

SPOTLIGHT BEST PLACES TO WORK

First Bank Chicago

633 Skokie Boulevard, Northbrook

847-272-1300 | firstbankchicago.com

Education Opens Doors to Opportunity

Ask Daryl Borja why First Bank Chicago is a great place to work, and he has a ready answer. “The bank helped me complete my education,” says Borja, who works in systems & applications support at the bank.

Borja had been working as a teller and decided to finish his college degree when he found out the bank had a tuition reimbursement benefit. He was able to continue working and finish college at Northeastern Illinois University, completing most of the coursework at night. “It was a tough schedule,” Borja recalls. “But well worth it.” Since receiving his degree in finance, Borja has been promoted twice. “The bank was very generous,” he says.

“The bank believes in bringing out the best in their people.”

First Bank Chicago supports education for employees—a reason why it’s been named one of Chicago’s Best Places to Work for 5 consecutive years since 2018. “We encourage self-development,” says Lenore Erickson, chief of human resources. “We offer a lot of educational opportunities.”

First Bank Chicago is one of the top five privately held banks in the Chicago area. The bank continues to expand, opening a full-service center in Skokie in 2019 and a loan production office in Westchester in 2022. The Northbrook banking center was modernized in 2021, and a future site is planned to open in the West Loop in 2023.

The bank’s original location is in Highland Park. The bank legally changed its name in 2022 to First Bank Chicago to reflect the bank’s expansive client list across Chicagoland. The Highland Park location will continue to use the name, First Bank of Highland Park, a division of First Bank Chicago.

Decades of strong growth has been fueled by superior employee performance and dedication. Employees enjoy a generous benefits package, including health and life insurance, 401 (k) and profit-sharing plans, reimbursement for wellness activities, and other benefits.

The education benefits extend to all employees, and in some cases to their families.

David Giangiorgi participates in the children’s college fund. His daughter Alyssa receives tuition assistance to attend Illinois State University where she is majoring in bi-lingual elementary education. The benefit amount is based on the employee’s years of service.

In Giangiorgi’s case, his daughter receives nearly \$5,000 a year for tuition. “This is an unbelievable benefit,” says Giangiorgi, senior vice president of consumer lending in Highland Park.

The bank offers other educational benefits, such as online courses, in-person and hybrid training classes, and lunch and learn seminars. With student debt a big concern, the bank reimburses employees to repay student loans up to \$200 a month.

Anne Ronstadt handles information security for the bank. She had been planning for eight years to complete a high-level certification, what she describes as the information security industry’s gold standard. The test has a pass rate of only 20%. The bank paid for the course, learning materials and the test. Ronstadt passed the test, and her certification goes into effect September 1. “The bank is amazing,” she says, echoing the views of other employees at First Bank Chicago. “The bank believes in bringing out the best in their people.”



Anne Ronstadt, Senior Information Security Officer, recently completed her certification program which was paid for by the bank as part of her continuous education.



Eric Ephraim, president and CEO, with staff from the Highland Park banking center, showing their support for the Highland Park community by wearing t-shirts purchased for a fundraiser.



Staff collectively volunteer nearly 3,000 hours annually. Serving dinner at St. James Church is just one of many volunteer activities.



Each year, the bank hosts an employee appreciation dinner.

First Bank Chicago



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