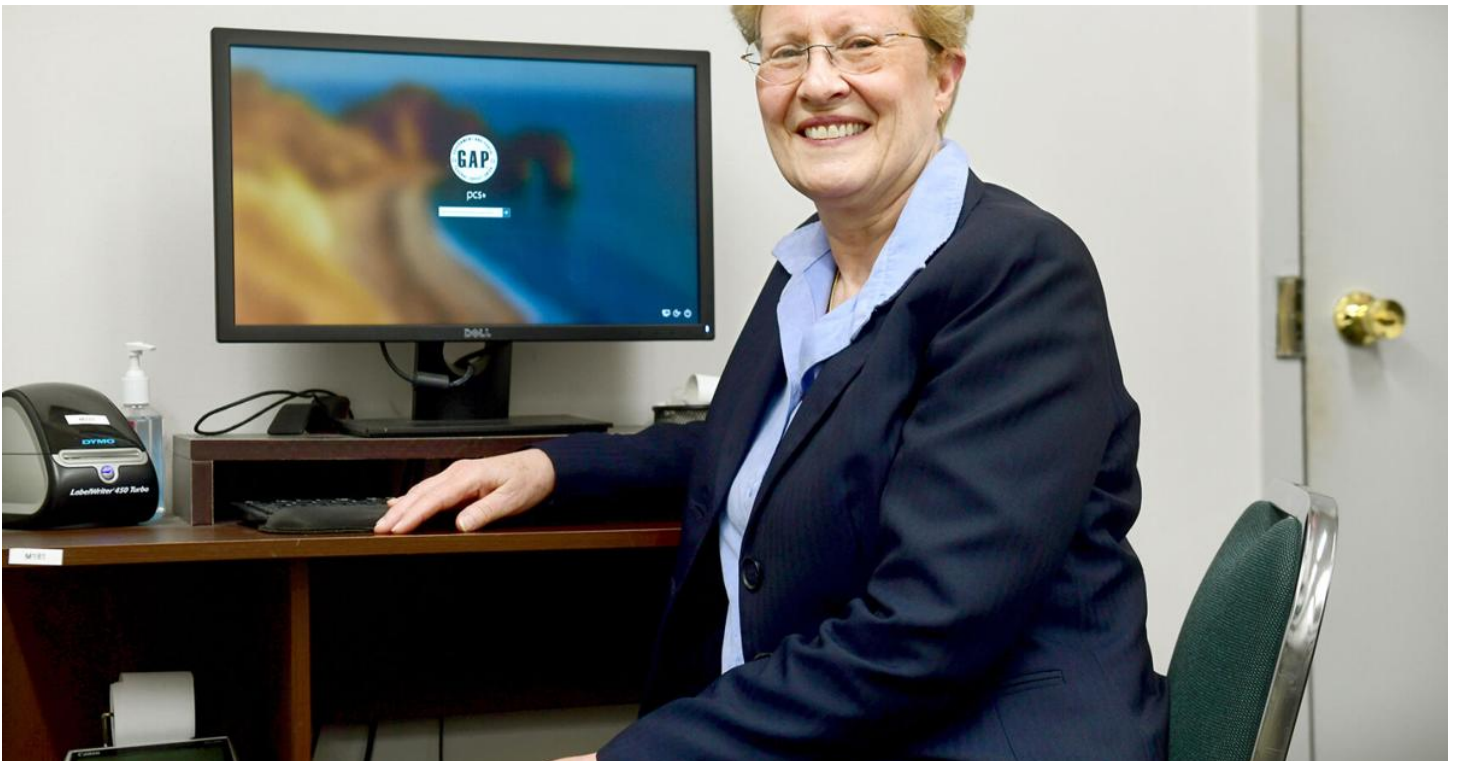


WATCH VIDEO | "A leader who is unequaled," Lopez shines as CEO and treasurer of G.A.P Federal Credit Union

Russ O'Reilly :



Editor's note: This is the latest installment in a bi-monthly series about women leading businesses.

Nearly 30 years ago, Diane Lopez left Texas, where she worked as a cattle and gas accountant, to take a new job in her hometown of Johnstown as CEO of G.A.P. Federal Credit Union.

"I knew I was leaving a higher-paying job in Texas to come here, but for me, it wasn't just about the job or money," she said.

It was a move that improved quality of life for herself and others.

“I like seeing financial success stories,” she said.

G.A.P. Federal Credit Union, based in Johnstown’s Post Office building at 111 Franklin St., Room 224, is a cooperative owned by its 6,400 members.

There are no external stockholders making decisions.

Members include federal postal employees, and through mergers with credit unions in Altoona and New Stanton, Westmoreland County, G.A.P. has expanded its membership to military veterans and their families, Veterans Affairs hospital employees, Teamsters in Westmoreland County, and private businesses that petition to join.

G.A.P. is a full-service credit union offering loans, savings, individual retirement accounts, credit cards and services of a certified financial counselor at each of its four offices in Johnstown, Richland Township, Altoona and New Stanton.

When Lopez started working at the credit union, its assets were just shy of \$12 million; as of the end of March, its assets stand at \$71 million.

“That growth over the years has been very rewarding, but also the financial literacy piece and empowering our members – getting them from D and E credit to A and B credit, because we can do that if they listen to us – so that’s really what has been very exciting for me and why I come to work every day,” she said.

Lopez also took on the role of the credit union’s board treasurer in 2000.

G.A.P. Federal Credit Union Board president and retired Johnstown Postmaster Wendy Hudak said Lopez’ leadership has propelled the credit union’s growth over the years.

“She is a leader who is unequalled,” Hudak said.

Lopez brings a lot of creative thoughts and ideas to the board, Hudak said.

“She is also a visionary who keeps our board thinking progressively with budgeting and planning so we are prepared for anything that might come up,” she said.

One way Lopez has planned for the future is by establishing small branches in local schools, which has created a pipeline of employees and future members.

“That has not only helped students become financially aware, but it has led to hiring students to work in the credit union’s branches,” Hudak said.

G.A.P. operates kiosks at student branches in Conemaugh Valley and Forest Hills school districts. Through those branches, students learn financial literacy, participate in processing loans and deposits for G.A.P. credit union members, and also have the opportunity to open accounts themselves.

G.A.P. Federal Credit Union originally started as Cambria County U.S. Employees Federal Credit Union in 1937 and was renamed Johnstown, Pa. Post Office Employees Federal Credit Union in 1941. Then, in July 1996, its name was changed to Government and Postal Federal Credit Union to better fit the expanding field of memberships.

Since then, the credit union has added three branches.

Across all branches, the credit union employs 18 people.

“I have an all-female workforce,” Lopez said.

“That is important to note.

“Not that we haven’t employed men in the past – I have had high school students, but they all had other career plans so they haven’t stayed, but that’s OK. I think some of my success is the fact we have all females who are all very diligent and detail-oriented.”