

## Craigmont citizens don't want stagecoach to leave

Decision by Wells Fargo to close bank draws fire

By Elaine Williams of the Tribune

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The Wells Fargo Bank at Craigmont.

CRAIGMONT - When Ralph Mathison's wife died about two years ago, the manager of the Wells Fargo Craigmont branch helped him settle her financial affairs.

Mathison, and more than 20 others who gathered Wednesday at the Prairie Club in Craigmont, said that's the kind of personal service they'll lose when the bank closes in August.

"Every time a small town loses any business like this, it's a real hurt," said Mike Lamping of the Craigmont area.

Their concerns seem unlikely to sway decision-makers at Wells Fargo.

"Unfortunately, the cost of doing business, including the extensive remodeling our building would have required, has become too great in Craigmont," wrote Amy McDevitt, a spokeswoman for Wells Fargo in Boise, who responded to questions by e-mail.

"It was a difficult decision, yet we could not grow market share in Craigmont, making it difficult to make the store profitable."

The closure in Craigmont is isolated and not a part of a larger plan to close small rural locations, wrote McDevitt, who didn't specify what kind of work the building needed.

The only other closure the bank is undertaking right now in Idaho, is in Mountain Home where a lease isn't being renewed. Wells Fargo owns its office in Craigmont.

The departure of the bank will limit the already scarce options for banking in Craigmont, Lamping said.

The only other provider of banking services with a Craigmont location is a community credit union, and unlike Wells Fargo it doesn't have safe deposit boxes, Lamping said.

Many bank customers in Craigmont are skeptical about the alternatives the company is proposing, such as online banking or use of the Cottonwood branch.

Part of that is based on the apparent lack of interest from Wells Fargo officials about their concerns, said Timothy Dorgan, of Winchester.

He owns or manages nine accounts with the bank, yet, so far, no one has responded to a letter he sent in mid April expressing his dissatisfaction with the decision.

Many people don't own computers and, especially in the winter when the roads are snowy, traveling to Cottonwood can be dangerous particularly for seniors, said Jan Kight, of the Winchester area.

Even if distance weren't a factor, it's unlikely the service in other locations will equal that of the Craigmont office where the employees act as allies for the customers, said Stephen Bly of the Winchester area.

"They not only call me by name, they ask how my kids and grandkids are."

Bly believes there will be a domino affect on other businesses once the bank closes. Bank customers from outlying areas like Winchester will do their banking elsewhere and no longer shop for groceries or run other errands in Craigmont.

What's strange about the decision, Bly said, is that it comes from a bank that has a stage coach in its logo evoking images of a business that serves the rural West. "I hope they get a different corporate symbol because it's not going to fit."

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