a “market that has stabilization and good diversity in terms of business” mix.

While hardly any bank that lent money five years ago is free of its problem loans, Mann said perseverance has helped.

“I came into banking in the 80’s when there were tough times” and then in the 90s and I remember thinking if those times would end. And they did,” he said. “One of the things that gets me through this is knowing that it’s out there, one day.”