

Ameris Bancorp
Form 10-K
February 27, 2012
Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549

FORM 10-K

x **ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934**

For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2011, or

.. **TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934**

For the transition period from to .

Commission File Number 001-13901

AMERIS BANCORP

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

GEORGIA
(State of incorporation)

58-1456434
(IRS Employer ID No.)

310 FIRST ST., SE, MOULTRIE, GA 31768

(Address of principal executive offices)

(229) 890-1111

(Registrant's telephone number)

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act: Common Stock, Par Value \$1 Per Share

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the Act: None

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant has submitted electronically and posted on its corporate Web site, if any, every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T (§ 232.405 of this chapter) during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to submit and post such files). Yes No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer or a smaller reporting company. See definitions of large accelerated filer, accelerated filer and smaller reporting company in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act.

Large accelerated filer Accelerated filer

Non-accelerated filer Smaller reporting company

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Securities Exchange Act). Yes No

As of the last business day of the registrant's most recently completed second fiscal quarter, the aggregate market value of the voting and non-voting common equity held by nonaffiliates of the registrant was approximately \$215.0 million.

As of February 17, 2012, the registrant had outstanding 23,751,294 shares of common stock, \$1.00 par value per share.

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

Portions of the registrant's Proxy Statement for the 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders are incorporated herein into Part III by reference.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

AMERIS BANCORP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PART I	
Item 1. <u>Business</u>	1
Item 1A. <u>Risk Factors</u>	17
Item 1B. <u>Unresolved Staff Comments</u>	25
Item 2. <u>Properties</u>	25
Item 3. <u>Legal Proceedings</u>	25
Item 4. <u>Mine Safety Disclosures</u>	25
PART II	
Item 5. <u>Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities</u>	26
Item 6. <u>Selected Financial Data</u>	28
Item 7. <u>Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations</u>	30
Item 7A. <u>Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosures About Market Risk</u>	49
Item 8. <u>Financial Statements and Supplementary Data</u>	49
Item 9. <u>Changes in and Disagreements With Accountants on Accounting and Financial Disclosure</u>	49
Item 9A. <u>Controls and Procedures</u>	49
Item 9B. <u>Other Information</u>	49
PART III	
Item 10. <u>Directors, Executive Officers and Corporate Governance</u>	50
Item 11. <u>Executive Compensation</u>	50
Item 12. <u>Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters</u>	50
Item 13. <u>Certain Relationships and Related Transactions, and Director Independence</u>	50
Item 14. <u>Principal Accounting Fees and Services</u>	50
PART IV	
Item 15. <u>Exhibits, Financial Statement Schedules</u>	51

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

CAUTIONARY NOTICE

REGARDING FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

Certain statements contained in this Annual Report on Form 10-K (this Annual Report) under the caption Management s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations, and elsewhere, including information incorporated herein by reference to other documents, are forward-looking statements within the meaning of, and subject to the protections of, Section 27A of the Securities Act of 1933, as amended (the Securities Act), and Section 21E of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the Exchange Act).

Forward-looking statements include statements with respect to our beliefs, plans, objectives, goals, expectations, anticipations, assumptions, estimates, intentions and future performance and involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties and other factors, many of which may be beyond our control and which may cause the actual results, performance or achievements of Ameris Bancorp to be materially different from future results, performance or achievements expressed or implied by such forward-looking statements.

All statements other than statements of historical fact are statements that could be forward-looking statements. You can identify these forward-looking statements through our use of words such as may, will, anticipate, assume, should, indicate, would, believe, could, expect, estimate, continue, plan, point to, project, predict, could, intend, target, potential and other similar words and expressions in the future. These forward-looking statements may not be realized due to a variety of factors, including, without limitation, those described in Part I, Item 1A., Risk Factors, and elsewhere in this report and those described from time to time in our future reports filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the SEC) under the Exchange Act.

All written or oral forward-looking statements that are made by or are attributable to us are expressly qualified in their entirety by this cautionary notice. Our forward-looking statements apply only as of the date of this Annual Report or the respective date of the document from which they are incorporated herein by reference. We have no obligation and do not undertake to update, revise or correct any of the forward-looking statements after the date of this Annual Report, or after the respective dates on which such statements otherwise are made, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise.

PART I

As used in this Annual Report, the terms we, us, our, Ameris and the Company refer to Ameris Bancorp and its subsidiaries (unless the context indicates another meaning).

ITEM 1. BUSINESS

OVERVIEW

We are a financial holding company whose business is conducted primarily through our wholly-owned banking subsidiary, Ameris Bank (the Bank), which provides a full range of banking services to its retail and commercial customers who are primarily concentrated in select markets in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina. Ameris was incorporated on December 18, 1980 as a Georgia corporation. The Company s executive office is located at 310 First St., S.E., Moultrie, Georgia 31768, our telephone number is (229) 890-1111 and our internet address is www.amerisbank.com. We operate 62 domestic banking offices with no foreign activities. At December 31, 2011, we had approximately \$2.99 billion in total assets, \$1.92 billion in total loans, \$2.59 billion in total deposits and stockholders equity of \$293.8 million. Our deposits are insured, up to applicable limits, by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (the FDIC).

We make our annual reports on Form 10-K, quarterly reports on Form 10-Q, current reports on Form 8-K and amendments to those reports filed or furnished pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Exchange Act available free of charge on our website at www.amerisbank.com as soon as reasonably practicable after we electronically file such material with the SEC. These reports are also available without charge on the SEC s website at www.sec.gov.

The Parent Company

Our primary business as a bank holding company is to manage the business and affairs of the Bank. As a bank holding company, we perform certain shareholder and investor relations functions and seek to provide financial support, if necessary, to our subsidiary.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Ameris Bank

Our principal subsidiary is the Bank, which is headquartered in Moultrie, Georgia and operates branches primarily concentrated in select markets in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina. These branches serve distinct communities in our business areas with autonomy but do so as one bank, leveraging our favorable geographic footprint in an effort to acquire more customers.

Capital Trust Securities

On September 20, 2006, the Company completed a private placement of an aggregate of \$36 million of trust preferred securities. The placement occurred through a newly formed Delaware statutory trust subsidiary of Ameris, Ameris Statutory Trust I (the "Trust"). The trust preferred securities carry a quarterly adjustable interest rate of 1.63% over the 3-Month LIBOR. The trust preferred securities mature on December 15, 2036 and became redeemable at the Company's option on September 15, 2011. The terms of the trust preferred securities are set forth in that certain Amended and Restated Declaration of Trust dated as of September 20, 2006 among Ameris, Wilmington Trust Company, as institutional trustee and Delaware trustee, and the administrators named therein. The payments of distributions on, and redemption or liquidation of, the trust preferred securities issued by the Trust are guaranteed by Ameris pursuant to a Guarantee Agreement dated as of September 20, 2006 between Ameris and Wilmington Trust Company, as trustee.

The net proceeds to Ameris from the placement of the trust preferred securities by the Trust were primarily used to redeem outstanding trust preferred securities issued by Ameris on November 8, 2001. These trust preferred securities were redeemed on September 30, 2006 for \$35.6 million.

On December 16, 2005, Ameris purchased First National Banc, Inc. ("FNB"). In 2004, FNB's wholly-owned subsidiary, First National Banc Statutory Trust I, issued \$5,000,000 in principal amount of trust preferred securities at a rate per annum equal to the 3-Month LIBOR plus 2.80% through a pool sponsored by a national brokerage firm. These trust preferred securities have a maturity of 30 years and are redeemable at the Company's option on any quarterly interest payment date. See the Notes to our Consolidated Financial Statements included in this Annual Report for a further discussion regarding the issuance of these trust preferred securities.

Strategy

We seek to increase our presence and grow the Ameris brand in the markets that we currently serve in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina and in neighboring communities that present attractive opportunities for expansion. Management has pursued this objective through an acquisition-oriented growth strategy and a prudent operating strategy. Our community banking philosophy emphasizes personalized service and building broad and deep customer relationships, which has provided us with a substantial base of low cost core deposits. Our markets are managed by senior level, experienced decision makers in a decentralized structure that differentiates us from our larger competitors. Management believes that this structure, along with involvement in and knowledge of our local markets, will continue to provide growth and assist in managing risk throughout our Company.

We have maintained our focus on a long-term strategy of expanding and diversifying our franchise in terms of revenues, profitability and asset size. Our growth over the past several years has been enhanced significantly by bank acquisitions, including acquisitions of failed institutions in FDIC-assisted transactions. We expect to continue to take advantage of the consolidation in the financial services industry and enhance our franchise through future acquisitions, including additional acquisitions of failed or problem financial institutions in FDIC-assisted transactions. We intend to grow within our existing markets, to branch into or acquire financial institutions in existing markets and to branch into or acquire financial institutions in other markets consistent with our capital availability and management abilities.

BANKING SERVICES

Lending Activities

General. The Company maintains a diversified loan portfolio by providing a broad range of commercial and retail lending services to business entities and individuals. We provide agricultural loans, commercial business loans, commercial and residential real estate construction and mortgage loans, consumer loans, revolving lines of credit and letters of credit. The Company also originates first mortgage residential mortgage loans and generally enters into a commitment to sell these loans in the secondary market. We have not made or participated in foreign, energy-related or subprime type loans. In addition, the Company does not buy loan participations or portions of national credits but from time to time, may acquire balances subject to participation agreements through acquisition. Excluding covered loans, less than 1% of the Company's loan

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

portfolio was subject to loan participation agreements at December 31, 2011 and 2010.

At December 31, 2011, our loan portfolio totaled \$1.92 billion, representing approximately 64.0% of our total assets. For additional discussion of our loan portfolio, see Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations - Loans.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Commercial Real Estate Loans. This portion of our loan portfolio has grown significantly over the past few years and represents the largest segment of our loan portfolio. These loans are generally extended for acquisition, development or construction of commercial properties. The loans are underwritten with an emphasis on the viability of the project, the borrower's ability to meet certain minimum debt service requirements and an analysis and review of the collateral and guarantors, if any.

Residential Real Estate Mortgage Loans. Ameris originates adjustable and fixed-rate residential mortgage loans. These mortgage loans are generally originated under terms and conditions consistent with secondary market guidelines. Some of these loans will be placed in the Company's loan portfolio; however, a majority are sold to the secondary mortgage market. The residential real estate mortgage loans that are included in the Company's loan portfolio are usually owner-occupied and generally amortized over a 10- to 20-year period with three- to five-year maturity or repricing.

Agricultural Loans. Our agricultural loans are extended to finance crop production, the purchase of farm-related equipment or farmland and the operations of dairies, poultry producers, livestock and timber growers. Agricultural loans typically involve seasonal balance fluctuations. Although we typically look to an agricultural borrower's cash flow as the principal source of repayment, agricultural loans are also generally secured by a security interest in the crops or the farm-related equipment and, in some cases, an assignment of crop insurance and mortgage on real estate. The lending officer visits the borrower regularly during the growing season and re-evaluates the loan in light of the borrower's updated cash flow projections. A portion of our agricultural loans is guaranteed by the Farm Service Agency Guaranteed Loan Program.

Commercial and Industrial Loans. Generally, commercial and industrial loans consist of loans made primarily to manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers of goods, service companies and other industries. These loans are made for acquisition, expansion and working capital purposes and may be secured by real estate, accounts receivable, inventory, equipment, personal guarantees or other assets. The Company monitors these loans by requesting submission of corporate and personal financial statements and income tax returns. The Company has also generated loans which are guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration (the "SBA"). SBA loans are generally underwritten in the same manner as conventional loans generated for the Bank's portfolio. Periodically, a portion of the loans that are secured by the guaranty of the SBA will be sold in the secondary market. Management believes that making such loans helps the local community and also provides Ameris with a source of income and solid future lending relationships as such businesses grow and prosper. The primary repayment risk for commercial loans is the failure of the business due to economic or financial factors.

Consumer Loans. Our consumer loans include motor vehicle, home improvement, home equity, student and signature loans and small personal credit lines. The terms of these loans typically range from 12 to 60 months and vary based upon the nature of collateral and size of the loan. These loans are generally secured by various assets owned by the consumer.

Credit Administration

We have sought to maintain a comprehensive lending policy that meets the credit needs of each of the communities served by the Bank, including low and moderate-income customers, and to employ lending procedures and policies consistent with this approach. All loans are subject to our corporate loan policy, which is reviewed annually and updated as needed. The loan policy provides that lending officers have sole authority to approve loans of various amounts commensurate with their seniority and experience. Our local market Presidents have discretion to approve loans in varying principal amounts up to established limits, and our regional credit officers review and approve loans that exceed such limits.

Individual lending authority is assigned by the Company's Senior Credit Officer, as is the maximum limit of new extensions of credit that may be approved in each market. These approval limits are reviewed annually by the Company and adjusted as needed. All requests for extensions of credit in excess of any of these limits are reviewed by one of three regional credit officers. When the request for approval exceeds the authority level of the regional credit officer, the approval of the Company's Senior Credit Officer and/or the Company's loan committee are required. All new loans or modifications to existing loans in excess of \$250,000 are reviewed monthly by the Company's credit administration department with the lender responsible for the credit. In addition, our ongoing loan review program subjects the portfolio to sampling and objective review by our monthly internal loan review process which is independent of the originating loan officer, or by our independent external loan review firm.

Each lending officer has authority to make loans only in the market area in which his or her Bank office is located and its contiguous counties. Occasionally, our loan committee will approve making a loan outside of the market areas of the Bank, provided the Bank has a prior relationship with the borrower. Our lending policy requires analysis of the borrower's projected cash flow and ability to service the debt.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

We actively market our services to qualified lending customers in both the commercial and consumer sectors. Our commercial lending officers actively solicit the business of new companies entering the market as well as longstanding members of that market's business community. Through personalized professional service and competitive pricing, we have been successful in attracting new commercial lending customers. At the same time, we actively advertise our consumer loan products and continually seek to make our lending officers more accessible.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

The Bank continually monitors its loan portfolio to identify areas of concern and to enable management to take corrective action when necessary. Local market Presidents, lending officers and local boards meet periodically to review all past due loans, the status of large loans and certain other credit or economic related matters. Individual lending officers are responsible for collection of past due amounts and monitoring any changes in the financial status of the borrowers.

Investment Activities

Our investment policy is designed to maximize income from funds not needed to meet loan demand in a manner consistent with appropriate liquidity and risk management objectives. Under this policy, our Company may invest in federal, state and municipal obligations, corporate obligations, public housing authority bonds, industrial development revenue bonds, Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs) securities and satisfactorily-rated trust preferred obligations. Investments in our portfolio must satisfy certain quality criteria. Our Company s investments must be investment-grade as determined by either Moody s or Standard and Poor s. Investment securities where the Company has determined a certain level of credit risk are periodically reviewed to determine the financial condition of the issuer and to support the Company s decision to continue holding the security. Our Company may purchase non-rated municipal bonds only if the issuer of such bonds is located in the Company s general market area and such bonds are determined by the Company to have a credit risk no greater than the minimum ratings referred to above. Industrial development authority bonds, which normally are not rated, are purchased only if the issuer is located in the Company s market area and if the bonds are considered to possess a high degree of credit soundness. Traditionally, the Company has purchased and held investment securities with very high levels of credit quality, favoring investments backed by direct or indirect guarantees of the U.S. Government.

While our investment policy permits our Company to trade securities to improve the quality of yields or marketability or to realign the composition of the portfolio, the Bank historically has not done so to any significant extent.

Our investment committee implements the investment policy and portfolio strategies and monitors the portfolio. Reports on all purchases, sales, net profits or losses and market appreciation or depreciation of the bond portfolio are reviewed by our Board of Directors each month. Once a year, the written investment policy is reviewed by the Company s Board of Directors and updated as needed.

The Company s securities are held in safekeeping accounts at approved correspondent banks.

Deposits

The Company provides a full range of deposit accounts and services to both retail and commercial customers. These deposit accounts have a variety of interest rates and terms and consist of interest-bearing and noninterest-bearing accounts, including commercial and retail checking accounts, regular interest-bearing savings accounts, money market accounts, individual retirement accounts and certificates of deposit. Our Bank obtains most of its deposits from individuals and businesses in its market areas.

Generally, our Bank has not needed to offer rates significantly higher than our competition to attract new deposits or to retain existing business. During 2008, the United States Department of the Treasury (the Treasury) and the Federal Reserve implemented several programs and initiatives aimed at reducing the liquidity risks in the United States economy. In addition to these governmental actions, loan demand in the Company s markets fell considerably during 2009 for many banks and further reduced the demand for deposits. Because of these events, the Company was able to significantly reduce deposit costs and force a migration from higher cost term deposits into lower cost money market and NOW deposits.

Brokered time deposits are deposits obtained by utilizing an outside broker that is paid a fee. The Bank utilizes brokered deposits to accomplish several purposes, such as (1) acquiring a certain maturity and dollar amount without repricing the Bank s current customers which could increase or decrease the overall cost of deposits, and (2) acquiring certain maturities and dollar amounts to help manage interest rate risk.

Other Funding Sources

The Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) allows the Company to obtain advances through its credit program. These advances are secured by securities owned by the Company and held in safekeeping by the FHLB, FHLB stock owned by the Company and certain qualifying residential mortgages.

The Company also enters into repurchase agreements. These repurchase agreements are treated as short-term borrowings and are reflected on the balance sheet as such.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Use of Derivatives

The Company seeks to provide a stable net interest income despite changes in interest rates. In its review of interest rate risk, the Company regularly considers the use of derivatives to protect interest income on loans or to create a structure in institutional borrowings that limits the Company's cost. During 2011, the Company benefited from an interest rate swap with a notional amount of \$37.1 million and an interest rate floor with a notional amount of \$35.0 million. The interest rate floor, which was classified as a cash flow hedge against certain variable rate loans on the Company's balance sheet, expired in August 2011. The hedge was indexed to the prime rate as are the variable rate loans and had a strike rate of 7.00%. During 2011, the Company received approximately \$825,000 of interest payments on the interest rate floor, which have been classified as interest income on loans. The interest rate swap, which was classified as a cash flow hedge against the subordinated deferrable interest debentures on the Company's balance sheet, is indexed to LIBOR.

CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING AND BUSINESS COMBINATIONS

High Trust Bank

On July 15, 2011, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of High Trust Bank (HTB) from the FDIC, as Receiver of HTB. HTB operated two branches in Stockbridge and Leary, Georgia, with \$133.5 million in loans and \$175.9 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and other real estate owned (OREO). Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire HTB included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$33.5 million. The bid resulted in a cash payment from the FDIC totaling \$30.2 million.

One Georgia Bank

On July 15, 2011, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of One Georgia Bank (OGB) from the FDIC, as Receiver of OGB. OGB operated one branch in Midtown Atlanta, Georgia, with \$120.8 million in loans and \$136.1 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire OGB included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$22.5 million. The bid resulted in a cash payment to the FDIC totaling \$5.7 million.

Tifton Banking Company

On November 12, 2010, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of Tifton Banking Company (TBC) from the FDIC, as Receiver of TBC. TBC operated one branch in Tifton, Georgia, with \$118.4 million in loans and \$132.9 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's acquisition of TBC resulted in the Bank recording \$956,000 of goodwill related to the purchase. The bid resulted in a cash payment to the FDIC totaling \$10.3 million to settle the transaction.

Darby Bank & Trust Co.

On November 12, 2010, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of Darby Bank & Trust Co. (DBT) from the FDIC, as Receiver of DBT. DBT operated seven branches in Vidalia, Lyons, Savannah and Pooler, Georgia, with \$393.3

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

million in loans and \$387.0 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement up to \$131.8 million of cumulative loss. The FDIC will absorb 30% of losses and share 30% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement for cumulative losses between \$131.8 million and \$193.1 million. The FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement on cumulative losses over \$193.1 million. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire DBT included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$45.0 million. The bid resulted in a cash payment to the FDIC totaling \$149.9 million.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

First Bank of Jacksonville

On October 22, 2010, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of First Bank of Jacksonville (FBJ) from the FDIC, as Receiver of FBJ. FBJ operated two branches in Jacksonville, Florida, with \$51.1 million in loans and \$71.9 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire FBJ included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$4.8 million. The bid resulted in a cash payment from the FDIC totaling \$8.1 million.

Satilla Community Bank

On May 14, 2010, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of Satilla Community Bank (SCB) from the FDIC, as Receiver of SCB. SCB operated one branch in St. Marys, Georgia, the southernmost city on the Georgia coast and a northern suburb of Jacksonville, Florida, with \$68.8 million in loans and \$75.5 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries during the term of the agreement. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire SCB included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$14.4 million. Also included in the bid was a premium of approximately \$92,000 on SCB's deposits. Because SCB's brokered deposits did not pass to the Bank, the acquisition resulted in significantly more assets being purchased than liabilities assumed. As a result, the Bank made a cash payment to the FDIC totaling \$35.7 million to settle the transaction.

United Security Bank

On November 6, 2009, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of United Security Bank (USB) from the FDIC, as Receiver of USB. USB operated one branch in Woodstock, Georgia and one branch in Sparta, Georgia, with total loans of \$108.4 million and \$141.1 million of total deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries on the first \$46 million of losses and absorb 95% of losses and share in 95% of loss recoveries on losses exceeding \$46 million. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire USB included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$32.6 million. Also included in the bid was a premium of approximately \$228,000 on USB's deposits. The bid resulted in a cash payment from the FDIC totaling \$24.2 million.

American United Bank

On October 23, 2009, the Bank purchased substantially all of the assets and assumed substantially all of the liabilities of American United Bank (AUB) from the FDIC, as Receiver of AUB. AUB operated only one branch in Lawrenceville, Georgia, a northeast suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, with \$85.7 million in loans and \$100.5 million in deposits. The Company's agreements with the FDIC included a loss-sharing agreement which affords the Bank significant protection from losses associated with loans and OREO. Under the terms of the loss-sharing agreement, the FDIC will absorb 80% of losses and share 80% of loss recoveries on the first \$38 million of losses and absorb 95% of losses and share in 95% of loss recoveries on losses exceeding \$38 million. The term for loss sharing on residential real estate loans is ten years, while the term for loss sharing on all other loans is five years.

The Company's bid to acquire AUB included a discount on the book value of the assets totaling \$19.6 million. Also included in the bid was a premium of approximately \$262,000 on AUB's deposits. The bid resulted in a cash payment from the FDIC totaling \$17.1 million.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Capital Purchase Program

On November 21, 2008, the Company, pursuant to the Capital Purchase Program (the "CPP") established under the Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 ("EESA"), in connection with the Troubled Asset Relief Program ("TARP"), issued and sold to the Treasury, for an aggregate cash purchase price of \$52 million, (i) 52,000 shares (the "Preferred Shares") of the Company's Fixed Rate Cumulative Perpetual Preferred Stock, Series A, having a liquidation preference of \$1,000 per share, and (ii) a ten-year warrant (the "Warrant") to purchase up to 679,443 shares of our common stock, par value \$1.00 per share (the "Common Stock"), at an exercise price of \$11.48 per share. Proceeds from the issuance of the Preferred Shares and the Warrant have been allocated based on the relative market values of each. As a result of the Company's participation in the CPP, the Company is subject to the rules and regulations promulgated under the EESA. These rules and regulations include certain limitations on compensation for senior executives, dividend payments and payments to senior executives upon termination of employment, as well as certain obligations of the Company to increase its efforts to reduce the number of foreclosures of primary residences.

The limitations on executive compensation imposed by the EESA are substantially those that management had accepted as practical prior to the Company's participation in the CPP. These limitations include the reduction of cash incentives, limitations on excessive severance payments and the implementation of a system allowing for the "claw back" of bonuses received while relying on financial performance later determined to be erroneous.

MARKET AREAS AND COMPETITION

The banking industry in general, and in the southeastern United States specifically, is highly competitive and dramatic changes continue to occur throughout the industry. Our select market areas in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina have experienced strong economic and population growth over the past 20 to 30 years. In recent years, however, intense market demands, economic pressures, fluctuating interest rates and increased customer awareness of product and service differences among financial institutions have forced banks to diversify their services and become more cost effective. Over the past few years, our Bank has faced strong competition in attracting deposits at profitable levels. In addition, intense demand for loans has not only impacted the interest rates and fees normally earned, but has also impacted underwriting criteria thought to be safe from historical standards such as debt to income and loan to value. Competition for deposits comes from other commercial banks, thrift institutions, mortgage bankers, finance companies, credit unions and issuers of securities such as brokerage firms. Interest rates, convenience of office locations and marketing are all significant factors in our Bank's competition for deposits.

Competition for loans comes from other commercial banks, thrift institutions, savings banks, insurance companies, consumer finance companies, credit unions and other institutional lenders. In order to remain competitive, our Bank has varied interest rates and loan fees to some degree as well as increased the number and complexity of services provided. We have not varied or altered our underwriting standards in any material respect in response to competitor willingness to do so and in some markets have not been able to experience the growth in loans that we would have preferred. Competition is affected by the general availability of lendable funds, general and local economic conditions, current interest rate levels and other factors that are not readily predictable.

Competition among providers of financial products and services continues to increase with consumers having the opportunity to select from a growing variety of traditional and nontraditional alternatives. The industry continues to consolidate, which affects competition by eliminating some regional and local institutions, while strengthening the franchise of acquirers. Management expects that competition will become more intense in the future due to changes in state and federal laws and regulations and the entry of additional bank and nonbank competitors. See "Supervision and Regulation" under this Item.

EMPLOYEES

At December 31, 2011, the Company employed approximately 746 full-time-equivalent employees. We consider our relationship with our employees to be good.

We have adopted one retirement plan for our employees, the Ameris Bancorp 401(k) Profit Sharing Plan. This plan provides deferral of compensation by our employees and contributions by Ameris. As a result of the Company's financial performance in 2011 and 2010, it did not make any contributions for eligible employees during either or those years. We also maintain a comprehensive employee benefits program providing, among other benefits, hospitalization and major medical insurance and life insurance. Management considers these benefits to be competitive with those offered by other financial institutions in our market areas. Our employees are not represented by any collective bargaining group.

RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

The Company makes loans to our directors and their affiliates and to banking officers. These loans are made on substantially the same terms as those prevailing at the time for comparable transactions and do not involve more than normal credit risk. At December 31, 2011, we had \$1.90 billion in total loans outstanding, of which \$6.9 million were outstanding to certain directors and their affiliates. Company policy prohibits loans to executive officers.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

SUPERVISION AND REGULATION

General

We are extensively regulated under federal and state law. Generally, these laws and regulations are intended to protect depositors and not shareholders. The following is a summary of certain provisions of certain laws that affect the regulation of bank holding companies and banks. The discussion is qualified in its entirety by reference to applicable laws and regulations. Changes in such laws and regulations may have a material effect on our business and prospects.

Federal Bank Holding Company Regulation and Structure

As a bank holding company, we are subject to regulation under the Bank Holding Company Act and to the supervision, examination and reporting requirements of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (the "Federal Reserve"). Our Bank has a Georgia state charter and is subject to regulation, supervision and examination by the FDIC and the Georgia Department of Banking and Finance (the "GDBF").

The Bank Holding Company Act requires every bank holding company to obtain the prior approval of the Federal Reserve before:

it may acquire direct or indirect ownership or control of any voting shares of any bank if, after the acquisition, the bank holding company will directly or indirectly own or control more than 5% of the voting shares of the bank;

it or any of its subsidiaries, other than a bank, may acquire all or substantially all of the assets of any bank; or

it may merge or consolidate with any other bank holding company.

The Bank Holding Company Act further provides that the Federal Reserve may not approve any transaction that would result in a monopoly or that would substantially lessen competition in the banking business, unless the public interest in meeting the needs of the communities to be served outweighs the anti-competitive effects. The Federal Reserve is also required to consider the financial and managerial resources and future prospects of the bank holding companies and banks involved and the convenience and needs of the communities to be served. Consideration of financial resources generally focuses on capital adequacy, and consideration of convenience and needs issues focuses, in part, on the performance under the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, both of which are discussed elsewhere in more detail.

Subject to various exceptions, the Bank Holding Company Act and the Change in Bank Control Act, together with related regulations, require Federal Reserve approval prior to any person or company acquiring control of a bank holding company. Control is conclusively presumed to exist if an individual or company acquires 25% or more of any class of voting securities of a bank holding company. Control is also presumed to exist, although rebuttable, if a person or company acquires 10% or more, but less than 25%, of any class of voting securities and either:

the bank holding company has registered securities under Section 12 of the Exchange Act; or

no other person owns a greater percentage of that class of voting securities immediately after the transaction.

Our Common Stock is registered under Section 12 of the Exchange Act. The regulations provide a procedure for challenging rebuttable presumptions of control.

The Bank Holding Company Act generally prohibits a bank holding company from engaging in activities other than banking; managing or controlling banks or other permissible subsidiaries and acquiring or retaining direct or indirect control of any company engaged in any activities other than activities closely related to banking or managing or controlling banks. In determining whether a particular activity is permissible, the Federal Reserve considers whether performing the activity can be expected to produce benefits to the public that outweigh possible adverse

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

effects, such as undue concentration of resources, decreased or unfair competition, conflicts of interest or unsound banking practices. The Federal Reserve has the power to order a bank holding company or its subsidiaries to terminate any activity or control of any subsidiary when the continuation of the activity or control constitutes a serious risk to the financial safety, soundness or stability of any bank subsidiary of that bank holding company.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Under the Bank Holding Company Act, a bank holding company may file an election with the Federal Reserve to be treated as a financial holding company and engage in an expanded list of financial activities. The election must be accompanied by a certification that all of the company's insured depository institution subsidiaries are well capitalized and well managed. Additionally, the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 rating of each subsidiary bank must be satisfactory or better. Effective August 24, 2000, pursuant to a previously-filed election with the Federal Reserve, Ameris became a financial holding company. As such, we may engage in activities that are financial in nature or incidental or complementary to financial activities, including insurance underwriting, securities underwriting and dealing, and making merchant banking investments in commercial and financial companies. If the Bank ceases to be well capitalized or well managed under applicable regulatory standards, the Federal Reserve may, among other things, place limitations on our ability to conduct these broader financial activities. In addition, if the Bank receives a rating of less than satisfactory under the Community Reinvestment Act, we would be prohibited from engaging in any additional activities other than those permissible for bank holding companies that are not financial holding companies. If, after becoming a financial holding company and undertaking activities not permissible for a bank holding company, the company fails to continue to meet any of the prerequisites for financial holding company status, including those described above, the company must enter into an agreement with the Federal Reserve to comply with all applicable capital and management requirements. If the company does not return to compliance within 180 days, the Federal Reserve may order the company to divest its subsidiary banks or the company may discontinue or divest investments in companies engaged in activities permissible only for a bank holding company that has elected to be treated as a financial holding company.

Under Federal Reserve policy, we are expected to act as a source of financial strength for the Bank and to commit resources to support the Bank. This support may be required at times when, without this Federal Reserve policy, we might not be inclined to provide it. In addition, any capital loans made by us to the Bank will be repaid only after its deposits and various other obligations are repaid in full.

Our Bank is also subject to numerous state and federal statutes and regulations that affect its business, activities and operations and is supervised and examined by state and federal bank regulatory agencies. The FDIC and the GDBF regularly examine the operations of our Bank and are given the authority to approve or disapprove mergers, consolidations, the establishment of branches and similar corporate actions. These agencies also have the power to prevent the continuance or development of unsafe or unsound banking practices or other violations of law.

Payment of Dividends and Other Restrictions

Ameris is a legal entity separate and distinct from its subsidiaries. While there are various legal and regulatory limitations under federal and state law on the extent to which our Bank can pay dividends or otherwise supply funds to Ameris, the principal source of our cash revenues is dividends from our Bank. The prior approval of applicable regulatory authorities is required if the total amount of all dividends declared by the Bank in any calendar year exceeds 50% of the Bank's net profits for the previous year. The relevant federal and state regulatory agencies also have authority to prohibit a state member bank or bank holding company, which would include Ameris and the Bank, from engaging in what, in the opinion of such regulatory body, constitutes an unsafe or unsound practice in conducting its business. The payment of dividends could, depending upon the financial condition of the subsidiary, be deemed to constitute an unsafe or unsound practice in conducting its business.

Under Georgia law, the prior approval of the GDBF is required before any cash dividends may be paid by a state bank if: (i) total classified assets at the most recent examination of such bank exceed 80% of the equity capital (as defined, which includes the reserve for loan losses) of such bank; (ii) the aggregate amount of dividends declared or anticipated to be declared in the calendar year exceeds 50% of the net profits (as defined) for the previous calendar year; or (iii) the ratio of equity capital to adjusted total assets is less than 6%. There were no amounts of retained earnings of our Bank available for payment of cash dividends under applicable regulations without obtaining regulatory approval as of December 31, 2011.

In addition, our Bank is subject to limitations under Section 23A of the Federal Reserve Act with respect to extensions of credit to, investments in and certain other transactions with Ameris. Furthermore, loans and extensions of credit are also subject to various collateral requirements.

The Federal Reserve has issued a policy statement on the payment of cash dividends by bank holding companies, which expresses the Federal Reserve's view that a bank holding company should pay cash dividends only to the extent that the holding company's net income for the past year is sufficient to cover both the cash dividends and a rate of earning retention that is consistent with the holding company's capital needs, asset quality and overall financial condition. The Federal Reserve also indicated that it would be inappropriate for a holding company experiencing serious financial problems to borrow funds to pay dividends. Furthermore, under the prompt corrective action regulations adopted by the Federal Reserve, the Federal Reserve may prohibit a bank holding company from paying any dividends if one or more of the holding company's bank subsidiaries are classified as undercapitalized.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

A bank holding company is required to give the Federal Reserve prior written notice of any purchase or redemption of its outstanding equity securities if the gross consideration for the purchase or redemption, when combined with the net consideration paid for all such purchases or redemptions during the preceding 12 months, is equal to 10% or more of its consolidated net worth. The Federal Reserve may disapprove such a purchase or redemption if it determines that the proposal would constitute an unsafe or unsound practice or would violate any law, regulation, Federal Reserve order or any condition imposed by, or written agreement with, the Federal Reserve.

Furthermore, under rules and regulations of the EESA to which the Company is subject, no dividends may be declared or paid on the Common Stock unless the dividends due with respect to Preferred Shares have been paid in full.

Capital Adequacy

We must comply with the Federal Reserve's established capital adequacy standards, and our Bank is required to comply with the capital adequacy standards established by the FDIC. The Federal Reserve has promulgated two basic measures of capital adequacy for bank holding companies: a risk-based measure and a leverage measure. A bank holding company must satisfy all applicable capital standards to be considered in compliance.

The risk-based capital standards are designed to make regulatory capital requirements more sensitive to differences in risk profile among banks and bank holding companies, account for off-balance-sheet exposure and minimize disincentives for holding liquid assets.

Assets and off-balance-sheet items are assigned to broad risk categories, each with appropriate weights. The resulting capital ratios represent capital as a percentage of total risk-weighted assets and off-balance-sheet items.

The minimum guideline for the ratio of total capital to risk-weighted assets is 8%. At least half of total capital must be comprised of Tier 1 Capital, which is common stock, undivided profits, minority interests in the equity accounts of consolidated subsidiaries and noncumulative perpetual preferred stock, less goodwill and certain other intangible assets. The remainder may consist of Tier 2 Capital, which is subordinated debt, other preferred stock and a limited amount of loan loss reserves. Since 2001, our consolidated capital ratios have increased due to the issuance of trust preferred securities. At December 31, 2011, all of our trust preferred securities were included in Tier 1 Capital. At December 31, 2011, our total risk-based capital ratio and our Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio were 20.05% and 18.80%, respectively. Neither Ameris nor its Bank has been advised by any federal banking agency of any additional specific minimum capital ratio requirement applicable to it.

In addition, the Federal Reserve has established minimum leverage ratio guidelines for bank holding companies. These guidelines provide for a minimum ratio of Tier 1 Capital to average assets, less goodwill and certain other intangible assets, of 3% for bank holding companies that meet specified criteria. All other bank holding companies generally are required to maintain a minimum leverage ratio of 4%. Our ratio at December 31, 2011 was 10.76% compared to 11.34% at December 31, 2010. The guidelines also provide that bank holding companies experiencing internal growth or making acquisitions will be expected to maintain strong capital positions substantially above the minimum supervisory levels without significant reliance on intangible assets. Furthermore, the Federal Reserve has indicated that it will consider a tangible Tier 1 Capital leverage ratio and other indications of capital strength in evaluating proposals for expansion or new activities. The Federal Reserve has not advised Ameris of any additional specific minimum leverage ratio or tangible Tier 1 Capital leverage ratio applicable to it.

Failure to meet capital guidelines could subject a bank to a variety of enforcement remedies, including issuance of a capital directive, the termination of deposit insurance by the FDIC, a prohibition on taking brokered deposits and certain other restrictions on its business. As described below, the FDIC can impose substantial additional restrictions upon FDIC-insured depository institutions that fail to meet applicable capital requirements.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Act (or FDI Act) requires the federal regulatory agencies to take prompt corrective action if a depository institution does not meet minimum capital requirements. The FDI Act establishes five capital tiers: well capitalized, adequately capitalized, undercapitalized, significantly undercapitalized and critically undercapitalized. A depository institution's capital tier will depend upon how its capital levels compare to various relevant capital measures and certain other factors, as established by regulation.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

The federal bank regulatory agencies have adopted regulations establishing relevant capital measures and relevant capital levels applicable to FDIC-insured banks. The relevant capital measures are the Total Capital ratio, Tier 1 Capital ratio and the leverage ratio. Under the regulations, a FDIC-insured bank will be:

well capitalized if it has a Total Capital ratio of 10% or greater, a Tier 1 Capital ratio of 6% or greater and a leverage ratio of 5% or greater and is not subject to any order or written directive by the appropriate regulatory authority to meet and maintain a specific capital level for any capital measure;

adequately capitalized if it has a Total Capital ratio of 8% or greater, a Tier 1 Capital ratio of 4% or greater and a leverage ratio of 4% or greater (3% in certain circumstances) and is not well capitalized;

undercapitalized if it has a Total Capital ratio of less than 8%, a Tier 1 Capital ratio of less than 4% or a leverage ratio of less than 4% (3% in certain circumstances);

significantly undercapitalized if it has a Total Capital ratio of less than 6%, a Tier 1 Capital ratio of less than 3% or a leverage ratio of less than 3%; and

critically undercapitalized if its tangible equity is equal to or less than 2% of average quarterly tangible assets.

An institution may be downgraded to, or deemed to be in, a capital category that is lower than is indicated by its capital ratios if it is determined to be in an unsafe or unsound condition or if it receives an unsatisfactory examination rating with respect to certain matters. As of December 31, 2011, our Bank had capital levels that qualify as well capitalized under such regulations.

The FDI Act generally prohibits an FDIC-insured bank from making a capital distribution (including payment of a dividend) or paying any management fee to its holding company if the bank would thereafter be undercapitalized. Undercapitalized banks are subject to growth limitations and are required to submit a capital restoration plan. The federal regulators may not accept a capital plan without determining, among other things, that the plan is based on realistic assumptions and is likely to succeed in restoring the bank's capital. In addition, for a capital restoration plan to be acceptable, the bank's parent holding company must guarantee that the institution will comply with such capital restoration plan. The aggregate liability of the parent holding company is limited to the lesser of: (i) an amount equal to 5% of the bank's total assets at the time it became undercapitalized; and (ii) the amount which is necessary (or would have been necessary) to bring the institution into compliance with all capital standards applicable with respect to such institution as of the time it fails to comply with the plan. If a bank fails to submit an acceptable plan, it is treated as if it is significantly undercapitalized.

Significantly undercapitalized insured banks may be subject to a number of requirements and restrictions, including orders to sell sufficient voting stock to become adequately capitalized, requirements to reduce total assets and the cessation of receipt of deposits from correspondent banks. critically undercapitalized institutions are subject to the appointment of a receiver or conservator. A bank that is not well capitalized is also subject to certain limitations relating to brokered deposits.

The regulatory capital framework under which we operate is expected to change in significant respects as a result of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (the Dodd-Frank Act), which was enacted in July 2010, and other regulation, including a separate regulatory capital initiative known as Basel II. Currently, the Company and the Bank are governed by a set of capital rules that the Federal Reserve and the FDIC have had in place since 1988, with some subsequent amendments and revisions. These rules are popularly known as Basel I. In 2004, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision published a new capital accord (Basel II) to replace Basel I. Basel II provides several options for determining capital requirements for credit and operational risk. In December 2007, U.S. regulators adopted a final rule implementing Basel II's advanced approach for core banks U.S. banking organizations with over \$250 billion in banking assets or on-balance-sheet foreign exposures of at least \$10 billion. For other banking organizations, the U.S. banking agencies proposed a rule in July 2008 that would have enabled these organizations to adopt the Basel II standardized approach. In September 2009, as a response to the ongoing financial crisis that had adversely affected global credit markets, the Treasury issued principles for stronger capital and liquidity standards for

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

banking firms, which included recommendations for higher capital standards for all banking organizations to be implemented as part of a broader reconsideration of international risk-based capital standards developed by Basel II. In December 2010, Basel III was finalized, with new standards that, as fully phased in, would require bank holding companies and their bank subsidiaries to maintain substantially more capital, with a greater emphasis on common equity. The Basel III requirements also call for a capital conservation buffer, designed to absorb losses during periods of economic stress. Basel III emphasizes quality of capital rather than the appropriate allocation of capital to bank assets based on credit risk, and it does not purport to replace or overrule Basel II.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Although Basel III is intended to be implemented by participating countries for large, internationally active banks, its provisions are likely to be considered by U.S. banking regulators in developing new regulations applicable to other banks in the United States, including those developed pursuant to directives in the Dodd-Frank Act. The Basel III provisions on liquidity include complex criteria establishing a liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) and a net stable funding ratio (NSFR). The purpose of the LCR is to ensure that a bank maintains adequate unencumbered, high quality liquid assets to meet its liquidity needs for 30 days under a severe liquidity stress scenario. The purpose of the NSFR is to promote more medium and long-term funding of assets and activities, using a one-year horizon. Although Basel III is described as a final text, it is subject to the resolution of certain issues and to further guidance and modification, as well as to adoption by U.S. banking regulators, including decisions as to whether and to what extent it will apply to United States banks that are not large, internationally active banks. In June 2011, the federal banking agencies adopted a rule applicable to only large, internationally active banks requiring their risk-based capital to meet the higher of the minimum requirements under the advanced approaches or under the risk-based capital rules generally applicable to United States banks.

The Dodd-Frank Act includes certain provisions concerning the capital regulations of U.S. banking regulators. These provisions are intended to subject bank holding companies to the same capital requirements as their bank subsidiaries and to eliminate or significantly reduce the use of hybrid capital instruments, especially trust preferred securities, as regulatory capital. Under these provisions, trust preferred securities issued before May 19, 2010 by a company with total consolidated assets of less than \$15 billion and treated as regulatory capital, such as those issued by our Company, are grandfathered, but any such securities issued later are not eligible for treatment as regulatory capital. Banking regulators must develop regulations setting minimum risk-based and leverage capital requirements for holding companies and banks on a consolidated basis that are no less stringent than the generally applicable requirements in effect for depository institutions under the prompt corrective action regulations discussed above. The banking regulators also must seek to make capital standards countercyclical so that the required levels of capital increase in times of economic expansion and decrease in times of economic contraction. The Dodd-Frank Act requires these new capital regulations to be adopted by the Federal Reserve in final form 18 months after the date of enactment of the Dodd-Frank Act. No proposed regulations have been issued to date.

Compliance by the Company and the Bank with these new capital requirements will likely affect our operations. However, the extent of that impact cannot be known until there is greater clarity regarding the specific requirements applicable to the Company and the Bank.

Acquisitions

As an active acquirer, we must comply with numerous laws related to our acquisition activity. Under the Bank Holding Company Act, a bank holding company may not directly or indirectly acquire ownership or control of more than 5% of the voting shares or substantially all of the assets of any bank or merge or consolidate with another bank holding company without the prior approval of the Federal Reserve. Current federal law authorizes interstate acquisitions of banks and bank holding companies without geographic limitation. Furthermore, a bank headquartered in one state is authorized to merge with a bank headquartered in another state, as long as neither of the states has opted out of such interstate merger authority prior to such date, and subject to any state requirement that the target bank shall have been in existence and operating for a minimum period of time, not to exceed five years, and to certain deposit market-share limitations. After a bank has established branches in a state through an interstate merger transaction, the bank may establish and acquire additional branches at any location in the state where a bank headquartered in that state could have established or acquired branches under applicable federal or state law.

FDIC Insurance Assessments

The FDIC insures the deposit accounts of the Bank up to the maximum amount provided by law. The general insurance limit is \$250,000. Effective November 21, 2008 and until December 31, 2010, the FDIC expanded deposit insurance limits for certain accounts under the Temporary Liquidity Guarantee Program (TLGP). Provided an institution did not opt out of the TLGP, the FDIC would fully guarantee funds deposited in non-interest bearing transaction accounts, including interest on lawyer trust accounts (or IOLTA accounts) and negotiable order of withdrawal accounts (or NOW accounts), with rates no higher than 0.50% through June 30, 2010 and no higher than 0.25% after June 30, 2010, if the institution committed to maintain the interest rate at or below that rate. In conjunction with the increased deposit insurance coverage, the amount of FDIC assessments paid by each Deposit Insurance Fund (DIF) member institution also increased. The Dodd-Frank Act now provides temporary, unlimited deposit insurance for all non-interest bearing transaction accounts. In January 2011, the FDIC issued final rules implementing this provision of the Dodd-Frank Act by including IOLTAs within the definition of non-interest bearing transaction accounts. Under the FDIC's final rules, all funds held in IOLTA accounts, together with all other non-interest bearing transaction account deposits, are fully insured, without limit, from December 31, 2010 through December 31, 2012.

The FDIC assesses deposit insurance premiums on each insured institution quarterly based on annualized rates for one of four risk categories. Under the rules in effect through March 31, 2011, these rates are applied to the institution's deposits. Each institution is assigned to one of four risk categories based on its capital, supervisory ratings and other factors. Well capitalized institutions that are financially sound with only a few

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

minor weaknesses are assigned to Risk Category I. Risk Categories II, III and IV present progressively greater risks to the DIF. A range of initial base assessment rates applies to each risk category, subject to adjustments based on an institution's unsecured debt, secured liabilities and brokered deposits, such that the total base assessment rates after adjustments range from 7 to 24 basis points for Risk Category I, 17 to 43 basis points for Risk Category II, 27 to 58 basis points for Risk Category III, and 40 to 77.5 basis points for Risk Category IV.

As required by the Dodd-Frank Act, the FDIC adopted rules effective April 1, 2011 under which insurance premium assessments are based on an institution's total assets minus its tangible equity (defined as Tier 1 capital) instead of its deposits. Under these rules, an institution with total assets of less than \$10 billion will be assigned to a risk category as described above, and a range of initial base assessment rates will apply to each category, subject to adjustment downward based on unsecured debt issued by the institution and, except for an institution in Risk Category I, adjustment upward if the institution's brokered deposits exceed 10% of its domestic deposits, to produce total base assessment rates. Total base assessment rates range from 2.5 to 9 basis points for Risk Category I, 9 to 24 basis points for Risk Category II, 18 to 33 basis points for Risk Category III, and 30 to 45 basis points for Risk Category IV, all subject to further adjustment upward if the institution holds more than a de minimis amount of unsecured debt issued by another FDIC-insured institution. The FDIC may increase or decrease its rates by 2.0 basis points without further rulemaking. In an emergency, the FDIC may also impose a special assessment.

The Company's insurance assessments during 2011, 2010 and 2009 were \$4.5 million, \$5.1 million and \$3.5 million, respectively. Because of the growing number of bank failures and costs to the DIF, the FDIC required a special assessment during 2009 totaling \$1.1 million and further required that we prepay the assessments that would normally have been paid during 2010-2012. This prepaid assessment amounted to \$12.3 million during 2009. The remaining prepaid balance at December 31, 2011 was \$4.2 million and is included in other assets on the Company's consolidated balance sheets.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Pursuant to the Dodd-Frank Act, the FDIC has established 2.0% as the designated reserve ratio (DRR), which is the ratio of the DIF to insured deposits. The FDIC has adopted a plan under which it will meet the statutory minimum DRR of 1.35% by September 30, 2020, the deadline imposed by the Dodd-Frank Act. The Dodd-Frank Act requires the FDIC to offset the effect of the increase in the statutory minimum DRR to 1.35% on institutions with assets of less than \$10 billion from the former statutory minimum of 1.15%. The FDIC has not yet announced how it will implement this offset or how larger institutions will be affected by it.

The FDIC also collects a deposit-based assessment from insured financial institutions on behalf of the Financing Corporation (the FICO). The funds from these assessments are used to service debt issued by FICO in its capacity as a financial vehicle for the Federal Savings & Loan Insurance Corporation. The FICO assessment rate is set quarterly and in 2011 ranged from 0.66 cents to 1.00 cents per \$100 of assessable deposits. These assessments will continue until the debt matures in 2017 through 2019.

Community Reinvestment Act

The Community Reinvestment Act requires federal bank regulatory agencies to encourage financial institutions to meet the credit needs of low and moderate-income borrowers in their local communities. An institution s size and business strategy determines the type of examination that it will receive. Large, retail-oriented institutions are examined using a performance-based lending, investment and service test. Small institutions are examined using a streamlined approach. All institutions may opt to be evaluated under a strategic plan formulated with community input and pre-approved by the bank regulatory agency.

The Community Reinvestment Act regulations provide for certain disclosure obligations. Each institution must post a notice advising the public of its right to comment to the institution and its regulator on the institution s Community Reinvestment Act performance and to review the institution s Community Reinvestment Act public file. Each lending institution must maintain for public inspection a file that includes a listing of branch locations and services, a summary of lending activity, a map of its communities and any written comments from the public on its performance in meeting community credit needs. The Community Reinvestment Act requires public disclosure of a financial institution s written Community Reinvestment Act evaluations. This promotes enforcement of Community Reinvestment Act requirements by providing the public with the status of a particular institution s community reinvestment record.

The Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act made various changes to the Community Reinvestment Act. Among other changes, Community Reinvestment Act agreements with private parties must be disclosed and annual Community Reinvestment Act reports must be made available to a bank s primary federal regulator. A bank holding company will not be permitted to become a financial holding company and no new activities authorized under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act may be commenced by a holding company or by a bank financial subsidiary if any of its bank subsidiaries received less than a satisfactory Community Reinvestment Act rating in its latest Community Reinvestment Act examination.

Consumer Protection Laws

The Bank is subject to a number of federal and state laws designed to protect borrowers and promote lending to various sectors of the economy and population. These laws include the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, the Truth in Lending Act, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act, the Fair Debt Collection Act and state law counterparts.

Federal law currently contains extensive customer privacy protection provisions. Under these provisions, a financial institution must provide to its customers, at the inception of the customer relationship and annually thereafter, the institution s policies and procedures regarding the handling of customers nonpublic personal financial information. These provisions also provide that, except for certain limited exceptions, an institution may not provide such personal information to unaffiliated third parties unless the institution discloses to the customer that such information may be so provided and the customer is given the opportunity to opt out of such disclosure. Federal law makes it a criminal offense, except in limited circumstances, to obtain or attempt to obtain customer information of a financial nature by fraudulent or deceptive means.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Anti-Terrorism Regulatory Matters

The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (the USA PATRIOT Act) requires each financial institution: (i) to establish an anti-money laundering program; (ii) to establish due diligence policies, procedures and controls with respect to its private banking accounts involving foreign individuals and certain foreign banks; and (iii) to avoid establishing, maintaining, administering or managing correspondent accounts in the United States for, or on behalf of, foreign banks that do not have a physical presence in any country. The USA PATRIOT Act also requires the Secretary of the Treasury to prescribe by regulation minimum standards that financial institutions must follow to verify the identity of customers, both foreign and domestic, when a customer opens an account. In addition, the USA PATRIOT Act contains a provision encouraging cooperation among financial institutions, regulatory authorities and law enforcement authorities with respect to individuals, entities and organizations engaged in, or reasonably suspected of engaging in, terrorist acts or money laundering activities.

Fiscal and Monetary Policy

Banking is a business which depends on interest rate differentials for success. In general, the difference between the interest paid by a bank on its deposits and its other borrowings, and the interest received by a bank on its loans and securities holdings, constitutes the major portion of a bank's earnings. Thus, our earnings and growth will be subject to the influence of economic conditions generally, both domestic and foreign, and also to the monetary and fiscal policies of the United States and its agencies, particularly the Federal Reserve. The Federal Reserve regulates the supply of money through various means, including open market dealings in United States government securities, the discount rate at which banks may borrow from the Federal Reserve and the reserve requirements on deposits. The nature and timing of any changes in such policies and their effect on Ameris cannot be predicted.

Current and future legislation and the policies established by federal and state regulatory authorities will affect our future operations. Banking legislation and regulations may limit our growth and the return to our investors by restricting certain of our activities.

In addition, capital requirements could be changed and have the effect of restricting our activities or requiring additional capital to be maintained. We cannot predict with certainty what changes, if any, will be made to existing federal and state legislation and regulations or the effect that such changes may have on our business.

Federal Home Loan Bank System

Our Company has a correspondent relationship with the FHLB of Atlanta, which is one of 12 regional FHLBs that administer the home financing credit function of savings companies. Each FHLB serves as a reserve or central bank for its members within its assigned region. FHLBs are funded primarily from proceeds derived from the sale of consolidated obligations of the FHLB system and make loans to members (i.e., advances) in accordance with policies and procedures, established by the Board of Directors of the FHLB which are subject to the oversight of the Federal Housing Finance Board. All advances from the FHLB are required to be fully secured by sufficient collateral as determined by the FHLB. In addition, all long-term advances are required to provide funds for residential home financing.

FHLB provides certain services to our Company such as processing checks and other items, buying and selling federal funds, handling money transfers and exchanges, shipping coin and currency, providing security and safekeeping of funds or other valuable items and furnishing limited management information and advice. As compensation for these services, our Company maintains certain balances with FHLB in interest-bearing accounts.

Under federal law, the FHLBs are required to provide funds for the resolution of troubled savings companies and to contribute to low and moderately-priced housing programs through direct loans or interest subsidies on advances targeted for community investment and low and moderate-income housing projects.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Title 6 of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, entitled the Federal Home Loan Bank System Modernization Act of 1999 (called the FHLB Modernization Act), amended the Federal Home Loan Bank Act to allow voluntary membership and modernized the capital structure and governance of the FHLBs. The capital structure established under the FHLB Modernization Act sets forth leverage and risk-based capital requirements based on permanence of capital. It also requires some minimum investment in the stock of the FHLBs of all member entities. Capital includes retained earnings and two forms of stock: Class A stock redeemable within six months upon written notice and Class B stock redeemable within five years upon written notice. The FHLB Modernization Act also reduced the period of time in which a member exiting the FHLB system must stay out of the system.

Real Estate Lending Evaluations

The federal regulators have adopted uniform standards for evaluations of loans secured by real estate or made to finance improvements to real estate. Banks are required to establish and maintain written internal real estate lending policies consistent with safe and sound banking practices and appropriate to the size of the institution and the nature and scope of its operations. The regulations establish loan to value ratio limitations on real estate loans. Our Company's loan policies establish limits on loan to value ratios that are equal to or less than those established in such regulations.

Commercial Real Estate Concentrations

Our lending operations may be subject to enhanced scrutiny by federal banking regulators based on our concentration of commercial real estate loans. On December 6, 2006, the federal banking regulators issued final guidance to remind financial institutions of the risk posed by commercial real estate (CRE) lending concentrations. CRE loans generally include land development, construction loans, and loans secured by multifamily property, and nonfarm, nonresidential real property where the primary source of repayment is derived from rental income associated with the property. The guidance prescribes the following guidelines for its examiners to help identify institutions that are potentially exposed to significant CRE risk and may warrant greater supervisory scrutiny:

total reported loans for construction, land development and other land (C&D) represent 100% or more of the institution's total capital;
or

total commercial real estate loans represent 300% or more of the institution's total capital, and the outstanding balance of the institution's commercial real estate loan portfolio has increased by 50% or more.

As of December 31, 2011 and excluding covered assets, our C&D concentration as a percentage of capital totaled 44.3% and our CRE concentration, net of owner-occupied loans, as a percentage of capital totaled 136.5%. Including loans subject to loss-share agreements with the FDIC, the Company's C&D concentration as a percentage of capital totaled 70.6% and our CRE concentration, net of owner-occupied loans, as a percentage of capital totaled 227.8%

TARP Regulations

Under the EESA, Congress has the ability to impose additional terms and conditions on TARP participants. As a participant in the CPP under TARP, we are subject to any such retroactive legislation. On February 10, 2009, the Treasury announced the Financial Stability Plan under the EESA (the Financial Stability Plan), which is intended to further stabilize financial institutions and stimulate lending across a broad range of economic sectors. On February 18, 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), a broad economic stimulus package that includes additional restrictions on, and potential additional regulation of, financial institutions.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

On June 10, 2009, under the authority granted to it under ARRA and EESA, the Treasury issued an interim final rule under Section 111 of EESA, as amended by ARRA, regarding compensation and corporate governance restrictions that would be imposed on TARP participants, effective June 15, 2009. As a TARP participant with currently outstanding obligations under TARP, we are subject to the compensation and corporate governance restrictions and requirements set forth in the interim final rule, which, among other things: (i) prohibit us from paying or accruing bonuses, retention awards or incentive compensation, except for certain long-term stock awards, to our senior executives; (ii) prohibit us from making severance payments to any of our senior executive officers or next five most highly compensated employees; (iii) require us to conduct semi-annual risk assessments to assure that our compensation arrangements do not encourage unnecessary and excessive risks or the manipulation of earnings to increase compensation; (iv) require us to recoup or claw back any bonus, retention award or incentive compensation paid by us to a senior executive officer or any of our next 20 most highly compensated employees, if the payment was based on financial statements or other performance criteria that are later found to be materially inaccurate; (v) prohibit us from providing tax gross-ups to any of our senior executive officers or next 20 most highly compensated employees; (vi) require us to provide enhanced disclosure of perquisites, and the use and role of compensation consultants; (vii) required us to adopt a corporate policy on luxury and excessive expenditures; (viii) require our chief executive officer and chief financial officer to provide period certifications about our compensation practices and compliance with the interim final rule; (ix) require us to provide enhanced disclosure of the relationship between our compensation plans and the risk posed by those plans; and (x) require us to provide an annual nonbinding shareholder vote, or say-on-pay proposal, to approve the compensation of our executives, consistent with regulations promulgated by the SEC. On January 12, 2010, the SEC adopted final regulations setting forth the parameters for such say-on-pay proposals for public company TARP participants.

Additional regulations applicable to TARP recipients adopted as part of EESA, the Financial Stability Plan, ARRA or other legislation may subject us to additional regulatory requirements.

Limitations on Incentive Compensation

The Dodd-Frank Act requires the federal banking regulators and other agencies, including the SEC, to issue regulations or guidelines requiring disclosure to the regulators of incentive-based compensation arrangements and to prohibit incentive-based compensation arrangements for directors, officers or employees that encourage inappropriate risks by providing excessive compensation, fees or benefits or that could lead to material financial loss to a financial institution. Proposed regulations for this purpose have been published, which are based upon the key principles that incentive compensation arrangements should (i) provide incentives that do not encourage risk-taking beyond the organization's ability to effectively identify and manage risks, (ii) be compatible with effective internal controls and risk management, and (iii) be supported by strong corporate governance, including active and effective oversight by the organization's board of directors and appropriate policies, procedures and monitoring. The proposed regulations are consistent with the Guidance on Sound Incentive Compensation Policies issued by the Federal Reserve, the FDIC and other regulators in June 2010.

As part of the regular, risk-focused examination process, the incentive compensation arrangements of banking organizations will be reviewed, and the regulator's findings will be incorporated into the organization's supervisory ratings, which can affect the organization's ability to make acquisitions and take other actions. Enforcement actions may be taken against a banking organization if its incentive compensation arrangements, or related risk-management control or governance processes, pose a risk to the organization's safety and soundness and the organization is not taking prompt and effective measures to correct any deficiencies.

Due to our participation in the CPP, we are also subject to additional executive compensation limitations, as discussed above.

Economic Environment

The policies of regulatory authorities, including the monetary policy of the Federal Reserve, have a significant effect on the operating results of bank holding companies and their subsidiaries. Among the means available to the Federal Reserve to affect the money supply are open market operations in U.S. government securities, changes in the discount rate on member bank borrowings and changes in reserve requirements against member bank deposits. These means are used in varying combinations to influence overall growth and distribution of bank loans, investments and deposits, and their use may affect interest rates charged on loans or paid on deposits.

The Federal Reserve's monetary policies have materially affected the operating results of commercial banks in the past and are expected to continue to do so in the future. The nature of future monetary policies and the effect of these policies on the business and earnings of our Company cannot be predicted.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Evolving Legislation and Regulatory Action

The Dodd-Frank Act was signed into law in 2010 and implements many new changes in the way financial and banking operations are regulated in the United States, including through the creation of a new resolution authority, mandating higher capital and liquidity requirements, requiring banks to pay increased fees to regulatory agencies and numerous other provisions intended to strengthen the financial services sector. The Dodd-Frank Act provides for the creation of the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC), which is charged with overseeing and coordinating the efforts of the primary U.S. financial regulatory agencies (including the Federal Reserve, the FDIC and the SEC) in establishing regulations to address systemic financial stability concerns. The Dodd-Frank Act also provides for the creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (the CFPB), a new consumer financial services regulator. The CFPB is authorized to prevent unfair, deceptive and abusive practices and ensure that consumers have access to markets for consumer financial products and services and that such markets are fair, transparent and competitive. Many aspects of the Dodd-Frank Act are subject to further rulemaking and will take effect over several years, with the result that the overall financial impact on the Company and the Bank cannot be anticipated at this time.

In addition, from time to time, various other legislative and regulatory initiatives are introduced in Congress and state legislatures, as well as by regulatory agencies, that may impact the Company or the Bank. Such initiatives may include proposals to expand or contract the powers of bank holding companies and depository institutions or proposals to substantially change the financial institution regulatory system. Such legislation could change banking statutes and the operating environment of Ameris in substantial and unpredictable ways. If enacted, such legislation could increase or decrease the cost of doing business, limit or expand permissible activities or affect the competitive balance among banks, savings associations, credit unions and other financial institutions. The Company cannot predict whether any such legislation will be enacted, and, if enacted, the effect that it, or any implementing regulations, would have on the financial condition or results of operations of the Company. A change in statutes, regulations or regulatory policies applicable to the Company or the Bank could have a material effect on the business of the Company.

ITEM 1A. RISK FACTORS

An investment in our Common Stock is subject to risks inherent in our business. The material risks and uncertainties that management believes affect Ameris are described below. Before making an investment decision, you should carefully consider the risks and uncertainties described below, together with all of the other information included or incorporated by reference in this Annual Report. The risks and uncertainties described below are not the only ones facing the Company. Additional risks and uncertainties that management is not aware of or focused on or that management currently deems immaterial may also impair the Company's business operations. This Annual Report is qualified in its entirety by these risk factors.

If any of the following risks actually occurs, the Company's financial condition and results of operations could be materially and adversely affected. If this were to happen, the value of the Common Stock could decline significantly, and you could lose all or part of your investment.

RISKS RELATED TO OUR COMPANY AND INDUSTRY

Difficult market conditions have adversely affected the industry in which we operate.

The capital and credit markets have been experiencing volatility and disruption for approximately four years. Declines in the housing market over this period, with falling home prices and increasing foreclosures, unemployment and under-employment, have negatively impacted the credit performance of mortgage loans and resulted in significant write-downs of asset values by financial institutions, including government-sponsored entities, as well as major commercial and investment banks. As a result of the broad based economic decline and the troubled economic conditions, financial institutions have pursued strategies that include seeking additional capital or merging with larger and stronger institutions. In some cases, financial institutions that did not pursue defensive strategies or did not succeed in those strategies, have failed. Reflecting concern about the stability of the financial markets generally and the strength of counterparties, many lenders and institutional investors have reduced or ceased providing funding to borrowers, including to other financial institutions. Additionally, the market disruptions have increased the level of commercial and consumer delinquencies, lack of consumer confidence, increased market volatility and widespread reduction of business activity generally. We do not expect that the difficult conditions in the financial markets are likely to improve materially in the near future and are managing the Company with numerous defensive strategies. A worsening of the current conditions would exacerbate the adverse effects of these difficult market conditions on us and others in the financial institution industry. In particular, we may face the following risks in connection with these events:

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Unreliable market conditions with significantly reduced real estate activity may adversely affect our ability to determine the fair value of the assets we hold. If we determine that a significant portion of our assets have values that are significantly below their recorded carrying value, we could recognize a material charge to earnings in the quarter during which such determination was made, our capital ratios would be affected and may result in increased regulatory scrutiny.

We may expect to face increased regulation of our industry, including as a result of the EESA or the Dodd-Frank Act. Compliance with such regulation may increase our costs and limit our ability to pursue business opportunities.

Market developments and the resulting economic pressure on consumers may affect consumer confidence levels and may cause increases in delinquencies and default rates, which, among other effects, could affect our charge-offs and provision for loan losses.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Competition in the industry could intensify as a result of the increasing consolidation of financial services companies in connection with current market conditions.

Recent legislation and regulatory proposals in response to recent turmoil in the financial markets may materially adversely affect our business and results of operations.

The banking industry is heavily regulated. We are subject to examinations, supervision and comprehensive regulation by various federal and state agencies. Our compliance with these regulations is costly and restricts certain of our activities. Banking regulations are primarily intended to protect the federal deposit insurance fund and depositors, not shareholders. The burden imposed by federal and state regulations puts banks at a competitive disadvantage compared to less regulated competitors such as finance companies, mortgage banking companies and leasing companies. Changes in the laws, regulations and regulatory practices affecting the banking industry may increase our costs of doing business or otherwise adversely affect us and create competitive advantages for others. Federal economic and monetary policies may also affect our ability to attract deposits and other funding sources, make loans and investments and achieve satisfactory interest spreads.

The Dodd-Frank Act represents a significant overhaul of many aspects of the regulation of the financial-services industry, including new or revised regulation of such things as systemic risk, capital adequacy, deposit insurance assessments and consumer financial protection. In addition, the federal banking regulators have issued joint guidance on incentive compensation and the Treasury and the federal banking regulators have issued statements calling for higher capital and liquidity requirements for banking organizations. Complying with these and other new legislative or regulatory requirements, and any programs established thereunder, could have a material adverse impact on our results of operations, our financial condition and our ability to fill positions with the most qualified candidates available.

Our revenues are highly correlated to market interest rates.

Our assets and liabilities are primarily monetary in nature, and as a result, we are subject to significant risks tied to changes in interest rates. Our ability to operate profitably is largely dependent upon net interest income. In 2011, net interest income made up 81.5% of our recurring revenue. Unexpected movement in interest rates, that may or may not change the slope of the current yield curve, could cause our net interest margins to decrease, subsequently decreasing net interest income. In addition, such changes could materially adversely affect the valuation of our assets and liabilities.

At present our one-year interest rate sensitivity position is mildly liability sensitive, such that a gradual increase in interest rates during the next twelve months should have a slightly negative impact on net interest income during that period. However, as with most financial institutions, our results of operations are affected by changes in interest rates and our ability to manage this risk. The difference between interest rates charged on interest-earning assets and interest rates paid on interest-bearing liabilities may be affected by changes in market interest rates, changes in relationships between interest rate indices, and changes in the relationships between long-term and short-term market interest rates. In addition, the mix of assets and liabilities could change as varying levels of market interest rates might present our customer base with more attractive options.

Certain changes in interest rates, inflation, deflation or the financial markets could affect demand for our products and our ability to deliver products efficiently.

Loan originations, and potentially loan revenues, could be materially adversely impacted by sharply rising interest rates. Conversely, sharply falling rates could increase prepayments within our securities portfolio lowering interest earnings from those investments. An unanticipated increase in inflation could cause our operating costs related to salaries and benefits, technology and supplies to increase at a faster pace than revenues.

The fair market value of our securities portfolio and the investment income from these securities also fluctuate depending on general economic and market conditions. In addition, actual net investment income and/or cash flows from investments that carry prepayment risk, such as mortgage-backed and other asset-backed securities, may differ from those anticipated at the time of investment as a result of interest rate fluctuations.

The downgrade of the U.S. credit rating and Europe's debt crisis could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and liquidity.

Standard & Poor's lowered its long term sovereign credit rating on the United States of America from AAA to AA+ on August 5, 2011. A further downgrade or a downgrade by other rating agencies could have a material adverse impact on financial markets and economic conditions in the

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

United States and worldwide. Any such adverse impact could have a material adverse effect on our liquidity, financial condition and results of operations.

In addition, the possibility that certain European Union (EU) member states will default on their debt obligations has negatively impacted economic conditions and global markets. The continued uncertainty over the outcome of international and the EU s financial support programs and the possibility that other EU member states may experience similar financial troubles could further disrupt global markets. The negative impact on economic conditions and global markets could also have a material adverse effect on our liquidity, financial condition and results of operations.

Our concentration of real estate loans subjects the Company to risks that could materially adversely affect our results of operations and financial condition.

The majority of our loan portfolio is secured by real estate. As the economy has deteriorated and depressed real estate values, the collateral value of the portfolio and the revenue stream from those loans has come under stress and has required additional provision to the allowance for loan losses. Our ability to dispose of foreclosed real estate and resolve credit quality issues is dependent on real estate activity and real estate prices, both of which have been unpredictable for more than four years.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Greater loan losses than expected may materially adversely affect our earnings.

We, as lenders, are exposed to the risk that our customers will be unable to repay their loans in accordance with their terms and that any collateral securing the payment of their loans may not be sufficient to assure repayment. Credit losses are inherent in the business of making loans and could have a material adverse effect on our operating results. Our credit risk with respect to our real estate and construction loan portfolio will relate principally to the creditworthiness of business entities and the value of the real estate serving as security for the repayment of loans. Our credit risk with respect to our commercial and consumer loan portfolio will relate principally to the general creditworthiness of businesses and individuals within our local markets.

We make various assumptions and judgments about the collectability of our loan portfolio and provide an allowance for estimated loan losses based on a number of factors. We believe that our current allowance for loan losses is adequate. However, if our assumptions or judgments prove to be incorrect, the allowance for loan losses may not be sufficient to cover actual loan losses. We may have to increase our allowance in the future in response to the request of one of our primary banking regulators, to adjust for changing conditions and assumptions, or as a result of any deterioration in the quality of our loan portfolio. The actual amount of future provisions for loan losses cannot be determined at this time and may vary from the amounts of past provisions.

Our business is highly correlated to local economic conditions in a geographically concentrated part of the United States.

Unlike larger organizations that are more geographically diversified, our banking offices are primarily concentrated in select markets in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina. As a result of this geographic concentration, our financial results depend largely upon economic conditions in these market areas. Deterioration in economic conditions in the markets we serve could result in one or more of the following:

an increase in loan delinquencies;

an increase in problem assets and foreclosures;

a decrease in the demand for our products and services; and

a decrease in the value of collateral for loans, especially real estate, in turn reducing customers' borrowing power, the value of assets associated with problem loans and collateral coverage.

Our growth and financial performance may be negatively impacted if we are unable to successfully execute our growth plans.

Economic conditions and other factors, such as our ability to identify appropriate markets for expansion, our ability to recruit and retain qualified personnel, our ability to fund earning asset growth at a reasonable and profitable level, sufficient capital to support our growth initiatives, competitive factors and banking laws, will impact our success.

We may seek to supplement our internal growth through acquisitions. We cannot predict with certainty the number, size or timing of acquisitions, or whether any such acquisition will occur at all. Our acquisition efforts have traditionally focused on targeted banking entities in markets in which we currently operate and markets in which we believe we can compete effectively. However, as consolidation of the financial services industry continues, the competition for suitable acquisition candidates may increase. We may compete with other financial services companies for acquisition opportunities, and many of these competitors have greater financial resources than we do and may be able to pay more for an acquisition than we are able or willing to pay. We also may need additional debt or equity financing in the future to fund acquisitions. We may not be able to obtain additional financing or, if available, it may not be in amounts and on terms acceptable to us. If we are unable to locate suitable acquisition candidates willing to sell on terms acceptable to us, or we are otherwise unable to obtain additional debt or equity financing necessary for us to continue making acquisitions, we would be required to find other methods to grow our business and we may not grow at the same rate we have in the past, or at all.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Generally, we must receive federal regulatory approval before we can acquire a bank or bank holding company. In determining whether to approve a proposed bank acquisition, federal bank regulators will consider, among other factors, the effect of the acquisition on the competition, financial condition and future prospects. The regulators also review current and projected capital ratios and levels, the competence, experience and integrity of management and its record of compliance with laws and regulations, the convenience and needs of the communities to be served (including the acquiring institution's record of compliance under the Community Reinvestment Act) and the effectiveness of the acquiring institution in combating money laundering activities. We cannot be certain when or if, or on what terms and conditions, any required regulatory approvals will be granted. We may also be required to sell banks or branches as a condition to receiving regulatory approval, which condition may not be acceptable to us or, if acceptable to us, may reduce the benefit of any acquisition.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

In the past, we have utilized de novo branching in new and existing markets as a way to supplement our growth. De novo branching and any acquisition carry with it numerous risks, including the following:

the inability to obtain all required regulatory approvals;

significant costs and anticipated operating losses associated with establishing a de novo branch or a new bank;

the inability to secure the services of qualified senior management;

the local market may not accept the services of a new bank owned and managed by a bank holding company headquartered outside of the market area of the new bank;

economic downturns in the new market;

the inability to obtain attractive locations within a new market at a reasonable cost; and

the additional strain on management resources and internal systems and controls.

We have experienced to some extent many of these risks with our de novo branching to date.

We rely on dividends from the Bank for most of our revenue.

Ameris is a separate and distinct legal entity from its subsidiaries. It receives substantially all of its revenue from dividends from the Bank. These dividends are the principal source of funds to pay dividends on the Common Stock and interest and principal on the Company's debt. Various federal and state laws and regulations limit the amount of dividends that the Bank may pay to the Company. Also, the Company's right to participate in a distribution of assets upon a subsidiary's liquidation or reorganization is subject to the prior claims of the subsidiary's creditors. In the event the Bank is unable to pay dividends to the Company, the Company may not be able to service debt, pay obligations or pay dividends on the Common Stock and its business, financial condition and results of operations may be materially adversely affected. Consequently, cash-based activities, including further investments in or support of, the Bank could require borrowings or additional issuances of common or preferred stock.

We are subject to regulation by various federal and state entities.

We are subject to the regulations of the SEC, the Federal Reserve Board, the FDIC and the GDBF. New regulations issued by these agencies may adversely affect our ability to carry on our business activities. We are subject to various federal and state laws and certain changes in these laws and regulations may adversely affect our operations. Noncompliance with certain of these regulations may impact our business plans, including our ability to branch, offer certain products or execute existing or planned business strategies.

We are also subject to the accounting rules and regulations of the SEC and the Financial Accounting Standards Board. Changes in accounting rules could materially adversely affect the reported financial statements or our results of operations and may also require extraordinary efforts or additional costs to implement. Any of these laws or regulations may be modified or changed from time to time, and we cannot be assured that such modifications or changes will not adversely affect us.

We are subject to industry competition which may have an impact upon our success.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Our profitability depends on our ability to compete successfully. We operate in a highly competitive financial services environment. Certain competitors are larger and may have more resources than we do. We face competition in our regional market areas from other commercial banks, savings and loan associations, credit unions, internet banks, finance companies, mutual funds, insurance companies, brokerage and investment banking firms, and other financial intermediaries that offer similar services. Some of our nonbank competitors are not subject to the same extensive regulations that govern us or our bank subsidiary and may have greater flexibility in competing for business.

Another competitive factor is that the financial services market, including banking services, is undergoing rapid changes with frequent introductions of new technology-driven products and services. Our future success may depend, in part, on our ability to use technology competitively to provide products and services that provide convenience to customers and create additional efficiencies in our operations.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Changes in the policies of monetary authorities and other government action could materially adversely affect our profitability.

The results of our operations are affected by credit policies of monetary authorities, particularly the Federal Reserve. The instruments of monetary policy employed by the Federal Reserve include open market operations in U.S. government securities, changes in the discount rate or the federal funds rate on bank borrowings and changes in reserve requirements against bank deposits. In view of changing conditions in the national economy and in the money markets, particularly in light of the continuing threat of terrorist attacks and current U.S. military operations and other instances of unrest around the world, we cannot predict with certainty possible future changes in interest rates, deposit levels, loan demand or our business and earnings. Furthermore, the actions of the U.S. government and other governments in responding to such terrorist attacks or instances of unrest may result in currency fluctuations, exchange controls, market disruption and other adverse effects.

We may need to rely on the financial markets to provide needed capital.

Our Common Stock is listed and traded on the NASDAQ Global Select Market. Although we anticipate that our capital resources will be adequate for the foreseeable future to meet our capital requirements, at times we may depend on the liquidity of the NASDAQ market to raise equity capital. If the market should fail to operate, or if conditions in the capital markets are adverse, we may be constrained in raising capital. Downgrades in the opinions of the analysts that follow our Company may cause our stock price to fall and significantly limit our ability to access the markets for additional capital requirements. Should these risks materialize, our ability to further expand our operations through internal growth or acquisition may be limited.

We may invest or spend the proceeds in stock offerings in ways with which you may not agree and in ways that may not earn a profit.

We may choose to use the proceeds of future stock offerings for general corporate purposes, including for possible acquisition opportunities that may become available, such as future FDIC-assisted transactions. It is not known whether suitable acquisition opportunities may become available or whether we will be able to successfully complete any such acquisitions. We may use the proceeds of an offering only to focus on sustaining our organic, or internal, growth or for other purposes. In addition, we may use all or a portion of the proceeds of an offering to support our capital. You may not agree with the ways we decide to use the proceeds of any stock offerings, and our use of the proceeds may not yield any profits.

We face risks related to our operational, technological and organizational infrastructure.

Our ability to grow and compete is dependent on our ability to build or acquire the necessary operational and technological infrastructure and to manage the cost of that infrastructure while we expand. Similar to other large corporations, in our case, operational risk can manifest itself in many ways, such as errors related to failed or inadequate processes, faulty or disabled computer systems, fraud by employees or persons outside of our Company and exposure to external events. We are dependent on our operational infrastructure to help manage these risks. In addition, we are heavily dependent on the strength and capability of our technology systems which we use both to interface with our customers and to manage our internal financial and other systems. Our ability to develop and deliver new products that meet the needs of our existing customers and attract new customers depends in part on the functionality of our technology systems. Additionally, our ability to run our business in compliance with applicable laws and regulations is dependent on these infrastructures.

We continuously monitor our operational and technological capabilities and make modifications and improvements when we believe it will be cost effective to do so. In some instances, we may build and maintain these capabilities ourselves. We also outsource some of these functions to third parties. These third parties may experience errors or disruptions that could adversely impact us and over which we may have limited control. We also face risk from the integration of new infrastructure platforms and/or new third party providers of such platforms into our existing businesses.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Financial services companies depend on the accuracy and completeness of information about customers and counterparties.

In deciding whether to extend credit or enter into other transactions, the Company may rely on information furnished by or on behalf of customers and counterparties, including financial statements, credit reports and other financial information. The Company may also rely on representations of those customers, counterparties or other third parties, such as independent auditors, as to the accuracy and completeness of that information. Reliance on inaccurate or misleading financial statements, credit reports or other financial information could have a material adverse impact on the Company's business and, in turn, the Company's financial condition and results of operations.

Reputational risk and social factors may impact our results.

Our ability to originate and maintain accounts is highly dependent upon customer and other external perceptions of our business practices and our financial health. Adverse perceptions regarding our business practices or our financial health could damage our reputation in both the customer and funding markets, leading to difficulties in generating and maintaining accounts as well as in financing them. Adverse developments with respect to the consumer or other external perceptions regarding the practices of our competitors, or our industry as a whole, may also adversely impact our reputation. In addition, adverse reputational impacts on third parties with whom we have important relationships may also adversely impact our reputation. Adverse impacts on our reputation, or the reputation of our industry, may also result in greater regulatory or legislative scrutiny, which may lead to laws, regulations or regulatory actions that may change or constrain the manner in which we engage with our customers and the products we offer. Adverse reputational impacts or events may also increase our litigation risk. We carefully monitor internal and external developments for areas of potential reputational risk and have established governance structures to assist in evaluating such risks in our business practices and decisions.

We may not be able to attract and retain skilled people.

The Company's success depends, in large part, on its ability to attract and retain key people. Competition for the best people in most activities engaged in by the Company can be intense and the Company may not be able to hire people or to retain them. The unexpected loss of services of one or more of the Company's key personnel could have a material adverse impact on the Company's business because of their skills, knowledge of the Company's market, years of industry experience and the difficulty of promptly finding qualified replacement personnel.

The FDIC has imposed a special assessment on all FDIC-insured institutions, which decreased our earnings in 2009, and future special assessments could materially adversely affect our earnings in future periods.

In May 2009, the FDIC announced that it had voted to levy a special assessment on insured institutions in order to facilitate the rebuilding of the Deposit Insurance Fund. During 2009, we were required to pay a special assessment totaling \$1.1 million and also to prepay the assessments that would normally have been paid during 2010-2012. The FDIC has indicated that future special assessments are possible, although it has not determined the magnitude or timing of any future assessments. Any such future assessments will decrease our earnings.

The terms governing the issuance of the Preferred Shares and the Warrant to the Treasury may be changed, the effect of which may have an adverse effect on our operations.

The terms of the Securities Purchase Agreement (Standard Terms incorporated by reference therein (collectively, the Purchase Agreement)), which we entered into with the Treasury in connection with its purchase of the Preferred Shares and the Warrant, provides that the Treasury may unilaterally amend any provision of the Purchase Agreement to the extent required to comply with any changes in applicable federal law that may occur in the future. We have no control over any change in the terms of the transaction that may occur in the future. Such changes may place restrictions on our business or results of operation, which may adversely affect the market price of our Common Stock.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

RISKS RELATED TO FDIC-ASSISTED TRANSACTIONS

Our Company is subject to certain risks related to FDIC-assisted transactions.

The success of past FDIC-assisted transactions, including the acquisitions of AUB, USB, SCB, FBJ, TBC, DBT, OGB and HTB, and any FDIC-assisted transaction in which the Company may participate in the future will depend on a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the following:

our ability to fully integrate, and to integrate successfully, the branches acquired into the Bank's operations;

our ability to limit the outflow of deposits held by our new customers in the acquired branches and to successfully retain and manage interest-earning assets (loans) acquired in FDIC-assisted transactions;

our ability to retain existing deposits and to generate new interest-earning assets in the geographic areas previously served by the acquired banks;

our ability to effectively compete in new markets in which we did not previously have a presence;

our success in deploying the cash received in the FDIC-assisted transactions into assets bearing sufficiently high yields without incurring unacceptable credit or interest rate risk;

our ability to control the incremental non-interest expense from the acquired branches in a manner that enables us to maintain a favorable overall efficiency ratio;

our ability to retain and attract the appropriate personnel to staff the acquired branches; and

our ability to earn acceptable levels of interest and non-interest income, including fee income, from the acquired branches.

As with any acquisition involving a financial institution, particularly one involving the transfer of a large number of bank branches as is often the case with FDIC-assisted transactions, there may be higher than average levels of service disruptions that would cause inconveniences or potentially increase the effectiveness of competing financial institutions in attracting our customers. Integrating the acquired branches would not be an operation of substantial size and expense that Ameris is not familiar with, but we anticipate unique challenges and opportunities because of the nature of the transaction. Integration efforts will also likely divert our management's attention and resources. It is not known whether we will be able to integrate acquired branches successfully, and the integration process could result in the loss of key employees, the disruption of ongoing business or inconsistencies in standards, controls, procedures and policies that adversely affect our ability to maintain relationships with clients, customers, depositors and employees or to achieve the anticipated benefits of the FDIC-assisted transactions. We may also encounter unexpected difficulties or costs during the integration that could materially adversely affect our earnings and financial condition, perhaps materially. Additionally, we may be unable to achieve results in the future similar to those achieved by our existing banking business, to compete effectively in the market areas previously served by the acquired branches or to manage any growth resulting from FDIC-assisted transactions effectively.

Our willingness and ability to grow the acquired branches following FDIC-assisted transactions depend on several factors, most importantly the ability to retain certain key personnel that we hire or transfer in connection with such transactions. Our failure to retain these employees could adversely affect the success of such transactions and our future growth.

We engage in acquisitions of other businesses from time to time, including FDIC-assisted acquisitions. These acquisitions may not produce revenue or earnings enhancements or cost savings at levels or within timeframes originally anticipated and may result in unforeseen integration difficulties.

When appropriate opportunities arise, we will engage in acquisitions of other businesses. Difficulty in integrating an acquired business or company may cause us not to realize expected revenue increases, cost savings, increases in geographic or product presence or other anticipated benefits from any acquisition. The integration could result in higher than expected deposit attrition (run-off), loss of key employees, disruption of our business or the business of the acquired company, or otherwise adversely affect our ability to maintain relationships with customers and employees or achieve the anticipated benefits of the acquisition. We are likely to need to make additional investment in equipment and personnel to manage higher asset levels and loan balances as a result of any significant acquisition, which may materially adversely impact our earnings. Also, the negative effect of any divestitures required by regulatory authorities in acquisitions or business combinations may be greater than expected.

In evaluating potential acquisition opportunities, we may seek to acquire failed banks through FDIC-assisted transactions. While the FDIC may, in such transactions, provide assistance to mitigate certain risks, such as sharing in exposure to loan losses, and providing indemnification against certain liabilities, of the failed institution, we may not be able to accurately estimate our potential exposure to loan losses and other potential liabilities, or the difficulty of integration, in acquiring such institution.

Depending on the condition of any institution that we may acquire, any acquisition may, at least in the near term, materially adversely affect our capital and earnings and, if not successfully integrated following the acquisition, may continue to have such effects.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

FDIC-assisted acquisition opportunities may not become available and increased competition may make it more difficult for us to bid on failed bank transactions on terms we consider to be acceptable.

Our near-term business strategy includes consideration of potential acquisitions of failing banks that the FDIC plans to place in receivership. The FDIC may not place banks that meet our strategic objectives into receivership. Failed bank transactions are attractive opportunities in part because of loss-sharing arrangements with the FDIC that limit the acquirer's downside risk on the purchased loan portfolio and, apart from our assumption of deposit liabilities, we have significant discretion as to the nondeposit liabilities that we assume. In addition, assets purchased from the FDIC are marked to their fair value and in many cases there is little or no addition to goodwill arising from an FDIC-assisted transaction. The bidding process for failing banks could become very competitive, and the increased competition may make it more difficult for us to bid on terms we consider to be acceptable.

Changes in national and local economic conditions could lead to higher loan charge-offs in connection with past FDIC-assisted transactions, all of which may not be supported by loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC.

Although loan portfolios acquired in past FDIC-assisted transactions have initially been accounted for at fair value, we do not yet know whether the loans we acquired will become impaired, and impairment may result in additional charge-offs to the portfolio. The fluctuations in national, regional and local economic conditions, including those related to local residential, commercial real estate and construction markets, may increase the level of charge-offs that we make to our loan portfolio, and, consequently, reduce our net income, and may also increase the level of charge-offs on the loan portfolios that we have acquired such acquisitions and correspondingly reduce our net income. These fluctuations are not predictable, cannot be controlled and may have a material adverse impact on our operations and financial condition even if other favorable events occur.

Although we have entered into loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC which provide that a significant portion of losses related to specified loan portfolios that we have acquired in connection with the FDIC-assisted transactions will be borne by the FDIC, we are not protected for all losses resulting from charge-offs with respect to those specified loan portfolios. Additionally, the loss-sharing agreements have limited terms; therefore, any charge-off of related losses that we experience after the term of the loss-sharing agreements will not be reimbursable by the FDIC and will negatively impact our net income. The loss-sharing agreements also impose standard requirements on us which must be satisfied in order to retain loss share protections.

RISKS RELATED TO OUR COMMON STOCK

The price of our Common Stock is volatile and may decline.

The trading price of our Common Stock may fluctuate widely as a result of a number of factors, many of which are outside our control. In addition, the stock market is subject to fluctuations in the share prices and trading volumes that affect the market prices of the shares of many companies. These broad market fluctuations have adversely affected and may continue to adversely affect the market price of our Common Stock. Among the factors that could affect our stock price are:

actual or anticipated quarterly fluctuations in our operating results and financial condition;

changes in revenue or earnings estimates or publication of research reports and recommendations by financial analysts or actions taken by rating agencies with respect to our securities or those of other financial institutions;

failure to meet analysts' revenue or earnings estimates;

speculation in the press or investment community;

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

strategic actions by us or our competitors, such as acquisitions or restructurings;

actions by institutional shareholders;

fluctuations in the stock price and operating results of our competitors;

general market conditions and, in particular, developments related to market conditions for the financial services industry;

proposed or adopted regulatory changes or developments;

anticipated or pending investigations, proceedings or litigation that involve or affect us; or

domestic and international economic factors unrelated to our performance.

A significant decline in our stock price could result in substantial losses for individual shareholders and could lead to costly and disruptive securities litigation.

Securities issued by us, including our Common Stock, are not FDIC insured.

Securities issued by us, including our Common Stock, are not savings or deposit accounts or other obligations of any bank and are not insured by the FDIC, the Deposit Insurance Fund or any other governmental agency or instrumentality, or any private insurer, and are subject to investment risk, including the possible loss of principal.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

We may issue debt and equity securities or securities convertible into equity securities, any of which may be senior to our Common Stock as to distributions and in liquidation, which could negatively affect the value of our Common Stock.

In the future, we may attempt to increase our capital resources by entering into debt or debt-like financing that is unsecured or secured by all or up to all of our assets, or by issuing additional debt or equity securities, which could include issuances of secured or unsecured commercial paper, medium-term notes, senior notes, subordinated notes, preferred stock or securities convertible into or exchangeable for equity securities. In the event of our liquidation, our lenders and holders of our debt and preferred securities would receive a distribution of our available assets before distributions to the holders of our Common Stock. Because our decision to incur debt and issue securities in our future offerings will depend on market conditions and other factors beyond our control, we cannot predict or estimate with certainty the amount, timing or nature of our future offerings and debt financings. Further, market conditions could require us to accept less favorable terms for the issuance of our securities in the future.

You may not receive dividends on the Common Stock.

Holders of our Common Stock are only entitled to receive such dividends as our Board of Directors may declare out of funds legally available for such payments. During 2008 and in response to anticipated increases in corporate risks, our Board reduced our dividend from \$0.56 per common share annually to \$0.20 per common share annually. During 2009, the Board took further action, replacing the cash dividend with stock dividends, and in 2010, the Board suspended the stock dividends.

Sales of a significant number of shares of our Common Stock in the public markets, or the perception of such sales, could depress the market price of our Common Stock.

Sales of a substantial number of shares of our Common Stock in the public markets and the availability of those shares for sale could adversely affect the market price of our Common Stock. In addition, future issuances of equity securities, including pursuant to outstanding options, could dilute the interests of our existing stockholders and could cause the market price of our Common Stock to decline. We may issue such additional equity or convertible securities to raise additional capital. Depending on the amount offered and the levels at which we offer the stock, issuances of common or preferred stock could be substantially dilutive to shareholders of our Common Stock. Moreover, to the extent that we issue restricted stock, phantom shares, stock appreciation rights, options or warrants to purchase our Common Stock in the future and those stock appreciation rights, options or warrants are exercised or as shares of the restricted stock vest, our shareholders may experience further dilution. Holders of our shares of Common Stock have no preemptive rights that entitle holders to purchase their pro rata share of any offering of shares of any class or series and, therefore, such sales or offerings could result in increased dilution to our shareholders. We cannot predict with certainty the effect that future sales of our Common Stock would have on the market price of our Common Stock.

ITEM 1B. UNRESOLVED STAFF COMMENTS

None.

ITEM 2. PROPERTIES

The Company's corporate headquarters is located at 310 First St. SE, Moultrie, Georgia 31768. The Company occupies approximately 6,300 square feet at this location plus an additional 37,248 square feet used for support services for banking operations, including credit, sales and operational support, as well as audit and loan review services. In addition to its corporate headquarters, Ameris operates 62 office or branch locations, of which 48 are owned and 14 are subject to either building or ground leases, and five mortgage production offices, all of which are subject to building leases. At December 31, 2011, there were no significant encumbrances on the offices, equipment or other operational facilities owned by Ameris and the Bank.

ITEM 3. LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

From time to time, the Company and the Bank are parties to legal proceedings arising in the ordinary course of our business operations. Management, after consultation with legal counsel, does not anticipate that current litigation will have a material adverse effect on the Company's financial position or results of operations or cash flows.

ITEM 4. MINE SAFETY DISCLOSURES

Not applicable.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****PART II****ITEM 5. MARKET FOR REGISTRANT'S COMMON EQUITY, RELATED STOCKHOLDER MATTERS AND ISSUER PURCHASES OF EQUITY SECURITIES****Market Price of Common Stock**

The Common Stock is listed on the NASDAQ Global Select Market (NASDAQ) under the symbol ABCB. The following table sets forth: (i) the high and low sales prices for the Common Stock as quoted on NASDAQ during 2011 and 2010, as adjusted for stock dividends; and (ii) the amount of quarterly dividends declared on the Common Stock during the periods indicated. The high and low sales prices reflect inter-dealer prices, without retail mark-up, mark-down or commission, and may not necessarily represent actual transactions.

Quarter Ended 2011	High	Low	Dividend
March 31	\$ 11.20	\$ 9.15	
June 30	10.25	8.49	
September 30	10.36	8.31	
December 31	10.98	8.51	
Quarter Ended 2010	High	Low	Dividend
March 31	\$ 10.19	\$ 6.88	1 for 130
June 30	11.64	8.90	1 for 210
September 30	10.59	7.75	
December 31	11.15	8.69	

Dividends

The amount of and nature of any dividends declared on our Common Stock in the future will be determined by our Board of Directors in their sole discretion. During 2008, the Board reduced our dividend rate from \$0.56 per share of Common Stock annually to \$0.20 per share annually. Beginning with the third quarter of 2009, the Board also replaced our cash dividend with a stock dividend, and during 2010, the stock dividend was suspended as well. Should the Board determine to declare a cash dividend in the future, the Company would be required to comply with the restrictions on the payment of dividends in respect of the Common Stock discussed in the section of Part I, Item 1. of this Annual Report captioned Payment of Dividends and Other Restrictions.

Holders of Common Stock

As of February 15, 2012, there were approximately 2,260 holders of record of the Common Stock. The Company believes a portion of Common Stock outstanding is held either in nominee name or street name brokerage accounts; therefore, the Company is unable to determine the number of beneficial owners of the Common Stock.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Performance Graph

Set forth below is a line graph comparing the change in the cumulative total shareholder return on the Common Stock against the cumulative return of the NASDAQ Stock Market (U.S. Companies) Index and the index of NASDAQ Bank Stocks for the five-year period commencing December 31, 2006, and ending December 31, 2011. This line graph assumes an investment of \$100 on December 31, 2006 and reinvestment of dividends and other distributions to shareholders.

Pursuant to the regulations of the SEC, this performance graph is not soliciting material, is not deemed filed with the SEC and is not to be incorporated by reference in any filing of the Company under the Securities Act or the Exchange Act.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****ITEM 6. SELECTED FINANCIAL DATA**

The following table presents selected consolidated financial information for Ameris. The data set forth below is derived from the audited consolidated financial statements of Ameris. The eight FDIC assisted transactions completed in 2009, 2010 and 2011 significantly affected the comparability of selected financial data. Specifically, since these acquisitions were accounted for using the purchase method, the assets of the acquired institutions were recorded at their fair values, the excess purchase price over the net fair value of the assets was recorded as goodwill and the results of operations for the business have been included in the Company's results since the respective dates these acquisitions were completed. Accordingly, the level of our assets and liabilities and our results of operations for these acquisitions have significantly affected the Company's financial position and results of operations. Discussion of these acquisitions can be found in the Corporate Restructuring and Business Combinations section of Part I, Item 1. of this Annual Report and in Note 2, Assets Acquired in FDIC-Assisted Acquisitions, in the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements. The selected financial data should be read in conjunction with, and is qualified in its entirety by, the Consolidated Financial Statements and the Notes thereto and Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations included elsewhere herein.

	2011	Year Ended December 31,			2007
	2010	2009	2008		
	(Dollars in Thousands, Except Per Share Data)				
Selected Balance Sheet Data:					
Total assets	\$ 2,994,308	\$ 2,972,168	\$ 2,423,970	\$ 2,407,090	\$ 2,112,063
Total loans, gross	1,332,086	1,374,757	1,584,359	1,695,777	1,614,048
Covered assets (loans and OREO)	650,106	609,922	146,585		
Investment securities available for sale	339,967	322,581	245,556	367,894	289,382
FDIC loss-share receivable	242,394	177,187	45,840		
Total deposits	2,591,566	2,535,426	2,123,116	2,013,525	1,757,265
Stockholders' equity	293,770	273,407	194,964	239,359	191,249
Selected Income Statement Data:					
Interest income	\$ 141,071	\$ 119,071	\$ 114,573	\$ 129,008	\$ 146,077
Interest expense	27,547	29,794	40,550	56,343	70,999
Net interest income	113,524	89,277	74,023	72,665	75,078
Provision for loan losses	32,729	50,521	42,068	35,030	11,321
Other income	52,807	35,248	58,353	19,149	17,592
Other expenses	101,953	81,188	124,800	62,753	58,896
Income/(loss) before income taxes	31,649	(7,184)	(34,492)	(5,969)	22,453
Income tax expense/(benefit)	10,556	(3,195)	7,297	(2,053)	7,300
Net income/(loss)	\$ 21,093	\$ (3,989)	\$ (41,789)	\$ (3,916)	\$ 15,153
Preferred stock dividends	3,241	3,213	3,161	328	
Net income/(loss) available to common shareholders	\$ 17,852	\$ (7,202)	\$ (44,950)	\$ (4,244)	\$ 15,153
Per Share Data:					
Net income/(loss) basic	\$ 0.76	\$ (0.35)	\$ (3.27)	\$ (0.31)	\$ 1.12
Net income/(loss) diluted	0.76	(0.35)	(3.27)	(0.31)	1.11
Common book value	10.23	9.44	10.52	14.06	14.12
Common dividends - cash			.10	0.38	0.56
Common dividends - stock		3 for 157	2 for 130		

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

	Year Ended December 31,				
	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
	(Dollars in Thousands, Except Per Share Data)				
Profitability Ratios:					
Net income (loss) to average total assets	0.60%	(0.37)%	(0.52)%	(0.19)%	0.74%
Net income (loss) to average common stockholders' equity	7.21	(4.44)	(6.25)	(2.22)	8.13
Net interest margin	4.57	4.11	3.52	3.65	4.02
Efficiency ratio	61.30	65.20	74.61	68.35	63.55
Loan Quality Ratios:					
Net charge-offs to average loans*	2.23%	3.33%	2.77%	1.36%	0.53%
Allowance for loan losses to total loans *	2.64	2.52	2.26	2.33	1.71
Nonperforming assets to total loans and OREO*	8.76	8.38	6.87	4.13	1.60
Liquidity Ratios:					
Loans to total deposits*	51.40%	54.22%	74.62%	84.22%	91.85%
Average loans to average earnings assets	76.72	76.50	79.26	82.32	81.72
Noninterest-bearing deposits to total deposits	15.26	11.91	11.16	10.36	9.36
Capital Adequacy Ratios:					
Stockholders' equity to total assets	9.81%	9.20%	8.04%	7.91%	9.06%
Common stock dividend payout ratio	NM	NM	NM	NM	50.00

* Excludes covered assets.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

ITEM 7. MANAGEMENT'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL CONDITION AND RESULTS OF OPERATIONS

OVERVIEW

During 2011, the Company reported net income available to common shareholders of \$17.9 million, or \$0.76 per share, compared to a net loss available to common shareholders in 2010 of \$7.2 million, or (\$0.35) per share. The Company's income/(loss) as a percentage of average assets for 2011 and 2010 was 0.71% and (0.37%), respectively, while the Company's income/(loss) as a percentage of average shareholders' equity was 8.52% and (4.44%), respectively.

Highlights of the Company's performance in 2011 include the following:

The Company participated in two FDIC-assisted acquisitions during 2011. These transactions resulted in after-tax gains of \$17.5 million, representing the difference between the fair values of the assets acquired and the liabilities assumed. The Company received a net cash payment of \$24.5 million from the FDIC to settle the acquisitions.

Tangible common equity to tangible assets increased from 7.35% at December 31, 2010 to 7.99% at December 31, 2011. Tangible common book value increased 9.1% per share from \$9.22 per share at December 31, 2010 to \$10.06 per share at December 31, 2011.

Total credit costs for the year ended December 31, 2011 were \$58.1 million, a decrease of 16.5% when compared to 2010. Credit costs include the loan loss provision, losses on the sale of problem loans or OREO and legal costs associated with problem loans or OREO. Provision for loan loss expense for the full year 2011 amounted to \$32.7 million, compared to \$50.5 million for 2010. The lower provision costs were possible because of a reduction in new problem loans in 2011 when compared to 2010.

The Company's net interest margin expanded in 2011 to 4.57% from 4.11% in 2010 because of strong incremental spreads on new business, steady yields on earning assets and continued decreases in funding costs. Yields on earning assets increased from 5.47% in 2010 to 5.68% in 2011, due primarily to improvements in the yield on covered loans. As expected cash flow on covered loans improves, a portion of the loan discount that was previously attributable to credit problems is reclassified into interest income. This reclassification occurs over the estimated life of the loan, which sometimes is a very short period of time.

Total assets at December 31, 2011 increased only slightly, growing 0.7% to \$2.99 billion, compared to \$2.97 billion at December 31, 2010. Average assets for the year reflected higher levels of growth considering the three acquisitions completed in the fourth quarter of 2010. Average assets and average earning assets in 2011 were \$2.97 billion and \$2.50 billion, respectively, compared to \$2.50 billion and \$2.20 billion, respectively, for 2010.

The Company's deposit mix improved during 2011 with 65.7% of total deposits in non-CD accounts at December 31, 2011 compared to 58.2% at December 31, 2010. Growth in deposits came through acquisitions and through the continued efforts of our seasoned bankers. At December 31, 2011, non-interest bearing deposit accounts totaled \$395.3 million, representing growth of 30.9% over balances at December 31, 2010.

CRITICAL ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Ameris has established certain accounting and financial reporting policies to govern the application of accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America in the preparation of our financial statements. Our significant accounting policies are described in Note 1 to the Consolidated Financial Statements. Certain accounting policies involve significant judgments and assumptions by management which have a material impact on the carrying value of certain assets and liabilities; management considers these accounting policies to be critical accounting policies. The judgments and assumptions used by management are based on historical experience and other factors which are believed to be

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

reasonable under the circumstances. Because of the nature of the judgments and assumptions made by management, actual results could differ from the judgments and estimates adopted by management which could have a material impact on the carrying values of assets and liabilities and the results of our operations. We believe the following accounting policies applied by Ameris represent critical accounting policies.

Allowance for Loan Losses

We believe the allowance for loan losses is a critical accounting policy that requires the most significant judgments and estimates used in the preparation of our consolidated financial statements. The allowance for loan losses represents management's estimate of probable loan losses inherent in the Company's loan portfolio. Calculation of the allowance for loan losses represents a critical accounting estimate due to the significant judgment, assumptions and estimates related to the amount and timing of estimated losses, consideration of subjective environmental factors and the amount and timing of cash flows related to impaired loans.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Management believes that the allowance for loan losses is adequate. While management uses available information to recognize losses on loans, future additions to the allowance for loan losses may be necessary based on changes in economic conditions. In addition, various regulatory agencies, as an integral part of their examination processes, periodically review the Company's allowance for loan losses. Such agencies may require the Company to recognize additions to the allowance for loan losses based on their judgments about information available to them at the time of their examination.

Considering current information and events regarding a borrower's ability to repay its obligations, management considers a loan to be impaired when the ultimate collectability of all amounts due, according to the contractual terms of the loan agreement, is in doubt. When a loan is considered to be impaired, the amount of impairment is measured based on the present value of expected future cash flows discounted at the loan's effective interest rate or if the loan is collateral-dependent, the fair value of the collateral is used to determine the amount of impairment. Impairment losses are included in the allowance for loan losses through a charge to the provision for losses on loans.

Subsequent recoveries are credited to the allowance for loan losses. Cash receipts for accruing loans are applied to principal and interest under the contractual terms of the loan agreement. Cash receipts on impaired loans for which the accrual of interest has been discontinued are applied first to principal and then to interest income.

Certain economic and interest rate factors could have a material impact on the determination of the allowance for loan losses. An improving economy could result in the expansion of businesses and creation of jobs which would positively affect our loan growth and improve our gross revenue stream. Conversely, certain factors could result from an expanding economy which could increase our credit costs and adversely impact our net earnings. A significant rapid rise in interest rates could create higher borrowing costs and shrinking corporate profits which could have a material impact on a borrower's ability to pay. We will continue to concentrate on maintaining a high quality loan portfolio through strict administration of our loan policy.

Another factor that we have considered in the determination of the allowance for loan losses is loan concentrations to individual borrowers or industries. At December 31, 2011, we had three non-covered loans that exceed our in-house credit limit of \$5.0 million. Total exposure to these three credits is \$16.4 million. Additional disclosure concerning the Company's largest loan relationships is provided below.

A substantial portion of our loan portfolio is in the commercial real estate and residential real estate sectors. Those loans are secured by real estate in our primary market areas. A substantial portion of OREO is located in those same markets. Therefore, the ultimate collectability of a substantial portion of our loan portfolio and the recoverability of a substantial portion of the carrying amount of OREO are susceptible to changes to market conditions in our primary market area.

Fair Value Accounting Estimates

Generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) require the use of fair values in determining the carrying values of certain assets and liabilities, as well as for specific disclosures. The most significant include impaired loans, OREO, and the net assets acquired in business combinations. Certain of these assets do not have a readily available market to determine fair value and require an estimate based on specific parameters. When market prices are unavailable, we determine fair values utilizing estimates, which are constantly changing, including interest rates, duration, prepayment speeds and other specific conditions. In most cases, these specific parameters require a significant amount of judgment by management. At December 31, 2011, the percentage of the Company's assets measured at fair value was 38%. See Note 19, Fair Value of Financial Instruments, in the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements herein for additional disclosures regarding the fair value of our assets and liabilities.

When a loan is considered impaired, a specific valuation allowance is allocated, if necessary, so that the loan is reported net, at the present value of estimated future cash flows using the loan's existing rate or at the fair value of collateral if repayment is expected solely from the collateral. In addition, foreclosed assets are carried at the net realizable value, following foreclosure. The Company's impaired loans and foreclosed property are concentrated in markets and areas where the determination of fair value through market research (recent sales and/or qualified appraisals) is difficult. Accordingly, the determination of fair value in the current environment is difficult and more subjective than it would be in traditionally stable real estate environments. Although management believes its processes for determining the value of these assets are appropriate and allow Ameris to arrive at a fair value, the processes require management judgment and assumptions and the value of such assets at the time they are revalued or divested may be different from management's determination of fair value.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Business Combinations

Assets purchased and liabilities assumed in a business combination are recorded at their fair value. The fair value of a loan portfolio acquired in a business combination requires greater levels of management estimates and judgment than the remainder of purchased assets or assumed liabilities. On the date of acquisition, when the loans have evidence of credit deterioration since origination and it is probable at the date of acquisition that the Company will not collect all contractually required principal and interest payments, the difference between contractually required payments at acquisition and the cash flows expected to be collected at acquisition is referred to as the non-accretable difference. The Company must estimate expected cash flows at each reporting date. Subsequent decreases to the expected cash flows will generally result in a provision for loan losses. Subsequent increases in cash flows result in a reversal of the provision for loan losses to the extent of prior charges and adjusted accretable yield which will have a positive impact on interest income. In addition, purchased loans without evidence of credit deterioration are also handled under this method.

Income Taxes

GAAP requires the asset and liability approach for financial accounting and reporting for deferred income taxes. We use the asset and liability method of accounting for deferred income taxes and provide deferred income taxes for all significant income tax temporary differences. See Note 13, Income Taxes, in the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements for additional details.

As part of the process of preparing our consolidated financial statements we are required to estimate our income taxes in each of the jurisdictions in which we operate. This process involves estimating our actual current tax exposure together with assessing temporary differences resulting from differing treatment of items, such as gains on FDIC-assisted transactions and the provision for loan losses, for tax and financial reporting purposes. These differences result in deferred tax assets and liabilities that are included in our consolidated balance sheet.

We must also assess the likelihood that our deferred tax assets will be recovered from future taxable income, and to the extent we believe that recovery is not likely, we must establish a valuation allowance. Significant management judgment is required in determining our provision for income taxes, our deferred tax assets and liabilities and any valuation allowance recorded against our net deferred tax assets. To the extent we establish a valuation allowance or adjust this allowance in a period, we must include an expense within the tax provisions in the statement of income.

We have recorded on our consolidated balance sheet net deferred tax liabilities of \$9.8 million as of December 31, 2011. Deferred gains on FDIC-assisted transactions represent the Company's largest deferred tax liability, totaling \$16.9 million. Allowances for loan losses associated with loans where no loss has yet been recorded for tax purposes represent the Company's largest deferred tax asset, totaling \$12.3 million.

Long-Lived Assets, Including Intangibles

During 2009, the Company engaged an independent third party to evaluate the carrying value of goodwill, and it was determined that the balance of goodwill was impaired. As such, the Company recorded an impairment charge of \$54.8 million, representing the entire balance of goodwill during the fourth quarter of 2009. No goodwill was expensed or amortized during 2011 or 2010 in accordance with GAAP. During 2010, the Bank recorded new goodwill totaling \$956,000 related to the acquisition of TBC.

The Company's balance of intangible assets at December 31, 2011 totaled \$3.3 million and is being amortized over its previously determined useful life. During 2010, the Bank recorded new core deposit intangibles totaling \$1.7 million related to the acquisitions of SCB, FBJ, TBC and DBT.

NET INCOME/(LOSS) AND EARNINGS PER SHARE

The Company's net income available to common shareholders during 2011 was \$17.9 million, or \$0.76 per diluted share. This is compared to a net loss available to common shareholders during 2010 of \$7.2 million, or \$0.35 per diluted share, and a net loss available to common shareholders during 2009 of \$45.0 million, or \$3.27 per diluted share. During the fourth quarter of 2009, the Company recorded a non-cash charge for goodwill impairment totaling \$54.8 million. Excluding this non-cash charge for goodwill impairment that did not affect the Company's tangible equity or liquidity, the Company reported net income available to common shareholders of \$9.9 million, or \$0.72 per diluted share, for the year ended December 31, 2009.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

For the fourth quarter of 2011, the Company recorded net income available to common shareholders of \$322,000, or \$0.01 per diluted share, compared to net income available to common shareholders of \$1.1 million, or \$0.04 per diluted share, for the quarter ended December 31, 2010 and to a net loss available to common shareholders of \$39.2 million, or \$2.82 per diluted share, for the quarter ended December 31, 2009. Excluding the \$54.8 million goodwill impairment recorded in the fourth quarter of 2009, net income available to common shareholders for the fourth quarter of 2009 totaled \$15.7 million, or \$1.14 per diluted share.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****EARNING ASSETS AND LIABILITIES**

Average earning assets in 2011 increased 13.5% to \$2.50 billion as compared to 2010. The earning asset and interest-bearing liability mix is constantly monitored to maximize the net interest margin and, therefore, increase return on assets and shareholders' equity.

The following statistical information should be read in conjunction with the remainder of Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operation and the Consolidated Financial Statements and related notes included elsewhere in this Annual Report and in the documents incorporated herein by reference.

The following tables set forth the amount of our interest income or interest expense for each category of interest-earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities and the average interest rate for total interest-earning assets and total interest-bearing liabilities, net interest spread and net interest margin on average interest-earning assets. Federally tax-exempt income is presented on a taxable-equivalent basis assuming a 35% federal tax rate.

	2011			Year Ended December 31, 2010			2009		
	Average Balance	Interest Income/ Expense	Average Yield/ Rate Paid	Average Balance	Interest Income/ Expense	Average Yield/ Rate Paid	Average Balance	Interest Income/ Expense	Average Yield/ Rate Paid
ASSETS									
Interest-earning assets:									
Loans	\$ 1,919,276	\$ 129,044	6.72%	\$ 1,686,162	\$ 108,315	6.42%	\$ 1,684,910	\$ 101,559	6.03%
Investment securities	338,736	12,277	3.62	259,652	11,691	4.50	289,320	13,505	4.67
Short-term assets	243,615	655	0.27	258,366	551	0.21	151,318	334	0.22
Total interest earning assets	2,501,627	141,976	5.68	2,204,180	120,557	5.47	2,125,548	115,398	5.43
Non-interest earning assets	464,172			288,116			145,791		
Total assets	\$ 2,965,799			\$ 2,492,296			\$ 2,271,339		
LIABILITIES AND STOCKHOLDERS' EQUITY									
Interest-bearing liabilities:									
Savings and interest-bearing									
demand deposits	\$ 1,233,346	\$ 9,310	0.75%	\$ 1,005,240	\$ 10,601	1.05%	\$ 865,001	\$ 11,107	1.28%
Time deposits	1,013,817	16,194	1.60	905,418	18,046	1.99	900,744	27,399	3.04
Other borrowings	22,275	167	0.75	28,368	186	0.66	30,799	272	0.88
FHLB advances	18,008	460	2.55	7,738	82	1.06	7,974	104	1.30
Trust preferred securities	42,269	1,410	3.34	42,269	879	2.08	42,269	1,668	3.95
Total interest-bearing liabilities	2,329,715	27,541	1.18	1,989,033	29,794	1.50	1,846,787	40,550	2.20
Demand deposits	344,021			242,533			213,786		
Other liabilities	9,540			17,881			9,472		
Stockholders' equity	282,523			242,849			201,294		
Total liabilities and stockholders' equity	\$ 2,965,799			\$ 2,492,296			\$ 2,271,339		

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Interest rate spread	4.50%	3.97%	3.23%
Net interest income	\$ 114,435	\$ 90,763	\$ 74,848
Net interest margin	4.57%	4.11%	3.52%

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

RESULTS OF OPERATIONS

Net Interest Income

Net interest income represents the amount by which interest income on interest-earning assets exceeds interest expense incurred on interest-bearing liabilities. Net interest income is the largest component of our income and is affected by the interest rate environment and the volume and composition of interest-earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities. Our interest-earning assets include loans, investment securities, interest-bearing deposits in banks and federal funds sold. Our interest-bearing liabilities include deposits, other short-term borrowings, FHLB advances and subordinated debentures.

2011 compared to 2010. For the year ended December 31, 2011, interest income was \$141.1 million, an increase of \$22.0 million, or 18.5%, compared to the same period in 2010. Average earning assets increased \$297.4 million, or 13.49%, to \$2.50 billion for the year ended December 31, 2011 compared to \$2.20 billion as of December 31, 2010. Yield on average earning assets on a taxable equivalent basis increased during 2011 to 5.68% compared to 5.47% for the year ended December 31, 2010. Higher yields on covered loans offset the lower yield on investment securities.

Interest expense on deposits and other borrowings for the year ended December 31, 2011 was \$27.5 million, compared to \$29.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2010. The Company's funding mix improved during 2011, leading to significant savings in cost of funds. During 2011, average non-interest bearing accounts amounted to \$344.0 million and comprised 13.3% of average total deposits compared to \$242.5 million, or 11.3% of average total deposits during 2010. Average balances of time deposits amounted to \$1.01 billion and comprised 39.1% of average total deposits compared to \$905.4 million, or 42.1%, of average total deposits during 2010. This shift of balances from higher cost time deposits into non-interest bearing accounts helped reduce the cost of average interest-bearing liabilities from 1.50% in 2010 to 1.18% in 2011.

On a taxable-equivalent basis, net interest income for 2011 was \$114.4 million compared to \$90.8 million in 2010, an increase of \$23.7 million, or 26.1%. The Company's net interest margin, on a tax equivalent basis, increased to 4.57% for the year ended December 31, 2011 compared to 4.11% for the year ended December 31, 2010.

2010 compared to 2009. For the year ended December 31, 2010, interest income was \$119.1 million, an increase of \$4.5 million, or 3.9%, compared to the same period in 2009. Average earning assets increased \$78.6 million, or 3.70%, to \$2.20 billion for the year ended December 31, 2010 compared to \$2.13 billion as of December 31, 2009. Yield on average earning assets on a taxable equivalent basis increased slightly during 2010 to 5.47% compared to 5.43% for the year ended December 31, 2009. Higher yields on covered loans offset the lower yield on investment securities.

Interest expense on deposits and other borrowings for the year ended December 31, 2010 was \$29.8 million, compared to \$40.6 million for the year ended December 31, 2009. During 2010, average funding increased \$171.0 million, or 8.3%. Average balances of time deposits increased \$4.7 million, or 0.5%, from 2009 to 2010. The average balance of non-interest bearing deposit accounts increased by \$28.7 million, or 13.4%, from 2009 to 2010. This shift of balances from higher cost time deposits into non-interest bearing accounts helped reduce the cost of average deposits from 1.95% in 2009 to 1.57% in 2010. Average non-deposit borrowings decreased 3.3% during 2010, from \$81.0 million at December 31, 2009 to \$78.4 million at December 31, 2010.

On a taxable-equivalent basis, net interest income for 2010 was \$90.6 million compared to \$74.8 million in 2009, an increase of \$15.7 million, or 21.0%. The Company's net interest margin, on a tax equivalent basis, increased to 4.11% for the year ended December 31, 2010 compared to 3.52% for the year ended December 31, 2009.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

	2011 vs. 2010			2010 vs. 2009		
	Increase (Decrease)	Changes Due To Rate	Changes Due To Volume	Increase (Decrease)	Changes Due To Rate	Changes Due to Volume
Increase (decrease) in:						
Income from earning assets:						
Interest and fees on loans	\$ 20,729	\$ 5,754	\$ 14,975	\$ 6,756	\$ 6,680	\$ 76
Interest on securities:	586	(2,975)	3,561	(1,814)	(429)	(1,385)
Short-term assets	104	135	(31)	217	(19)	236
Total interest income	21,419	2,914	18,505	5,159	6,232	(1,073)
Expense from interest-bearing liabilities:						
Interest on savings and interest-bearing demand deposits	(1,291)	(3,697)	2,406	(506)	(2,307)	1,801
Interest on time deposits	(1,852)	(4,013)	2,161	(9,353)	(9,495)	142
Interest on other borrowings	(19)	21	(40)	(86)	(65)	(21)
Interest on FHLB advances	378	269	109	(22)	(19)	(3)
Interest on trust preferred securities	531	531		(789)	(789)	
Total interest expense	(2,253)	(6,889)	4,636	(10,756)	(12,675)	1,919
Net interest income	\$ 23,672	\$ 9,803	\$ 13,869	\$ 15,915	\$ 18,907	\$ (2,992)

Provision for Loan Losses

The allowance for loan losses is a reserve established through charges to earnings in the form of a provision for loan losses. The provision for loan losses is based on management's evaluation of the size and composition of the loan portfolio, the level of non-performing and past due loans, historical trends of charged-off loans and recoveries, prevailing economic conditions and other factors management deems appropriate. As these factors change, the level of loan loss provision may change.

The Company's provision for loan losses during 2011 amounted to \$32.7 million, compared to \$50.5 million for 2010 and \$42.1 million in 2009. Net charge-offs in 2011 were 2.23% of average loans, excluding the loans covered in the FDIC-loss sharing agreements, compared to 3.33% in 2010 and 2.26% in 2009.

At December 31, 2011, non-performing assets, excluding assets covered in the FDIC-loss sharing agreements, amounted to \$121.1 million, or 4.05% of total assets, compared to 4.62% at December 31, 2010. Other real estate was approximately \$50.3 million as of December 31, 2011, reflecting a 13.1% decrease from the \$57.9 million reported at December 31, 2010. The Company's allowance for loan losses at December 31, 2011 was \$35.2 million, or 2.64% of non-covered loans, compared to \$34.6 million, or 2.52%, and \$35.8 million, or 2.26%, at December 31, 2010 and 2009, respectively.

Non-Interest Income

Following is a comparison of non-interest income for 2011, 2010 and 2009.

	Years Ended December 31,		
	2011	2010	2009
	(Dollars in Thousands)		
Service charges on deposit accounts	\$ 18,081	\$ 15,143	\$ 13,593
Mortgage banking activities	2,971	2,748	3,050
Other service charges, commissions and fees	1,247	805	531
Gain on sale of securities	238	200	871
Gain on acquisitions	26,867	14,651	38,566
Other income	3,403	1,701	1,742

\$ 52,807	\$ 35,248	\$ 58,353
-----------	-----------	-----------

2011 compared to 2010. Total non-interest income in 2011 was \$52.8 million compared to \$35.2 million in 2010, an increase of \$17.6 million. The majority of the increase in non-interest income is the \$12.2 million increase in gains realized on the FDIC-assisted transactions. In determining the gain from these transactions, the Company evaluated the fair value of the assets acquired and the liabilities assumed. Because the Company's bid to acquire the assets included discounts totaling \$56.0 million and because the anticipated losses were covered by loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC, Ameris determined that the fair value of the assets acquired exceeded the liabilities assumed.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

Service charges on deposit accounts represent the largest component of recurring non-interest income. In 2011, excluding gains on securities and on acquisitions, service charges were 70% of total non-interest income, compared to 74% in 2010. The increase in service charges was due to the increased number of deposit accounts as a result of the FDIC-assisted transactions. Mortgage banking activities increased as the Company hired new mortgage producers to expand its mortgage banking business.

2010 compared to 2009. Total non-interest income in 2010 was \$35.2 million compared to \$58.4 million in 2009, a decrease of \$23.2 million. The majority of the decrease in non-interest income related to gains realized on the FDIC-assisted transactions. In determining the gain from these transactions, the Company evaluated the fair value of the assets acquired and the liabilities assumed. Because the Company's bid to acquire the assets included discounts totaling \$68.2 million and because the anticipated losses were covered by loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC, Ameris determined that the fair value of the assets acquired exceeded the liabilities assumed.

Income from mortgage banking activities declined during 2010. Although mortgage rates are at historically low levels, real estate activity and stricter underwriting guidelines from the guaranteeing agencies have limited the production to levels much lower than would have been anticipated.

Service charges on deposit accounts represent the largest component of recurring non-interest income. In 2010, excluding gains on securities and on acquisitions, service charges were 74% of total non-interest income, compared to 72% in 2009. The increase in service charges was due to the increased number of deposit accounts as a result of the FDIC-assisted transactions.

Non-Interest Expense

Following is a comparison of non-interest expense for 2011, 2010 and 2009.

	Years Ended December 31,		
	2011	2010	2009
	(Dollars in Thousands)		
Salaries and employee benefits	\$ 40,210	\$ 31,918	\$ 31,939
Equipment and occupancy	11,390	8,212	8,914
Amortization of intangible assets	1,011	999	617
Data processing and communication costs	10,315	7,644	6,878
Advertising and public relations	722	566	1,661
Postage & delivery	1,528	1,248	1,245
Printing & supplies	1,312	924	1,020
Legal fees	311	647	445
Other professional fees	1,493	1,116	803
Directors fees	19	150	709
FDIC assessments	4,537	5,133	3,452
OREO and problem loan expenses	22,448	16,412	7,643
Goodwill impairment charge			54,813
Other expense	6,657	6,219	4,661
	\$ 101,953	\$ 81,188	\$ 124,800

2011 compared to 2010. Operating expenses increased in 2011 from \$81.2 million in 2010 to \$102.0 million in 2011. Salaries and employee benefits increased 26.0% from \$31.9 million in 2010 to \$40.2 million in 2011. Equipment and occupancy expense increased 38.7% from \$8.2 million in 2010 to \$11.4 million in 2011. Both of these increases are due to the growth in personnel and branch locations as a result of recent FDIC-assisted transactions. During the fourth quarter of 2010, the Company completed three acquisitions with assets totaling \$658.1 million. Because these occurred late in 2010, the additional expense associated with these acquisitions, as well as the two acquisitions completed in July 2011, skew the growth in operating expenses. Expressed as a percentage of average assets, total operating expense net of credit related and non-recurring merger costs in 2011 was 2.62%, only a slight increase from 2.55% reported in 2010.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Data processing and telecommunications expense increased during 2011 to \$10.3 million, an increase of 34.9% when compared to the \$7.6 million reported in 2010. During 2011, the Company had approximately \$1.6 million of non-recurring charges associated with the conversion of core operating systems of acquired banks. Excluding these amounts, data processing expense would have increased a more reasonable \$1.1 million, or 13.9%, during 2011.

Problem loan and OREO expenses increased \$6.0 million in 2011, as the level of OREO and problem loans remained elevated throughout the year. Excluding credit related expenses, total operating expenses were \$79.5 million for the year ended December 31, 2011, compared to \$64.8 million for 2010.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

2010 compared to 2009. Operating expenses in 2010 increased from \$70.0 million in 2009, excluding the \$54.8 million of goodwill impairment recorded in 2009, to \$81.2 million in 2010. Problem loan and OREO expenses increased \$8.8 million in 2010, as the level of OREO and problem loans remained elevated throughout 2010. This \$8.8 million increase included a \$3.7 million increase in losses on the sale of OREO and a \$5.1 million increase in carrying costs on problem loans and OREO. Reductions in marketing and advertising expense totaled \$1.1 million, or 65.9%, as the Company reduced print and radio advertisements and focused more heavily on lower cost advertising in its local markets.

Although the Company's assets increased 22.6% during 2010, salaries and employee benefits remained stable at \$31.9 million for both 2009 and 2010. Expenses associated with occupancy and equipment decreased by 7.9% in 2010 to \$8.2 million due to lower maintenance and depreciation expense. At the end of 2010, the Company has no branch projects planned or under development and notes that all costs associated with its recent de novo activity in South Carolina have been incurred.

Data processing and communication costs increased to \$7.6 million in 2010, an increase of 11.1% compared to \$6.9 million in 2009. This increase is attributable to the FDIC-assisted transactions, as well as growth in customer accounts. The Company anticipates data processing costs to stabilize as the banks acquired through FDIC-assisted transactions are converted to the Ameris core operating system.

Income Taxes

Federal income tax expense is influenced by the amount of taxable income, the amount of tax-exempt income and the amount of non-deductible expenses. For the year ended December 31, 2011, the Company recorded income tax expense of \$10.6 million. This compares to an income tax benefit of \$3.2 million for the year ended December 31, 2010 and income tax expense of \$7.3 million for the year ended December 31, 2009. The Company's effective tax rate was 33%, 44% and 21% for the years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009, respectively. The Company has excluded the goodwill impairment charge of \$54.8 million for purposes of calculating the 2009 effective tax rate. The Company's higher effective tax rate for 2010 was due to the impact of tax-exempt income compared to total taxable income for the year.

BALANCE SHEET COMPARISON**LOANS**

Management believes that our loan portfolio is adequately diversified. The loan portfolio contains no foreign loans or significant concentrations in any one industry. As of December 31, 2011, approximately 85.1% of our loan portfolio was secured by real estate. The amount of loans outstanding at the indicated dates is shown in the following table according to type of loans.

	2011	2010	December 31, 2009	2008	2007
	(Dollars in Thousands)				
Commercial, financial & agricultural	\$ 142,960	\$ 142,312	\$ 169,280	\$ 184,187	\$ 194,629
Real estate construction & development	130,270	162,594	234,403	342,161	382,171
Real estate commercial & farmland	672,765	683,974	749,029	718,821	624,582
Real estate residential	330,727	344,830	380,080	395,372	352,695
Consumer installment loans	37,296	34,293	40,984	47,160	52,736
Other	18,068	6,754	10,583	8,076	7,235
	1,332,086	1,374,757	1,584,359	1,695,777	1,614,048
Less allowance for possible loan losses	35,156	34,576	35,762	39,652	27,640
Loans, net	\$ 1,296,930	\$ 1,340,181	\$ 1,548,597	\$ 1,656,125	\$ 1,586,408

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

The following table provides additional disclosure on the various loan types comprising the subgroup Real estate commercial & farmland at December 31, 2011 (in thousands):

	Outstanding Balance	Average Maturity (Months)	Average Rate	% non-accrual
Owner-Occupied	\$ 267,335	41	6.35%	1.86%
Farmland	108,581	27	6.49%	1.39%
Apartments	48,493	43	5.90%	
Hotels / Motels	40,133	42	7.59%	30.70%
Auto Dealers	7,510	36	5.40%	35.48%
Offices / Office Buildings	50,874	40	6.46%	9.14%
Strip Centers (Anchored & Non-Anchored)	26,114	48	5.44%	8.30%
Convenience Stores	4,941	26	6.57%	2.25%
Retail Properties	45,879	37	6.12%	1.79%
Warehouse Properties	28,708	46	6.97%	14.23%
All Other	44,197	27	6.65%	4.71%
	\$ 672,765	35	6.44%	5.26%

Assets Covered by Loss-Sharing Agreements with the FDIC - Loans that were acquired in FDIC-assisted transactions that are covered by the loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC (covered loans) totaling \$571.5 million and \$555.0 million at December 31, 2011 and 2010, respectively, are not included in the preceding table. OREO that is covered by the loss-sharing agreements with the FDIC totaled \$78.6 million and \$54.9 million at December 31, 2011 and 2010, respectively. The loss-sharing agreements are subject to the servicing procedures as specified in the agreements with the FDIC. The expected reimbursements under the loss-sharing agreements were recorded as an indemnification asset at their estimated fair value of \$95.0 million, \$168.9 million and \$45.8 million on the 2011, 2010 and 2009 acquisition dates, respectively. The FDIC loss-share receivable reported at December 31, 2011 and 2010 was \$242.4 million and \$177.2 million, respectively.

The Company recorded the loans at their fair values, taking into consideration certain credit quality, risk and liquidity marks. The Company is confident in its estimation of credit risk and its adjustments to the carrying balances of the acquired loans. If the Company determines that a loan or group of loans has deteriorated from its initial assessment of fair value, a reserve for loan losses will be established to account for that difference. For the years ended December 31, 2011 and 2010, the Company recorded approximately \$2.4 million and \$1.7 million, respectively, of provision for loan losses to account for decreases in estimated cash flows on loans acquired in FDIC-assisted transactions. If the Company determines that a loan or group of loans has improved from its initial assessment of fair value, the increase in cash flows over those expected at the acquisition date are recognized as interest income prospectively. Covered loans are shown below according to loan type as of the end of the years shown (in thousands):

	2011	2010
Commercial, financial & agricultural	\$ 41,867	\$ 47,309
Real estate construction & development	77,077	89,781
Real estate commercial & farmland	321,257	257,428
Real estate residential	127,644	149,226
Consumer installment loans	3,644	11,247
Total Covered Loans	\$ 571,489	\$ 554,991

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

The Company seeks to diversify its loan portfolio across its geographic footprint and in various loan types. Also, the Company's stated in-house legal lending limit for a single loan is \$5 million which would normally prevent a concentration with a single loan project. Certain lending relationships may contain more than one loan and consequently, exceed the in-house lending limit. The Company regularly monitors its largest loan relationships to avoid a concentration with a single borrower. The largest 25 loan relationships are summarized below by type and compared to the Bank's loan portfolio taken as a whole (in thousands):

	Balance	Average Rate	Average Maturity (months)	% unsecured	% in non-accrual status
Commercial, financial & agricultural	\$ 6,091	5.58%	20	32.4%	
Real estate construction & development	9,235	5.41%	12		4.42%
Real estate commercial & farmland	105,820	5.27%	32		2.93%
Real estate residential	2,990	5.94%	15		
Consumer installment loans	4,785	4.52%	119	2.8%	
Total	\$ 128,921	5.48%	28	1.6%	2.72%
Ameris Bank Loan Portfolio	\$ 1,332,086	6.21%	40	1.1%	5.32%

Total loans as of December 31, 2011 are shown in the following table according to their contractual maturity.

	Contractual Maturity in:			Total
	One Year or Less	Over One Year through Five Years	Over Five Years	
	(Dollars in Thousands)			
Commercial, financial & agricultural	\$ 66,405	\$ 59,450	\$ 17,105	\$ 142,960
Real estate construction & development	69,091	53,614	7,565	130,270
Real estate commercial & farmland	170,077	373,144	129,544	672,765
Real estate residential	107,116	129,699	93,912	330,727
Consumer installment loans	10,873	24,515	1,908	37,296
Other	18,068			18,068
	\$ 441,630	\$ 640,422	\$ 250,034	\$ 1,332,086

The following table summarizes loans at December 31, 2011 with maturity dates after one year which (1) have predetermined interest rates and (2) have floating or adjustable interest rates.

	(Dollars in Thousands)
Predetermined interest rates	\$ 614,529
Floating or adjustable interest rates	275,927
	\$ 890,456

Covered loans as of December 31, 2011, are shown below according to their contractual maturity:

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

	One Year or Less	Contractual Maturity in:		Total
		Over One Year through Five Years (Dollars in Thousands)	Over Five Years	
Covered loans	\$ 190,535	\$ 167,844	\$ 213,110	\$ 571,489

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****ALLOWANCE AND PROVISION FOR LOAN LOSSES**

The allowance for loan losses represents a reserve for inherent losses in the loan portfolio. The adequacy of the allowance for loan losses is evaluated periodically based on a review of all significant loans, with a particular emphasis on non-accruing, past due and other loans that management believes might be potentially impaired or warrant additional attention. We segregate our loan portfolio by type of loan and utilize this segregation in evaluating exposure to risks within the portfolio. In addition, based on internal reviews and external reviews performed by independent loan reviewers and regulatory authorities, we further segregate our loan portfolio by loan grades based on an assessment of risk for a particular loan or group of loans. Certain reviewed loans are assigned specific allowances when a review of relevant data determines that a general allocation is not sufficient or when the review affords management the opportunity to fine tune the amount of exposure in a given credit. In establishing allowances, management considers historical loan loss experience but adjusts this data with a significant emphasis on data such as current loan quality trends, current economic conditions and other factors in the markets where the Bank operates. Factors considered include among others, current valuations of real estate in our markets, unemployment rates, the effect of weather conditions on agricultural related entities and other significant local economic events, such as major plant closings.

We have developed a methodology for determining the adequacy of the allowance for loan losses which is monitored by the Company's Senior Credit Officer. Procedures provide for the assignment of a risk rating for every loan included in our total loan portfolio, with the exception of credit card receivables and overdraft protection loans which are treated as pools for risk rating purposes. The risk rating schedule provides nine ratings of which five ratings are classified as pass ratings and four ratings are classified as criticized ratings. Each risk rating is assigned a percent factor to be applied to the loan balance to determine the adequate amount of allowance. Many of the larger loans require an annual review by an independent loan officer and are often reviewed by independent third parties. As a result of these loan reviews, certain loans may be assigned specific allowance allocations. Other loans that surface as problem loans may also be assigned specific allowance allocations. Past due loans are assigned risk ratings based on the number of days past due. The calculation of the allowance for loan losses, including underlying data and assumptions, is reviewed regularly by the Company's Chief Financial Officer as well as the Director of Internal Audit.

The following table sets forth the breakdown of the allowance for loan losses by loan category for the periods indicated. Management believes the allowance can be allocated only on an approximate basis. The allocation of the allowance to each category is not necessarily indicative of future losses and does not restrict the use of the allowance to absorb losses in any other category.

	2011		2010		At December 31, 2009		2008		2007	
	Amount	% of Loans to Total Loans	Amount	% of Loans to Total Loans	Amount	% of Loans to Total Loans	Amount	% of Loans to Total Loans	Amount	% of Loans to Total Loans
Commercial, financial, and agricultural	\$ 2,918	11%	\$ 2,779	10%	\$ 3,375	11%	\$ 4,675	11%	\$ 3,830	13%
R/E Commercial & Farmland	14,226	50	14,971	50	25,304	67	20,770	63	17,199	62
R/E Construction & Development	9,438	10	7,705	12	3,552	6	4,907	10	3,487	11
Total Commercial	26,582	71	25,455	72	32,231	84	30,352	84	24,516	86
R/E Residential	8,128	25	8,664	25	2,636	12	3,285	11	2,078	10
Consumer Installment	446	4	457	3	895	4	1,015	5	1,046	4
Unallocated							5,000			
	\$ 35,156	100%	\$ 34,576	100%	\$ 35,762	100%	\$ 39,652	100%	\$ 27,640	100%

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

The following table presents an analysis of our loan loss experience, excluding covered loans, for the periods indicated:

	2011	2010	December 31, 2009	2008	2007
	(Dollars in Thousands)				
Average amount of non-covered loans outstanding	\$ 1,348,557	\$ 1,448,662	\$ 1,662,061	\$ 1,667,483	\$ 1,536,243
Balance of allowance for possible loan losses at beginning of period	\$ 34,576	\$ 35,762	\$ 39,652	\$ 27,640	\$ 24,863
Charge-offs:					
Commercial real estate, financial and agricultural	(25,475)	(41,442)	(35,231)	(18,711)	(8,735)
Residential real estate	(5,399)	(10,091)	(10,859)	(4,514)	(623)
Consumer Installment	(749)	(1,090)	(1,041)	(1,115)	(1,057)
Recoveries:					
Commercial real estate, financial and agricultural	1,593	2,097	742	733	1,339
Residential real estate	146	186	278	199	120
Consumer Installment	123	315	153	390	412
Net charge-offs	(29,761)	(50,025)	(45,958)	(23,018)	(8,544)
Additions to allowance charged to operating expenses	30,341	48,839	42,068	35,030	11,321
Balance of allowance for possible loan losses at end of period	\$ 35,156	\$ 34,576	\$ 35,762	\$ 39,652	\$ 27,640
Ratio of net loan charge-offs to average non-covered loans	2.23%	3.33%	2.73%	1.38%	0.56%

NONPERFORMING LOANS

A loan is placed on non-accrual status when, in management's judgment, the collection of the interest income appears doubtful. Interest receivable that has been accrued in prior years and is subsequently determined to have doubtful collectability is charged to the allowance for possible loan losses. Interest on loans that are classified as non-accrual is recognized when received. Past due loans are placed on non-accrual status when principal or interest is past due 90 days or more. In some cases, where borrowers are experiencing financial difficulties, loans may be restructured to provide terms significantly different from the original contractual terms. The following table presents an analysis of non-covered loans accounted for on a non-accrual basis.

	2011	2010	December 31, 2009	2008	2007
	(Dollars in Thousands)				
Commercial, financial & agricultural	\$ 3,987	\$ 8,648	\$ 4,774	\$ 4,810	\$ 1,736
Real estate construction & development	15,020	7,887	15,787	10,522	3,754
Real estate commercial & farmland	35,385	55,170	67,172	44,235	11,037
Real estate residential	15,498	6,376	6,965	4,730	1,076
Consumer installment loans	933	1,208	1,433	1,117	865
Total	\$ 70,823	\$ 79,289	\$ 96,131	\$ 65,414	\$ 18,468

Installment loans and term loans contractually past due ninety days or more as
to interest or principal payments and still accruing

2

4

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

During 2008 and continuing through 2009, loans tied to the housing industry (Acquisition, Development and Construction loans) came under severe strain as housing prices fell sharply and sales activity slowed. Certain markets, where housing prices had risen sharply in recent years, suffered greater corrections than others. The Company's exposure to certain housing related loans primarily in northern Florida and coastal Georgia and South Carolina resulted in deteriorating credit quality and caused most of the increase in non-accrual loans shown above. As the deterioration in the real estate market slowed and indications of recovery in these markets emerged during the second half of 2010, our levels of non-accrual loans have seen improvement.

LIQUIDITY AND INTEREST RATE SENSITIVITY

Liquidity management involves the matching of the cash flow requirements of customers, who may be either depositors desiring to withdraw funds or borrowers needing assurance that sufficient funds will be available to meet their credit needs, and the ability of our Company to meet those needs. We seek to meet liquidity requirements primarily through management of short-term investments (principally interest-bearing deposits in banks) and monthly amortizing loans. Another source of liquidity is the repayment of maturing single payment loans. In addition, our Company maintains relationships with correspondent banks including the FHLB and FRB, which could provide funds on short notice, if needed.

A principal objective of our asset/liability management strategy is to minimize our exposure to changes in interest rates by matching the maturity and repricing horizons of interest-earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities. This strategy is overseen in part through the direction of our Asset and Liability Committee (the ALCO Committee) which establishes policies and monitors results to control interest rate sensitivity.

As part of our interest rate risk management policy, the ALCO Committee examines the extent to which its assets and liabilities are interest rate sensitive and monitors its interest rate-sensitivity gap. An asset or liability is considered to be interest rate sensitive if it will reprice or mature within the time period analyzed, usually one year or less. The interest rate-sensitivity gap is the difference between the interest-earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities scheduled to mature or reprice within such time period. A gap is considered positive when the amount of interest rate-sensitive assets exceeds the amount of interest rate-sensitive liabilities. A gap is considered negative when the amount of interest rate-sensitive liabilities exceeds the interest rate-sensitive assets. During a period of rising interest rates, a negative gap would tend to adversely affect net interest income, while a positive gap would tend to result in an increase in net interest income. During a period of falling interest rates, a negative gap would tend to result in an increase in net interest income, while a positive gap would tend to adversely affect net interest income. If our assets and liabilities were equally flexible and moved concurrently, the impact of any increase or decrease in interest rates on net interest income would be minimal.

A simple interest rate gap analysis by itself may not be an accurate indicator of how net interest income will be affected by changes in interest rates. Accordingly, the ALCO Committee also evaluates how the repayment of particular assets and liabilities is impacted by changes in interest rates. Income associated with interest-earning assets and costs associated with interest-bearing liabilities may not be affected uniformly by changes in interest rates. In addition, the magnitude and duration of changes in interest rates may have a significant impact on net interest income. For example, although certain assets and liabilities may have similar maturities or periods of repricing, they may not react identically to changes in market interest rates. Interest rates on certain types of assets and liabilities fluctuate in advance of changes in general market interest rates, while interest rates on other types may lag behind changes in general market rates. In addition, certain assets, such as adjustable rate mortgage loans, have features (generally referred to as interest rate caps) which limit changes in interest rates on a short-term basis and over the life of the asset. In the event of a change in interest rates, prepayment and early withdrawal levels also could deviate significantly from those assumed in calculating the interest rate gap. The ability of many borrowers to service their debts also may decrease in the event of an interest rate increase.

We manage the mix of asset and liability maturities in an effort to control the effects of changes in the general level of interest rates on net interest income. Except for its effect on the general level of interest rates, inflation does not have a material impact on the balance sheet due to the rate variability and short-term maturities of its earning assets. In particular, approximately 55.2% of earning assets mature or reprice within one year or less. Mortgage loans, generally our loan with the longest maturity, are usually made with five to fifteen year maturities, but with either a variable interest rate or a fixed rate with an adjustment between origination date and maturity date.

The following table sets forth the distribution of the repricing of our interest-earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities as of December 31, 2011, the interest rate sensitivity gap (i.e., interest rate sensitive assets minus interest rate sensitive liabilities), the cumulative interest rate sensitivity gap, the interest rate sensitivity gap ratio (i.e., interest rate sensitive assets divided by interest rate sensitive liabilities) and the cumulative interest rate sensitivity gap ratio. The table also sets forth the time periods in which earning assets and liabilities will mature or may reprice in accordance with their contractual terms. However, the table does not necessarily indicate the impact of general interest rate movements on the net interest margin since the repricing of various categories of assets and liabilities is subject to competitive pressures and the needs of our customers. In addition, various assets and liabilities indicated as repricing within the same period may in fact reprice at different

times within such period and at different rates.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

	At December 31, 2011 Maturing or Repricing Within				Total
	Zero to Three Months	Three Months to One Year	One to Five Years	Over Five Years	
(Dollars in Thousands)					
Interest-earning assets:					
Short-term assets	\$ 229,042	\$	\$	\$	\$ 229,042
Investment securities		15,370	20,401	304,196	339,967
Loans	560,315	162,946	502,940	117,448	1,343,649
Covered loans	294,027	110,060	130,318	37,084	571,489
	1,083,384	288,376	653,659	458,728	2,484,147
Interest-bearing liabilities:					
Interest-bearing demand deposits	1,223,440				1,223,440
Savings	80,105				80,105
Time deposits	269,756	526,765	96,109	44	892,674
Short-term borrowings	37,665				37,665
FHLB advances	7,234	1,064	11,702		20,000
Trust preferred securities	5,155			37,114	42,269
	1,623,355	527,829	107,811	37,158	2,296,153
Interest rate sensitivity gap	\$ (539,971)	\$ (239,453)	\$ 545,848	\$ 421,570	\$ 187,994
Cumulative interest rate sensitivity gap	\$ (539,971)	\$ (779,424)	\$ (233,576)	\$ 187,994	
Interest rate sensitivity gap ratio	0.67	0.55	6.06	NM	
Cumulative interest rate sensitivity gap ratio	0.67	0.64	0.90	1.18	

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

Following is a summary of the carrying value of investment securities available for sale as of the end of each reported period:

	December 31,		
	2011	2010	2009
(Dollars in Thousands)			
U. S. Government sponsored agencies	\$ 14,937	\$ 35,468	\$ 39,525
State, county and municipal securities	79,133	57,696	38,156
Corporate debt securities	11,401	10,786	8,675
Mortgage-backed securities	234,496	218,631	159,200
	\$ 339,967	\$ 322,581	\$ 245,556

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

The amounts of securities available for sale in each category as of December 31, 2011 are shown in the following table according to contractual maturity classifications: (1) one year or less, (2) after one year through five years, (3) after five years through ten years and (4) after ten years.

	U.S. Government Sponsored Agencies		State, County and Municipal		Corporate debt		Mortgage-backed	
	Amount	Yield(1)	Amount	Yield(1)(2)	Amount	Yield(1)	Amount	Yield (1)
	(Dollars in Thousands)							
One year or less	\$ 10,057	0.52%	\$ 3,366	4.54%	\$ 1,309	7.15%	\$	%
After one year through five years	3,022	0.83	15,470	4.88	1,262	6.47	766	3.55
After five years through ten years	1,858	4.12	40,249	5.54	1,964	6.66	8,804	3.87
After ten years			20,048	5.91	6,866	6.56	224,926	3.05
	\$ 14,937	1.03%	\$ 79,133	5.46%	\$ 11,401	6.64%	\$ 234,496	3.08%

(1) Yields were computed using coupon interest, adding discount accretion or subtracting premium amortization, as appropriate, on a ratable basis over the life of each security. The weighted average yield for each maturity range was computed using the acquisition price of each security in that range.

(2) Yields on securities of state and political subdivisions are stated on a taxable-equivalent basis, using a tax rate of 35%.

The investment portfolio consists of securities which are classified as available for sale and recorded at fair value with unrealized gains and losses excluded from earnings and reported in accumulated other comprehensive income, net of the related deferred tax effect.

The amortization of premiums and accretion of discounts are recognized in interest income using methods approximating the interest method over the life of the securities. Realized gains and losses, determined on the basis of the cost of specific securities sold, are included in earnings on the settlement date. Declines in the fair value of securities below their cost that are deemed to be other-than-temporary are reflected in earnings as realized losses.

The Company's methodology for determining whether other-than-temporary impairment losses exist include management considering (1) the length of time and the extent to which the fair value has been less than cost, (2) the financial condition and near-term prospects of the issuer and (3) the intent and ability of the Company to retain its investment in the issuer for a period of time sufficient to allow for any anticipated recovery in fair value.

Management evaluates securities for other-than-temporary impairment at least on a quarterly basis, and more frequently when economic or market concerns warrant such evaluation. Substantially all of the unrealized losses on debt securities are related to changes in interest rates and do not affect the expected cash flows of the issuer or underlying collateral. All unrealized losses are considered temporary because each security carries an acceptable investment grade, the Company has the intent and ability to hold to maturity and it is more likely than not that the Company will not be required to sell these securities prior to recovery or maturity. The Company's investments in subordinated debt include investments in regional and super-regional banks on which the Company conducts regular analysis through review of financial information or credit ratings. Investments in preferred securities are also concentrated in the preferred obligations of regional and super-regional banks through non-pooled investment structures. The Company did not hold any investments in pooled trust preferred securities at December 31, 2011.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****DEPOSITS**

Average amount of various deposit classes and the average rates paid thereon are presented below:

	Year Ended December 31,			
	2011		2010	
	Amount	Rate	Amount	Rate
	(Dollars in Thousands)			
Noninterest-bearing demand	\$ 344,021	0.00%	\$ 242,533	0.00%
NOW	592,043	0.63	498,433	0.91
Money Market	561,978	0.93	442,589	1.29
Savings	79,325	0.45	64,218	0.56
Time	1,013,817	1.60	905,418	1.99
Total deposits	\$ 2,591,184	0.98%	\$ 2,153,191	1.38%

We have a large, stable base of time deposits with little or no dependence on what we consider volatile deposits. Volatile deposits, in management's opinion, are those deposit accounts that are overly rate sensitive and apt to move if our rate offerings are not at or near the top of the market. Generally speaking, these are brokered deposits or time deposits in amount greater than \$100,000.

The amounts of time certificates of deposit issued in amounts of \$100,000 or more as of December 31, 2011, are shown below by category, which is based on time remaining until maturity of (1) three months or less, (2) over three through twelve months and (3) greater than one year.

	(Dollars in Thousands)
Three months or less	\$ 62,863
Three months to one year	154,330
One year or greater	300,586
Total	\$ 517,779

OFF-BALANCE SHEET ARRANGEMENTS AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

In the ordinary course of business, our Bank has granted commitments to extend credit to approved customers. Generally, these commitments to extend credit have been granted on a temporary basis for seasonal or inventory requirements and have been approved by the Bank's local boards. Our Bank has also granted commitments to approved customers for financial standby letters of credit. These commitments are recorded in the financial statements when funds are disbursed or the financial instruments become payable. The Bank uses the same credit policies for these off-balance sheet commitments as it does for financial instruments that are recorded in the consolidated financial statements. Commitments generally have fixed expiration dates or other termination clauses and may require payment of a fee. Since many of the commitment amounts expire without being drawn upon, the total commitment amounts do not necessarily represent future cash requirements.

Following is a summary of the commitments outstanding at December 31, 2011 and 2010.

	December 31,	
	2011	2010
	(Dollars in Thousands)	
Commitments to extend credit	\$ 132,700	\$ 166,845

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Financial standby letters of credit	8,074	7,874
	\$ 140,774	\$ 174,719

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements**

The following table summarizes short-term borrowings for the periods indicated:

	2011		Years Ended December 31, 2010 (Dollars in Thousands)		2009	
	Average Balance	Average Rate	Average Balance	Average Rate	Average Balance	Average Rate
Federal funds purchased and securities sold under agreement to repurchase	\$ 22,275	0.75%	\$ 28,368	0.66%	\$ 25,813	0.67%
	Total Balance		Total Balance		Total Balance	
Total maximum short-term borrowings outstanding at any month-end during the year	\$ 37,665		\$ 68,184		\$ 55,254	

The following table sets forth certain information about contractual cash obligations as of December 31, 2011.

	Total	Payments Due After December 31, 2010			
		1 Year Or Less	1-3 Years	4-5 Years	5 Years
(Dollars in Thousands)					
Time certificates of deposit	\$ 892,674	\$ 796,521	\$ 87,416	\$ 8,693	\$ 44
Federal Home Loan Bank advances	20,000	5,319	8,298	6,383	
Subordinated debentures	42,269				42,269
Total contractual cash obligations	\$ 954,943	\$ 801,840	\$ 95,714	\$ 15,076	\$ 42,313

Our operating leases represent short-term obligations, normally with maturities of less than three years. Many of the operating leases have thirty-day cancellation provisions. The total contractual obligations for operating leases do not require a material amount of our cash funds.

At December 31, 2011, we had immaterial amounts of binding commitments for capital expenditures.

CAPITAL ADEQUACY**Capital Purchase Program**

On November 21, 2008, the Company elected to participate in the CPP established by the EESA. Accordingly, on such date, the Company issued and sold to the Treasury, for an aggregate cash purchase price of \$52 million, (i) 52,000 Preferred Shares having a liquidation preference of \$1,000 per share, and (ii) a ten-year Warrant to purchase up to 679,443 shares of Common Stock, at an exercise price of \$11.48 per share. The issuance and sale of these securities was a private placement exempt from registration pursuant to Section 4(2) of the Securities Act.

Cumulative dividends on the Preferred Shares will accrue on the liquidation preference at a rate of 5% per annum for the first five years and at a rate of 9% per annum thereafter, but such dividends will be paid only if, as and when declared by the Company's Board of Directors. The Preferred Shares have no maturity date and rank senior to the Common Stock (and pari passu with the Company's other authorized preferred stock, of which no shares are currently designated or outstanding) with respect to the payment of dividends and distributions and amounts payable upon liquidation, dissolution and winding up of the Company. Subject to the approval of the Federal Reserve, the Preferred Shares are redeemable at the option of the Company at 100% of their liquidation preference.

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

The Purchase Agreement pursuant to which the Preferred Shares and the Warrant were sold contains limitations on the payment of dividends on the Common Stock and on the Company's ability to repurchase its Common Stock, and subjects the Company to certain of the executive compensation limitations included in the EESA and related regulations.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****Capital Regulations**

The capital resources of our Company are monitored on a periodic basis by state and federal regulatory authorities. During 2011, the Company's capital increased \$20.4 million, primarily due to the amounts of net income available to common shareholders of \$17.9 million and other comprehensive income of \$1.1 million. Other capital related transactions, such as Common Stock issuances through the exercise of stock options and restricted stock account for only a small change in the capital of the Company. During 2010, our Company's capital increased \$78.4 million due to the successful capital raise of \$85.3 million, partially offset by the net loss available to common shareholders of \$7.2 million.

In accordance with risk capital guidelines issued by the Federal Reserve, we are required to maintain a minimum standard of total capital to risk-weighted assets of 8%. Additionally, all member banks must maintain core or Tier 1 capital of at least 4% of total assets (leverage ratio). Member banks operating at or near the 4% capital level are expected to have well-diversified risks, including no undue interest rate risk exposure, excellent control systems, good earnings, high asset quality and well managed on-and off-balance sheet activities, and, in general, be considered strong banking organizations with a composite 1 rating under the CAMEL rating system of banks. For all but the most highly rated banks meeting the above conditions, the minimum leverage ratio is to be 4% plus an additional 1% to 2%.

The following table summarizes the regulatory capital levels of Ameris at December 31, 2011.

	Actual		Required		Excess	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
	(Dollars in Thousands)					
Leverage capital						
Consolidated	\$ 324,125	10.76%	\$ 120,683	4.00%	\$ 203,442	6.76%
Ameris Bank	320,032	10.62	120,515	4.00	199,517	6.62
Risk-based capital:						
Core capital						
Consolidated	324,125	18.80	68,977	4.00	255,148	14.80
Ameris Bank	320,032	18.61	68,790	4.00	251,242	14.61
Total capital						
Consolidated	345,789	20.05	137,954	8.00	207,835	12.05
Ameris Bank	341,697	19.87	137,580	8.00	204,117	11.87

INFLATION

The consolidated financial statements and related consolidated financial data presented herein have been prepared in accordance with GAAP and practices within the banking industry which require the measurement of financial position and operating results in terms of historical dollars without considering the changes in the relative purchasing power of money over time due to inflation. Unlike most industrial companies, virtually all the assets and liabilities of a financial institution are monetary in nature. As a result, interest rates have a more significant impact on a financial institution's performance than the effects of general levels of inflation.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****QUARTERLY FINANCIAL INFORMATION (Unaudited)**

The following table sets forth certain consolidated quarterly financial information of the Company. This information is derived from unaudited consolidated financial statements, which include, in the opinion of management, all normal recurring adjustments which management considers necessary for a fair presentation of the results for such periods.

	Quarters Ended December 31, 2011			
	4	3	2	1
(Dollars in Thousands, Except Per Share Data)				
Selected Income Statement Data:				
Interest income	\$ 38,223	\$ 34,788	\$ 35,923	\$ 32,137
Interest expense	5,455	6,986	7,176	7,930
Net interest income	32,768	27,802	28,747	24,207
Provision for loan losses	9,019	7,552	9,115	7,043
Net interest income after provision for loan losses	23,749	20,250	19,632	17,164
Noninterest income	6,689	33,945	5,980	6,193
Noninterest expense	28,710	29,486	22,602	21,155
Income before income taxes	1,728	24,709	3,010	2,202
Income tax	587	8,249	896	824
Net income	1,141	16,460	2,114	1,378
Preferred stock dividends	819	817	807	798
Net income available to common stockholders	\$ 322	\$ 15,643	\$ 1,307	\$ 580
Per Share Data:				
Net income basic	0.01	0.67	0.06	0.02
Net income diluted	0.01	0.66	0.06	0.02
Common Dividends (Cash)				
Common Dividends (Stock)				

	Quarters Ended December 31, 2010			
	4	3	2	1
(Dollars in Thousands, Except Per Share Data)				
Selected Income Statement Data:				
Interest income	\$ 30,811	\$ 29,173	\$ 31,097	\$ 27,991
Interest expense	7,805	7,173	7,238	7,578
Net interest income	23,006	22,000	23,859	20,413
Provision for loan losses	11,404	9,740	18,608	10,770
Net interest income after provision for loan losses	11,602	12,260	5,251	9,643
Noninterest income	12,303	5,011	13,049	4,885
Noninterest expense	21,946	18,928	23,383	16,931
Income (loss) before income taxes	1,959	(1,657)	(5,083)	(2,403)
Income tax	98	(760)	(1,664)	(869)

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Net income (loss)	1,861	(897)	(3,419)	(1,534)
Preferred stock dividends	811	807	799	796
Net income (loss) available to common stockholders	\$ 1,050	\$ (1,704)	\$ (4,218)	\$ (2,330)
Per Share Data:				
Net income (loss) basic and diluted	0.04	(0.07)	(0.20)	(0.17)
Common Dividends (Cash)				
Common Dividends (Stock)			1 for 210	1 for 130

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

ITEM 7A. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DISCLOSURES ABOUT MARKET RISK

We are exposed only to U.S. Dollar interest rate changes and, accordingly, we manage exposure by considering the possible changes in the net interest margin. We do not have any trading instruments nor do we classify any portion of the investment portfolio as trading. Finally, we have no exposure to foreign currency exchange rate risk, commodity price risk or other market risks.

Interest rates play a major part in the net interest income of a financial institution. The sensitivity to rate changes is known as interest rate risk. The repricing of interest earning assets and interest-bearing liabilities can influence the changes in net interest income. As part of our asset/liability management program, the timing of repriced assets and liabilities is referred to as gap management. Our policy is to maintain a gap ratio in the one-year time horizon of .80 to 1.20. As indicated by the gap analysis included in this Annual Report, we are somewhat liability sensitive in relation to changes in market interest rates. Being liability sensitive would result in net interest income decreasing in a rising rate environment and increasing in a declining rate environment.

We use simulation analysis to monitor changes in net interest income due to changes in market interest rates. The simulation of rising, declining and flat interest rate scenarios allow management to monitor and adjust interest rate sensitivity to minimize the impact of market interest rate swings. The analysis of the impact on net interest income over a twelve-month period is subjected to a gradual 200 basis points increase or 200 basis points decrease in market rates on net interest income and is monitored on a quarterly basis. Our most recent model projects net interest income would decrease slightly if rates rise 200 basis points gradually over the next year. A scenario involving a 200 basis points decrease is irrelevant at this time with current market rates being at or near zero since the last reduction of the federal funds target rate by the Federal Reserve on December 16, 2008.

ITEM 8. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Report of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm

Consolidated Balance Sheets December 31, 2011 and 2010

Consolidated Statements of Operations Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009

Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income/(Loss) Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009

Consolidated Statements of Changes in Stockholders' Equity Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009

Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements

ITEM 9. CHANGES IN AND DISAGREEMENTS WITH ACCOUNTANTS ON ACCOUNTING AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None.

ITEM 9A. CONTROLS AND PROCEDURES

Disclosure Controls and Procedures

The Company's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer have evaluated the Company's disclosure controls and procedures (as such term is defined in Rules 13a-15(e) or 15d-15(e) promulgated under the Exchange Act as of the end of the period covered by this Annual Report, as required by paragraph (b) of Rules 13a-15 or 15d-15 of the Exchange Act. Based on such evaluation, such officers have concluded that, as of the end of the period covered by this Annual Report, the Company's disclosure controls and procedures are effective.

Management's Report on Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Management's Report on Internal Control Over Financial Reporting is set forth on page F-3 of this Annual Report.

Changes in Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

During the quarter ended December 31, 2011 there was no change in the Company's internal control over financial reporting identified in connection with the evaluation required by paragraph (d) of Rules 13a-15 or 15d-15 of the Exchange Act that has materially affected, or is reasonably likely to materially affect, the Company's internal control over financial reporting.

ITEM 9B. OTHER INFORMATION

Not applicable.

Table of Contents**Index to Financial Statements****PART III****ITEM 10. DIRECTORS, EXECUTIVE OFFICERS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The information set forth under the captions Proposal 1 Election of Directors, Board and Committee Matters, Executive Officers and Section 16(a) Beneficial Ownership Reporting Compliance in the Proxy Statement to be used in connection with the solicitation of proxies for the Company's 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders, to be filed with the SEC, is incorporated herein by reference.

Code of Ethics

Ameris has adopted a code of ethics that is applicable to all employees, including its Chief Executive Officer and all senior financial officers, including its Chief Financial Officer and principal accounting officer. Ameris shall provide to any person without charge, upon request, a copy of its code of ethics. Such requests should be directed to the Corporate Secretary of Ameris Bancorp at 310 First St., SE, Moultrie, Georgia 31768.

ITEM 11. EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

The information set forth under the caption Executive Compensation in the Proxy Statement to be used in connection with the solicitation of proxies for the Company's 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders, to be filed with the SEC, is incorporated herein by reference.

ITEM 12. SECURITY OWNERSHIP OF CERTAIN BENEFICIAL OWNERS AND MANAGEMENT AND RELATED STOCKHOLDER MATTERS

The information set forth under the caption Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management in the Proxy Statement to be used in connection with the solicitation of proxies for the Company's 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders, to be filed with the SEC, is incorporated herein by reference.

Equity Compensation Plans

The following table sets forth certain information with respect to securities to be issued under our equity compensation plans as of December 31, 2011.

Plan Category	Number of securities to be issued upon exercise of outstanding options, warrants and rights	Weighted average exercise price of outstanding options, warrants and rights	Number of securities remaining available for future issuance under equity compensation plans
Equity compensation plans approved by security holders (1)	1,581,252	\$ 12.59	282,153

- (1) Consists of our (i) 2005 Omnibus Stock Ownership and Long-Term Incentive Plan, which provides for the granting to officers and certain other employees of qualified or nonqualified stock options, restricted stock, stock appreciation rights, long-term incentive compensation units consisting of a combination of cash and Common Stock or any combination thereof, and (ii) the ABC Bancorp Omnibus Stock Ownership and Long-Term Incentive Plan that was adopted in 1997, which now is operative only with respect to the exercise of options that remain outstanding under such plan and under which no further awards may be granted. All securities remaining for future issuance represent awards that may be granted under the 2005 Omnibus Stock Ownership and Long-Term Incentive Plan.

ITEM 13. CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND RELATED TRANSACTIONS, AND DIRECTOR INDEPENDENCE

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

The information set forth under the captions "Certain Relationships and Related Transactions" and "Proposal 1 Election of Directors" in the Proxy Statement to be used in connection with the solicitation of proxies for the Company's 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders, to be filed with the SEC, is incorporated herein by reference.

ITEM 14. PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTING FEES AND SERVICES

The information set forth under the caption "Proposal 2 Ratification of Appointment of Independent Auditor" in the Proxy Statement to be used in connection with the solicitation of proxies for the Company's 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders, to be filed with the SEC, is incorporated herein by reference.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

PART IV

ITEM 15. EXHIBITS, FINANCIAL STATEMENT SCHEDULES

1. Financial statements:

(a) Ameris Bancorp and Subsidiaries:

- (i) Consolidated Balance Sheets December 31, 2011 and 2010;
- (ii) Consolidated Statements of Operations Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009;
- (iii) Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income/(Loss) Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009;
- (iv) Consolidated Statements of Changes in Stockholders' Equity Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009;
- (v) Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows Years ended December 31, 2011, 2010 and 2009; and
- (vi) Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements.

(b) Ameris Bancorp (parent company only):

Parent company only financial information has been included in Note 20 of the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements.

2. Financial statement schedules:

All schedules are omitted as the required information is inapplicable or the information is presented in the financial statements or related notes.

3. A list of the Exhibits required by Item 601 of Regulation S-K to be filed as a part of this Annual Report is shown on the Exhibit Index filed herewith.

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

SIGNATURES

Pursuant to the requirements of Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, the Registrant has duly caused this report to be signed on its behalf by the undersigned, thereunto duly authorized.

AMERIS BANCORP

Date: February 27, 2012

By: /s/ Edwin W. Hortman, Jr.
Edwin W. Hortman, Jr.,
President and Chief Executive Officer

(principal executive officer)

POWER OF ATTORNEY

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that each person whose signature appears below constitutes and appoints Edwin W. Hortman, Jr. as his attorney-in-fact, acting with full power of substitution for him in his name, place and stead, in any and all capacities, to sign any amendments to this Form 10-K and to file the same, with exhibits thereto, and any other documents in connection therewith, with the Securities and Exchange Commission and hereby ratifies and confirms all that said attorney-in-fact, or his substitute or substitutes, may do or cause to be done by virtue thereof.

Pursuant to the requirements of the Exchange Act, this Form 10-K has been signed by the following persons in the capacities and on the dates indicated.

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Edwin W. Hortman, Jr.
Edwin W. Hortman, Jr., President, Chief Executive Officer and Director
(principal executive officer)

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Dennis J. Zember Jr.
Dennis J. Zember Jr., Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
(principal accounting and financial officer)

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ R. Dale Ezzell
R. Dale Ezzell, Director

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ J. Raymond Fulp
J. Raymond Fulp, Director

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Daniel B. Jeter
Daniel B. Jeter, Director and Chairman of the Board

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Robert P. Lynch
Robert P. Lynch, Director

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Brooks Sheldon
Brooks Sheldon, Director

Date: February 27, 2012 /s/ Jimmy D. Veal
Jimmy D. Veal, Director

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

Date: February 27, 2012

/s/ V. Wayne Williford
V. Wayne Williford, Director

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

EXHIBIT INDEX

Exhibit No.	Description
2.1	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of October 23, 2009 among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of American United Bank, Lawrenceville, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K/A filed with the SEC on March 15, 2010).
2.2	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of November 6, 2009 among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of United Security Bank, Sparta, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 16, 2010).
2.3	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of May 14, 2010 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of Satilla Community Bank, St. Marys, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on May 20, 2010).
2.4	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of October 22, 2010 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of First Bank of Jacksonville, Jacksonville, Florida, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on October 27, 2010).
2.5	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of November 12, 2010 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of Darby Bank & Trust Co., Vidalia, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on November 18, 2010).
2.6	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of November 12, 2010 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of Tifton Banking Company, Tifton, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on November 18, 2010).
2.7	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of July 15, 2011 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of High Trust Bank, Stockbridge, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on July 21, 2011).
2.8	Purchase and Assumption Agreement dated as of July 15, 2011 by and among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Receiver of One Georgia Bank, Atlanta, Georgia, Ameris Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation acting in its corporate capacity (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on July 21, 2011).
3.1	Articles of Incorporation of Ameris Bancorp, as amended (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 2.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Regulation A Offering Statement on Form 1-A filed with the SEC on August 14, 1987).
3.2	Amendment to Amended Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 28, 1996).
3.3	Amendment to Amended Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.3 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 filed with the SEC on July 17, 1996).
3.4	Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.5 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 25, 1998).
3.5	Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.7 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 26, 1999).

Edgar Filing: Ameris Bancorp - Form 10-K

- 3.6 Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.9 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 31, 2003).
- 3.7 Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on December 1, 2005).

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Exhibit No.	Description
3.8	Amended and Restated Bylaws (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on March 14, 2005).
3.9	Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Form 8-K filed with the SEC on November 21, 2008).
3.10	Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Form 8-K filed with the SEC on June 1, 2011).
4.1	Placement Agreement between Ameris Bancorp, Ameris Statutory Trust I, FTN Financial Capital Markets and Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, Inc. dated September 13, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.2	Subscription Agreement between Ameris Bancorp, Ameris Statutory Trust I and First Tennessee Bank National Association dated September 20, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.3	Subscription Agreement between Ameris Bancorp, Ameris Statutory Trust I and TWE, Ltd. dated September 20, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.3 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.4	Indenture between Ameris Bancorp and Wilmington Trust Company dated September 20, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.4 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.5	Amended and Restated Declaration of Trust between Ameris Bancorp, the Administrators of Ameris Statutory Trust I signatory thereto and Wilmington Trust Company dated September 20, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.5 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.6	Guarantee Agreement between Ameris Bancorp and Wilmington Trust Company dated September 20, 2006 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.6 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.7	Floating Rate Junior Subordinated Deferrable Interest Debenture dated September 20, 2006 issued to Ameris Statutory Trust I (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.7 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-4 (Registration No. 333-138252) filed with the SEC on October 27, 2006).
4.8	Warrant to Purchase 679,443 shares of Common Stock of Ameris Bancorp, issued to the U.S. Department of Treasury on November 21, 2008 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Form 8-K filed with the SEC on November 21, 2008).
10.1	Deferred Compensation Agreement for Kenneth J. Hunnicutt dated December 16, 1986 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 5.3 to Ameris Bancorp's Regulation A Offering Statement on Form 1-A filed with the SEC on August 14, 1987).
10.2	Executive Salary Continuation Agreement dated February 14, 1984 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.6 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-KSB filed with the SEC on March 27, 1989).
10.3	Form of Omnibus Stock Ownership and Long-Term Incentive Plan (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.17 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 25, 1998).
10.4	ABC Bancorp 2000 Officer/Director Stock Bonus Plan (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.19 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 29, 2000).
10.5	Executive Employment Agreement with Jon S. Edwards dated as of July 1, 2003 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC on November 12, 2003).
10.6	Executive Employment Agreement with Edwin W. Hortman, Jr. dated as of December 31, 2003 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.19 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 15, 2004).
10.7	Executive Employment Agreement with Cindi H. Lewis dated as of December 31, 2003 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.20 to Ameris Bancorp's Annual Report on Form 10-K filed with the SEC on March 15, 2004).

Table of Contents

Index to Financial Statements

Exhibit No.	Description
10.8	Amendment No. 1 to Executive Employment Agreement with Edwin W. Hortman, Jr. dated as of March 10, 2005 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on March 14, 2005).
10.9	Form of 2005 Omnibus Stock Ownership and Long-Term Incentive Plan (incorporated by reference to Appendix A to Ameris Bancorp's Definitive Proxy Statement filed with the SEC on April 18, 2005).
10.10	Executive Employment Agreement with Dennis J. Zember Jr. dated as of May 5, 2005 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K/A filed with the SEC on May 11, 2005).
10.11	Revolving Credit Agreement with SunTrust Bank dated as of December 14, 2005 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on December 20, 2005).
10.12	Security Agreement with SunTrust Bank dated as of December 14, 2005 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on December 20, 2005).
10.13	Form of Incentive Stock Option Agreement (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.2 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-8 filed with the SEC on January 24, 2006).
10.14	Form of Non-Qualified Stock Option Agreement (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.3 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-8 filed with the SEC on January 24, 2006).
10.15	Form of Restricted Stock Agreement (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 4.4 to Ameris Bancorp's Registration Statement on Form S-8 filed with the SEC on January 24, 2006).
10.16	Executive Employment Agreement with C. Richard Sturm dated as of May 31, 2007 (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Current Report on Form 8-K filed with the SEC on June 6, 2007).
10.17	Letter Agreement, dated November 21, 2008, including Securities Purchase Agreement Standard Terms incorporated by reference therein, between Ameris Bancorp and the U.S. Department of Treasury (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.1 to Ameris Bancorp's Form 8-K filed with the SEC on November 21, 2008).
10.18	Form of Senior Executive Officer Waiver, executed by each of Messrs. Edwin W. Hortman, Jr., Dennis J. Zember Jr., Jon S. Edwards, C. Johnson Hipp, III and Marc J. Bogan (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 10.2 to