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Community banking may not seem much different from other banks that have populated every crevice of every town in the country. Indeed, they provide loans, take deposits, and open accounts for people much like all other banks do. However, there is a side to community banking that people don't tend to see until they need it: compassion. Community banks have compassion for the community and support it because they see the other side of the story when someone in a tough situation comes in for a loan. They look past the person's simple statistics and look for the story before making a decision that could change that person's life. While I may not have personally experienced this effect at the tender age of 18, I know some stories that show it.

I was part of a class last year called AP Seminar that went to TEDxUGA, a TED Talk event where inspired people talked about topics and concerns to change the way people think about different parts of their lives. The speakers' topics were very broad, but one of the speakers struck me with his topic because of how much I hadn't realized about its importance: financial empathy. The speaker was a financial planning PhD student at UGA who wanted to talk about financial empathy: the story behind the numbers. He talked about how a lot of times, in financial services and in general, really, people tended to only look at the numbers. They don't understand why some people make financial decisions against the opinion of experts because they only look at the numbers. For instance, he talked about an experience he once heard about from his colleague, who was helping a woman file her taxes. This colleague asked the woman what she would do with her sizeable tax return, and she said that she was going to buy a big flat-screen TV. The colleague kept trying to convince her to save the money instead of spend it but she would not budge. Finally, after they had filed the return and she was getting ready to leave, he asked why. She said that she lived in a pretty rough neighborhood, and that if that TV could keep her kids and their friends in the house and off the streets, it would be one less thing to worry about.

This was just one of many situations that the speaker talked about that made me start to realize the importance in seeing the story behind the numbers. And later, after learning more about community banking, I realized that this might be one of its most important qualities. These banks are supports for the community because they are part of the community, and that above anything else shows just how important they are. They exemplify financial empathy, which can make all the difference in a person's life when they need it the most. And most of all, the community will always be better off for it.