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“Like to think of it as a journey. It’s ongoing and it’s also called our life. There are some unique aspects of both the professional journey as well as the personal journey and how they align together. But as I think about that overall journey, there’s probably one or two points that really jump out for me that have had the most impact in shaping what the future journey looks like,” she said.

One point that stands out for Tuuk came when she left a law firm in Chicago to join Old Kent Bank in Grand Rapids as legal counsel and corporate secretary — at a time when few young women held such positions. The year was 1996 and the move marked her entry into the banking profession, a step that has led to a flourishing financial career.

“I was engaged in the practice of law primarily around financial transactions. At that time, leveraged leases were very popular. I had a very good path there, but ultimately I made the decision to move out of that realm of professional services into the banking industry and came back here to Grand Rapids,” she said.

Tuuk acquired her law degree, along with an MBA, from Indiana University, after earning undergraduate degrees in business and music from Calvin College. Some might find that an unusual combination for someone in the financial field, but Tuuk said she has always been a believer in optimizing the skill sets each of us are given. She sees her musical skills as having a lot in common with her professional experiences.

“Performing in a musical situation, or with a music group is a very unique expression of teamwork and collaboration, and there is teamwork and collaboration in the business world, as well. In addition, a musical venue also calls for a fair amount of artistic expression, creativity and innovation. Creativity and innovation are themes that are absolute musts for ultimate business success,” she said.

“So although they sound a little bit different — sometimes, people talk about right-brain and left-
brain — I think that in many respects they are more similar than what they might first appear to be."

Tuuk was born in Kalamazoo but moved to Grand Rapids at an early age and was raised here. "I have lots of memories of Grand Rapids and western Michigan," she said.

Tuuk said one of her favorite memories is the first River Bank Run. Old Kent Bank, the forerunner of Fifth Third, started the marathon in 1977 that Fifth Third has continued. She remembers her brother, Stephen, running in the inaugural race.

"He's proud of the fact that he's just missed a few races in the 35th anniversary year here. I remember very early on watching him come home after running his first race and then seeing his inactivity for the rest of the day because it was a long race," she said with a laugh.

In the short time she has been here, Tuuk has become active in the community. She sits on the Heart of West Michigan United Way board and is chairing this year's campaign, which she said has kept her busy but has been a fun experience. She recruited the campaign's cabinet and recently announced this year's goal: $12.15 million, an increase of 1 percent from last year.

Tuuk is also on the board of the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce and said she is becoming more involved with the organization but couldn't share the details at this point.

"I'm looking forward to what next year will bring for that partnership with the chamber. But we're doing some fun things there from a board capacity and from a general capacity," she said.

Tuuk also serves on the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority, having been appointed by Mayor George Heartwell in July. When she returned here in January, she was impressed with the developments that have occurred downtown, such as the Medical Mile and the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

"The DDA has been a great next stage for me and also for our bank, to be able to look at that more holistically and determine how we continue that path of success. What's particularly enjoyable about the DDA experience is the opportunity to see firsthand what happens on a day-to-day basis and the tools that are used to continue that path of success," she said.

Tuuk is also on the Grand Rapids Symphony board. "For me, it's a wonderful alignment of one of my most personal passions, which is my passion for music. It's a unique opportunity to bring a personal passion of mine to the table in a way that also aligns well with the community's needs and the needs to keep our community vibrant and healthy."

That passion is both personal and a family trait. Another of Tuuk's brothers, Jonathan, is musical director at Mayflower Congregational Church. Mary and Jonathan performed together twice this year as part of the Music at Mid-Day series at Park Congregational Church. Jonathan is an organist, while Mary sings and plays the piano, organ and violin. "It's been fun for us to come together in a number of different venues and perform," she said.

Tuuk also is working with Calvin College officials to expand a fairly new program called Women in Vision. Their mission is to help young women realize the opportunities available to them in the business world.

"I'm really passionate about that because I strongly believe that our young women deserve to have the opportunity to see what sometimes they may not yet be exposed to, and to fully understand what opportunities are available to them and to really dream big," she said.

Tuuk said two of her nieces recently had the chance to explore business opportunities with her and other members of her family. "But not all young women have the opportunity to have those role models around them, so what I was really impassioned about is how do we help young women dream big and realize that they, too, can do a lot of things, even if the doors don't yet appear to be open to them."

Tuuk said the program brought high school juniors to the Calvin campus for a few days. They met female business leaders, made a trip to downtown design center GKind70, became familiar with basic business strategies and had their skills assessed.

"It ultimately gave them an opportunity to envision what their future in business could be," she said. "And we're supplementing that with the creation of a women's business network, and the opportunity to bring in more speakers who can help them see on a very big basis what might be possible."

She said her first nine months as president of Fifth Third Bank West Michigan has been a positive experience in a number of ways, including returning to Grand Rapids and rekindling the relationships she embraced while growing up. Tuuk also noted she eagerly looks forward to the next phase of her journey.

"I would hope that if we're talking at a point in the immediate future and reflecting back on this next stage, we would be able to see the work of the bank in furthering the well-being of the community, bringing more solutions to the needs of our current clients, as well as to others in the community," she said.

"That prospect is very exciting for us at Fifth Third. So I think this next stage is going to be a fun one and it's all about continuing on those paths of success for the community."