The Top of The Heap

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Acadiana economy. The careful approach many local business people have adopted has prepared them to deal with external pressures while securing their own internal controls.

“1991 was a good year, and it appears 1991 will be good, too,” says Bob Bladot, whose North Western Inc., a building materials supplier, posted $1 million in revenue in 1990, up some $1 million from 1989, for each year in the Top 50. “There was a pickup in construction of all types, and our growth also came from those growths. We’re maintaining our operation, and we think that we can make some of that profit at the bottom line.”

Either kind of that vision—looking for opportunities while keeping a watchful eye on costs—that typifies what First National Bank president Swann observed in the current wave of entrepreneurship in Acadiana.

“This is the age of the entrepreneur,” he says. “People are entrepreneurship. It’s not that there’s less—just that entrepreneurship is disciplined and thoughtfully. They’re more broad in their research and investigation. They think more about choosing their paths, in making their financial decisions, and they’re much more cautious about what to borrow money.”

In the final analysis, it’s bullish for Lafayette and Acadiana, he says. “The most important entrepreneurship is new entrepreneurship, but they don’t get into the money every day and the rest.”

Swann says that South Louisiana remains a business community in which entrepreneurs thrive, but they’ve added caution to their range of focuses. “The one who went through the nickle and now has the value of the dime learned then,” he says. “After going through what they went through, nobody wants to go through it again.”

In the short period that followed (pages 18-20) of some of the firms that represent the varied companies of the 1991 Acadiana Top 50, those themes are echoed both in companies that are enjoying brighter times and those that are weathering challenges. But the engine of Acadiana is moving forward, not without bumps, but with purpose.