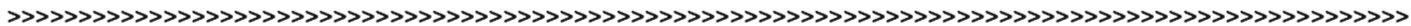


For the fans



First person Charlie Crawford

Cheerleading as a life experience

The fuel for March Madness comes from college cheerleaders. Charlie Crawford, chairman of the Private Bank of Buckhead, drew business lessons from what he learned cheering for the University of Pennsylvania Quakers in football, basketball and the NCAA Tournament.

I can't say I aspired to be a college cheerleader. I had some misconceptions. I had no idea I would spend so much time in the weight room in order to compete and perform stunts.

I'm 5-foot-10 and 165 pounds now, 155 pounds back then. I played varsity tennis at Penn and enjoyed running. My fraternity brother was a cheerleader and asked me to check it out.

I hit the gym and went to a weeklong camp at Virginia Tech. It was challenging to learn the proper techniques for lifting my partner over my head. Being at the base of pyramids resulted in bloody ears as the ladies would stand on my shoulders. Fortunately, we practiced on pads and didn't have any bad accidents.

I have a lot of admiration for today's cheerleaders. These men and women are extremely competent in gymnastics. I did not have a lot of that background.

The trust is unbelievable. When the ladies fall off the backside of a pyramid, they trust that you or the other guy will catch them. You develop a bond with your partner. It was nice to catch up recently with one of the members of our squad that went on to coach cheerleading at the collegiate level.

Cheerleading gets you in front of a crowd and builds self-confidence. In starting the Private Bank of Buckhead, I had to keep spirits high and draw the vision and enthusiasm for pursuing our goals.

The last five years have been challenging for our industry. Just like my misperceptions about cheerleading, people have misperceptions about banking. We make sure we are out front, telling our story.

My senior year, the Quakers won the 1985 Ivy League basketball title and an automatic NCAA berth.

We flew to Houston for the first round against Memphis State. We lost 67-55. The Ivy League isn't known for its athletic prowess, so we had to be careful not to be intimidated by schools with more athletic resources. In banking, you need to be careful of the same thing.

I married into a Georgia Tech family, and with our three kids, we cheer for the Yellow Jackets. My daughter, 15, recently asked me what it was like to be a collegiate cheerleader.

I shared with her what a great experience it was and some life lessons that I am able to apply in my business today.

- Reported by Michelle Hiskey



Private Bank of Buckhead Chairman Charlie Crawford supported his fellow cheerleaders at Penn (bottom).

