

 IN PERSON

Finding Wealth Management Opportunities in Boston



DAVID MURPHY

Title: SVP and Massachusetts Regional Wealth Leader, People's United Bank

Age: 61

Industry experience: 34 years

BY DIANE MCLAUGHLIN
BANKER & TRADESMAN STAFF

While military special operations might bring to mind Navy SEALs and anti-terrorism missions, David Murphy's military service gave him access to a quieter side of the special operations community. This experience has helped him develop a key skill for his work as a wealth manager: listening to clients.

Murphy recently joined Connecticut-based People's United Bank to lead the expansion of its investment advisory business, People's United Advisors, into Greater Boston. Murphy previously led a wealth advisory team at Boston Private and spent 17 years at TD Bank. His time there was interrupted when he returned to active duty from 2009 to 2012, running the Department of Defense's Counter Threat Finance operations in Afghanistan for a year and then working for Special Operations Command in Tampa for another two years.

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Q: Why did People's United Advisors decide to expand into Greater Boston?

A: There are two reasons. One, I think all banks want to create a steady stream of earnings, and two, banks want to be able to provide a broad range of financial products and services to their client base. What came first was a really strong and robust build-out of the commercial team here under Pat Sullivan, and that's been going on for about three years now. He's brought in some talented folks like Bruce Figueroa, who heads up the not-for-profit group, and then brought in other talented folks who are leading our business banking, commercial, residential real estate lending and franchising teams.

Successful folks in those particular commercial verticals – whether they be privately held independents or part of large public corporations – also need principal financial planning and advice and counsel. So, it's a natural extension for the bank to build out its existing wealth management platform to satisfy those customers' needs.

Q: What are some of the benefits for clients to combine their wealth management with their banker?

A: We will provide relationship pricing to clients. So, a commercial client may come in, and they'll be assigned a private banker, they'll have a relationship manager, they'll have access to planning as part of the services, and they'll also have access to trusts. We get a full picture of the client's commercial, retail and wealth picture. If we can understand that, we can be able to one, provide relationship pricing, and two, on the wealth side, we can provide a holistic multigenerational view for the client.

We find it increasingly important to engage the adult children and spouses in all of the planning that's going on. So that way, and if the client is willing to entrust us with that level of detail, we can do the most effective job possible for them.

Q: What are some opportunities that you see in the Boston area?

A: I think by anybody's calculation, somebody who has acquired \$1 million to \$5 million in net worth – either due to self-starting and owning a business, being successful in corporate America, or some other entrepreneurial endeavor – is wealthy. But there are a number of competitors in the market who have taken that segment and moved it to a 1-800 number, and I don't think that's what people who have accumulated a few million dollars in wealth really want. Likewise, we've seen an increase in the number of robo-advisers, where the client answers a dozen questions and receives a recommended investment portfolio.

I was part of a group that did a survey a few years back and we asked, "If you had to choose between a digital type engagement with your advisor or a more traditional sit-down with an adviser, an estate attorney or an accountant, somebody who coordinates all of those activities for you so you get a holistic picture, what do you choose?" And the answer was: They wanted both.

So the challenge – and I think the opportunity – for those financial institutions, including People's United, is can they up their digital game in term so communicating with clients, but then post-COVID or a lessening of the COVID crisis, have that personal sit-down and understand what the client's needs are and become that trusted financial adviser who can do that. That said, we do have a number of clients who have net worth far in excess of that \$1 million to \$5 million threshold. But I think right now, the low-lying fruit in Boston is to serve the need that's being largely ignored by our competitors.

Q: What else does People's United plan in expanding into this area?

A: We are constantly looking and interviewing for not only talented people, but, probably more importantly than somebody who has the skills to do the job, understanding if they're a cultural fit for People's United. I've previously worked at organizations, and acquisitions have been made that are a struggle to integrate not because the people we acquired weren't smart, but more that they didn't understand the culture of the organization that they were joining. People's United is always looking for not only talented people but talented organizations.

Q: Is there anything about your time in the service that influences your work?

A: I think there is. When you're going to a country in Africa, or you're going to a country in the Middle East, you have to understand the cultural norms, you have to understand how to listen and understand what their hopes and desires are, and you have to put aside your particular cultural biases. I think through that training, I've become a better listener. If there was a bias, I like to hire employees who are good listeners, because the clients that we are going to serve, we can't do a darned thing until we've listened, and listened intuitively.

Occasionally people won't be particularly straightforward with you, but they will leave hints, or they will start guiding you. If you're not listening, you won't understand what they have to say and how you can best help them. I believe that my military service helped me become a better listener in understanding what people are really asking and hiring those good listeners as employees who can be inquisitive but at the same time hear what the client is saying. ◀

FIVE FACTS ABOUT MURPHY:

1

Climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro with his wife

2

Enjoys almost any flavor of Ben & Jerry's

3

Supports the Special Operations Warrior Foundation

4

A fan of Australian Shepherd dogs

5

Enjoys anything to do with ice hockey

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