

CLIENT STORY

# Sioux Valley Community CU

How a \$35M Credit Union Thrives with an  
Ongoing Accountability Partner





“You've got a hundred other things that you're working on. If you're trying to survive and grow, who's got time to sit there and update an outdated plan? We no longer live in fear of what the future might hold; we are excited control our future to help us reach our five year, ten year, and 20 year plans.”

– John Parks, President/CEO



## Introduction

**Sioux Valley Community Credit Union (SVCCU)** is a \$38M institution with three branches in and around Sioux City, IA. John Parks, President/CEO of SVCCU and his team have been partnering with **Kathy Darwin** since 2019, together weathering the pandemic's gales and the economy's continual rollercoaster.

In this case study, we'll learn how Park's decision to hire Kathy Darwin and her unique approach to strategic planning and "coaching" benefited SVCCU over the course of four years, helping them navigate the storm and come out stronger than ever on the other side.



## A Tragedy and an Opportunity

SVCCU was in a tough place when Parks joined the credit union in 2012. A relatively small - but mighty - credit union, Parks has rekindled the traditional principles of the credit union movement in SVCCU, like investing in local communities. The credit union had veered off-path before Parks suddenly stepped into the CEO role after a tragedy at the credit union. “What I walked into was a credit union losing money. SVCCU has less than a \$5M portfolio, and probably \$2M of that was in CBL (community business) loans.

**Those loans were in Des Moines, IA, and because they weren't in our community, they weren't helping our community,” said Parks.**

A portfolio heavy on investments, which at the time were risky, combined with a quickly decreasing membership, were catalysts for change. The SVCCU leadership needed to think outside the box to survive.

Several years of working with local strategic planners left Parks wondering if it was time to expand their scope. “We couldn't get new ideas anymore,” said Parks. His team agreed it was time to try out a non-local strategic planner. “The board and I felt it was really important to try a strategic planner outside of Iowa and offer wider eyesight on what's going on,” said Parks.



## Why SVCCU Chose Kathy Darwin



As Parks was reviewing his options, Kathy Darwin stood out due to her totally unique coaching process. “We needed someone that was going to hold us accountable to make sure that we were looking at our action plan and recognize if we were making progress,” said Parks. Indeed, one of the biggest problems with strategic planning is lack of follow-through and accountability. Candles burnt hot and bright, but fizzle after a few short months.

**Kathy’s combination of bi-weekly check-ins, accountability partnerships, and aggressive vision formulas produce strong success rates among her credit union clients.**

Progress was made quickly once SVCCU and Darwin started working together, but COVID threw the plan for a loop shortly after.



## Navigating COVID

As many readers know firsthand, leading a credit union through early COVID times was brutal. “I can tell you when we first went into COVID, I wasn’t contacting Kathy because we were supposed to have these bi-weekly meetings and it was just...everything was just difficult,” said Parks, painfully. “But Kathy reached out to me and she was like, ‘Hey, let’s do this. Come on.’”

**Parks was thankful for her consistent check-ins to help guide him through the early stages of COVID, when lockdowns were in place and no one knew what was coming next.**

“The charge offs were just killing us. Meat facilities like Tyson halted production and we had many members that were impacted. Kathy helped us strategize loans and figure out strategies to get those members get through it,” said Parks.



## Navigating COVID



The only light that we really had was my calls with Kathy because she was so upbeat and she would look at our data and say, ‘You guys are doing great. Now, what can we do to get the loans up?’” said Parks. Kathy’s national perspective allowed SVCCU a view into what other credit unions around the country, in similar predicaments, were doing to survive.

**“She really listened to me and interpreted what was going on in our community and so forth. And that back and forth was such a tremendous help in developing enhancements to our original plan.”**

Parks applauded his board and staff for their efforts getting through the pandemic, “And Kathy's been right there with us.”



## By the Numbers

“All of a sudden 2021 rolls around and we're sitting really good,” said Parks, shocked that any credit union survived the first year of the pandemic. Below is a detailed report on SVCCU’s improvement since working with Kathy Darwin:

**16.5x**  
**In-House Mortgage  
Growth**

*2018 - present*

**165%**  
**Asset Growth**

*2018 - present*

**113%**  
**Loan Growth**

*2019 - present*





## 16.5x In-House Mortgage Growth

*2018 - present*

### Expanding In-House Mortgages

In 2020, SVCCU's direct consumer loans had dropped from \$15M to \$14M and the credit union was struggling to get additional auto loans, which make up almost 70% of their direct loans. SVCCU currently has \$2,889,535 (23 loans) for in-house mortgages with two more pre-approvals for 2nd quarter 2023 totaling another \$650K.

Prior to working with Kathy in 2018, SVCCU's in-house mortgages totaled \$174,295 (two mortgages), but early on Kathy recommended expanding their in-house mortgage program. As a trusted lender in the community, it made sense for SVCCU to include mortgage services. Members know and trust SVCCU to help them with their financial needs and home financing is one of the most important purchases a person will make.

The minimum LTV (Loan to Value) SVCCU would go was 80% and their current "in-house" loan portfolio has an LTV of 69% and average interest rate of 4.35%. The SVCCU Board has now approved a couple new programs with PLA (Premier Lending Alliance) that allows SVCCU to finance up to 100% LTV and they also offer Adjustable-Rate Mortgages.



**135%**  
**Asset Growth**

*2018 - present*

## Assets

SVCCU's assets have grown by over a third in five years.

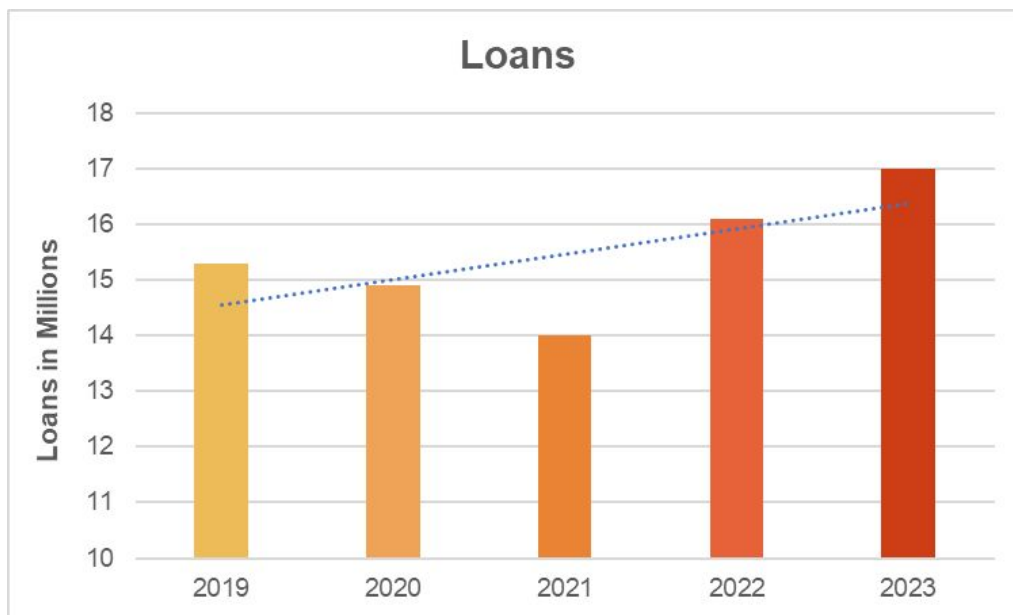


**113%**  
**Loan Growth**

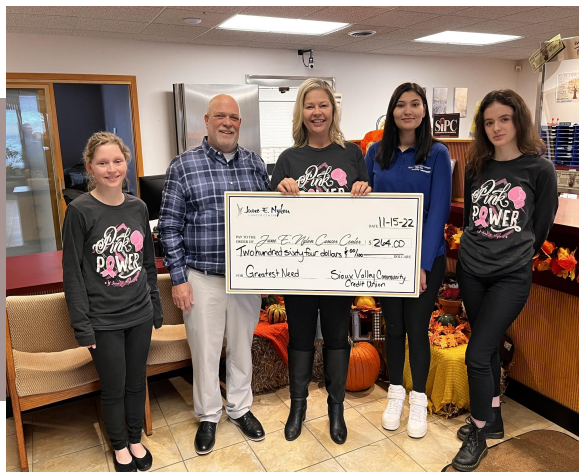
*2019 - present*

## Loans

SVCCU ended 2019 with \$15.3M in loans and struggled during the pandemic to get over the \$15M hump again



**“It’s no coincidence that once Kathy came on board with us, you see the improvements in our assets and our loans. She’s been a vital part of our team in helping us get there,” said Parks.**



## Accountability and Consistency is Key

Consistent coaching, pivoting, and a laser focus is what Kathy provides to help credit unions reach their specific goals.

**“Without ongoing strategy coaching, this would've never happened, our plan would've sat on the shelf through COVID, and never been picked up again,” said Parks matter-of-factly.**

“You've got a hundred other things that you're working on. If you're trying to survive and grow, who's got time to sit there and update their strategic plan? Are you doing the credit union any justice by spending time updating a plan that's outdated?”

Under Park's leadership, SVCCU will never go back to the old ways of doing strategic planning. “You have a planning session, one to three days, however fancy you make it. Once it's over, you have the plan, but then it's up to a specific team – often just the CEO - to implement. It's a waste of money,” laughed Parks.



## Conclusion

Parks strongly believes his credit union's success begins with their Board of Directors and employees, who care deeply about their Members and SVCCU. The credit union's partnership with Kathy Darwin, as well as other key partners like Premier Lending Alliance and Central States of Omaha, have made it possible for SVCCU to maintain four growing and vibrant locations, which is quite rare for a credit union their size.

**“We no longer live in fear of what the future might hold; we are excited to continue our work and control our future to help us reach our five-year, ten year, and 20 year plans,” said Parks.**

**Interested in learning more about Kathy Darwin's strategic planning and coaching services?**

Visit [kathydarwin.com](https://kathydarwin.com) / email [kathy.darwin@me.com](mailto:kathy.darwin@me.com)  
call Kathy directly at (505) 480-7304

Scan here to learn more



**KATHY  
DARWIN**

Strategic coaching,  
not planning