

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP /OH/

Form 10-K

February 24, 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNITED STATES

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Washington, D.C. 20549

FORM 10-K

(Mark One)

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

For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2014

OR

TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(D) OF THE SECURITIES ACT OF 1934

Commission File Number 001-34762

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP.

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

Ohio

(State or other jurisdiction of  
incorporation or organization)

31-1042001

(I.R.S. Employer  
Identification No.)

255 East Fifth Street, Suite 700

Cincinnati, Ohio

(Address of principal executive offices)

Registrant's telephone number, including area code: (877) 322-9530

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:

Common Shares, no par value

Warrants, each to purchase one Common Share, no par value

Name of exchange on which registered:

The NASDAQ Stock Market LLC

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

Indicated by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the 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 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 (subpart 229.405 of this chapter) 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.

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. (Check one):

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 Exchange Act).

Yes  No

The aggregate market value of the voting stock held by non-affiliates of the registrant, computed by reference to the sales price of the last trade of such stock as of June 30, 2014, was \$955,704,000. (The exclusion from such amount of the market value of the shares owned by any person shall not be deemed an admission by the registrant that such person is an affiliate of the registrant.)

As of February 23, 2015, there were issued and outstanding 61,470,844 common shares of the registrant.

Documents Incorporated by Reference:

Portions of the registrant’s Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2014 are incorporated by reference into Parts I, II and IV.

Portions of the registrant’s definitive Proxy Statement for the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 26, 2015 are incorporated by reference into Part III.

---

TABLE OF CONTENTSFORM 10-K CROSS REFERENCE INDEX

			Page
<u>Part I</u>	<u>Item 1</u>	<u>Business</u>	<u>1</u>
	<u>Item 1A</u>	<u>Risk Factors</u>	<u>9</u>
	<u>Item 1B</u>	<u>Unresolved Staff Comments</u>	<u>20</u>
	<u>Item 2</u>	<u>Properties</u>	<u>21</u>
	<u>Item 3</u>	<u>Legal Proceedings</u>	<u>21</u>
	<u>Item 4</u>	<u>Mine Safety Disclosures</u>	<u>21</u>
		<u>Supplemental Item - Executive Officers of the Registrant</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>Part II</u>	<u>Item 5</u>	<u>Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities</u>	<u>25</u>
	<u>Item 6</u>	<u>Selected Financial Data</u>	<u>27</u>
	<u>Item 7</u>	<u>Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations</u>	<u>28</u>
	<u>Item 7A</u>	<u>Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosures about Market Risk</u>	<u>28</u>
	<u>Item 8</u>	<u>Financial Statements and Supplementary Data</u>	<u>28</u>
	<u>Item 9</u>	<u>Changes in and Disagreements with Accountants on Accounting and Financial Disclosure</u>	<u>28</u>
	<u>Item 9A</u>	<u>Controls and Procedures</u>	<u>28</u>
	<u>Item 9B</u>	<u>Other Information</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>Part III</u>	<u>Item 10</u>	<u>Directors, Executive Officers, and Corporate Governance</u>	<u>29</u>
	<u>Item 11</u>	<u>Executive Compensation</u>	<u>29</u>
	<u>Item 12</u>	<u>Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters</u>	<u>29</u>
	<u>Item 13</u>	<u>Certain Relationships and Related Transactions and Director Independence</u>	<u>29</u>
	<u>Item 14</u>	<u>Principal Accounting Fees and Services</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Part IV</u>	<u>Item 15</u>	<u>Exhibits, Financial Statement Schedules</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Signatures</u>			<u>34</u>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

Certain statements contained in this Annual Report on Form 10-K which are not statements of historical fact constitute forward-looking statements within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995, including, without limitation, the statements specifically identified as forward-looking statements within this document. In addition, certain statements in future filings by us with the SEC, in press releases, and in oral and written statements made by or with our approval which are not statements of historical fact constitute forward-looking statements within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Examples of forward-looking statements include: (i) projections of income or expense, earnings per share, the payment or non-payment of dividends, capital structure and other financial items; (ii) statements of our plans and objectives or our management or Board of Directors, including those relating to products or services; (iii) statements of future economic performance; and (iv) statements of assumptions underlying such statements. Words such as “believes,” “anticipates,” “expects,” “intends,” “targeted” and similar expressions are intended to identify forward-looking statements but are not the exclusive means of identifying those statements.

The Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 provides a “safe harbor” for forward-looking statements to encourage companies to provide prospective information so long as those statements are identified as forward-looking and are accompanied by meaningful cautionary statements identifying important factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those discussed in the forward-looking statements. We desire to take advantage of the “safe harbor” provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995.

Forward-looking statements involve risks and uncertainties. Actual results may differ materially from those predicted by the forward-looking statements because of various factors and possible events, including those factors and events identified (i) in "Item 1A. Risk Factors" of the Annual Report on Form 10-K and (ii) under the heading "Forward-Looking Statements" in the "Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations" section of First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included within Exhibit 13 to this Annual Report on Form 10-K and incorporated by reference into Item 7 of this Annual Report on Form 10-K).

Forward-looking statements speak only as of the date on which they are made, and, except as may be required by law, we undertake no obligation to update any forward-looking statement to reflect events or circumstances after the date on which the statement is made to reflect unanticipated events. All subsequent written and oral forward-looking statements attributable to us or any person acting on our behalf are qualified in their entirety by the foregoing cautionary statements.

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PART I

#### Item 1. Business.

##### First Financial Bancorp.

First Financial Bancorp., an Ohio corporation (First Financial or the Company), was formed in 1982. First Financial is a mid-sized, regional bank holding company headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. References in this Form 10-K to “we,” “us” or “our” refer, as the context requires, to First Financial and its subsidiaries, collectively or to First Financial as the holding company.

First Financial engages in the business of commercial banking and other banking and banking-related activities through its oldest wholly owned subsidiary, First Financial Bank, National Association (the Bank), which was founded in 1863.

The range of banking services provided by First Financial to individuals and businesses includes commercial lending, real estate lending, and consumer financing. Real estate loans are loans secured by a mortgage lien on the real property of the borrower, which may either be residential property (one to four family residential housing units) or commercial property (owner-occupied and/or investor income producing real estate, such as apartments, shopping centers, office buildings). In addition, First Financial offers deposit products that include interest-bearing and noninterest-bearing accounts, time deposits, and cash management services for commercial customers. A full range of trust and asset management services is also provided through First Financial’s Wealth Management division.

Commercial loans are made to all types of businesses for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to, inventory, receivables, and equipment. First Financial works with businesses to meet their shorter term working capital needs while also providing long-term financing for their business plans. First Financial also offers lease and equipment financing through a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Bank, First Financial Equipment Finance LLC (First Equipment Finance), primarily in its principal markets. Credit risk for lending activities is managed through standardized loan policies, established and authorized credit limits, centralized portfolio management and the diversification of market area and industries. The overall strength of the borrower is evaluated through the credit underwriting process and includes a variety of analytical activities, including the review of historical and projected cash flows, historical financial performance, financial strength of the principals and guarantors, and collateral values, where applicable.

Commercial lending activities include equipment and leasehold improvement financing for franchisees, that are principally quick service and casual dining restaurants. The underwriting of these loans incorporates basic credit proficiencies combined with knowledge of select franchise concepts to measure the creditworthiness of proposed multi-unit borrowers. The focus is on a limited number of concepts that have sound economics, lower closure rates, and brand awareness within specified local, regional, or national markets. Loan terms for equipment are generally up to 84 months fully amortizing and up to 180 months on real estate related requests.

Commercial real estate loans are secured by a mortgage lien on the real property. The credit underwriting for both owner-occupied and investor income producing real estate loans includes detailed market analysis, historical and projected cash flow analysis, appropriate equity margins, assessment of lessees and lessors, type of real estate and other analyses. Risk of loss is managed by adherence to standard loan policies that establish certain levels of performance prior to the extension of a loan to the borrower. Market diversification within First Financial’s service area, as well as a diversification by industry, are other means by which the risk of loss is managed by First Financial. First Financial does not have a significant exposure to residential builders and developers.

The majority of residential real estate loans originated by the Bank conform to secondary market underwriting standards and are sold within a short timeframe to unaffiliated third parties. The Bank generally does not retain servicing rights to the loans. The credit underwriting standards adhere to a certain level of documentation, verifications, valuation, and overall credit performance of the borrower. The underwriting of these loans includes an evaluation of these and other pertinent factors prior to the extension of credit. These underwriting standards help in the management of the credit risk elements and increase the marketability of the loans.

Consumer loans are primarily loans made to individuals. These types of loans include new and used vehicle loans, second mortgages on residential real estate, and unsecured loans. Risk elements in the consumer loan portfolio are primarily focused on the borrower's cash flow and credit history, which are key indicators of the ability to repay. A certain level of security is provided through liens on automobile titles and second mortgage liens, where applicable. Consumer loans are generally smaller dollar amounts than other types of lending and are made to a large number of customers. Both factors help provide diversification within the portfolio. Economic conditions that affect consumers in First Financial's markets have a direct

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

impact on the credit quality of these loans. Higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of income growth and weaker economic growth are factors that may adversely impact consumer loan credit quality.

Home equity lines of credit consist mainly of revolving lines of credit secured by residential real estate. Home equity lines of credit are generally governed by the same lending policies and subject to the same credit risk as described previously for residential real estate loans.

First Financial has minimal foreign currency transactions and, in general, does not have a significant exposure to foreign currencies. Foreign currency activities are generally related to services provided to commercial customers. Information regarding statistical disclosure required by the Securities and Exchange Commission's Industry Guide 3 is included in First Financial's Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2014, and is incorporated herein by reference.

First Financial's executive office is located at 255 East Fifth Street, Suite 700, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202, and the telephone number is (877) 322-9530. First Financial makes available, free of charge, its Annual Reports on Form 10-K, Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q, Current Reports on Form 8-K, and all amendments to those reports, as soon as reasonably practicable after filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), through its website, [www.bankatfirst.com](http://www.bankatfirst.com) under the "Investor Information" link, under "SEC Filings." Copies of such reports also can be found on the SEC's website at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov).

### Employees

At December 31, 2014, First Financial and its subsidiaries had 1,442 full-time and part-time employees.

### Subsidiaries

A listing of each of First Financial's subsidiaries can be found in Exhibit 21 to this Form 10-K.

### Business Combinations

During the third quarter of 2009, through Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)-assisted transactions, First Financial acquired the banking operations of Peoples Community Bank (Peoples), Irwin Union Bank and Trust Company (Irwin Union Bank) and Irwin Union Bank, F.S.B. (Irwin FSB) (Irwin Union Bank and Irwin FSB, collectively, Irwin). Prior to the FDIC-assisted transactions, the Company also acquired three Indiana banking centers, including related deposits and loans, from Irwin in a separate and unrelated transaction. The acquisitions of the Peoples and Irwin franchises significantly expanded the First Financial footprint, opened new markets and strengthened the Company through the generation of additional capital.

In connection with the Peoples and Irwin FDIC-assisted transactions, First Financial entered into loss sharing agreements with the FDIC. Under the terms of these agreements, the FDIC will reimburse First Financial for losses with respect to certain loans (covered loans) and other real estate owned (covered OREO) (collectively, covered assets), beginning with the first dollar of loss. Covered loans represent approximately 2.8% of First Financial's loans at December 31, 2014. These agreements provide for loss protection on single-family, residential loans for a period of ten years and First Financial is required to share any recoveries of previously charged-off amounts for the same time period, on the same pro-rata basis with the FDIC. All other loans were provided loss protection for a period of five years, which expired on October 1, 2014, and recoveries of previously charged-off loans must be shared with the FDIC for a period of eight years, again on the same pro-rata basis.

First Financial must follow specific servicing and resolution procedures, as outlined in the loss sharing agreements, in order to receive reimbursement from the FDIC for losses on covered assets. First Financial services all covered assets with the same resolution practices and diligence as it does for the assets that are not subject to a loss sharing agreement.

On August 7, 2014, First Financial closed its merger agreement with The First Bexley Bank (First Bexley). Founded in 2006 and conducting operations out of one full service branch location in Bexley, Ohio, First Bexley served commercial and consumer clients throughout Columbus and central Ohio. First Financial acquired First Bexley in a cash and stock transaction in which First Bexley merged with and into First Financial Bank.

On August 7, 2014, First Financial also closed its merger with Insight Bank (Insight) during the third quarter 2014. Founded in 2006 and conducting operations out of one full service location in Worthington, Ohio, and a mortgage origination office in Newark, Ohio, Insight provided commercial and consumer banking services to clients throughout Columbus and central Ohio. First Financial acquired Insight in a cash and stock transaction in which Insight merged with and into First Financial Bank.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

On August 21, 2014, First Financial finalized its merger with Guernsey Bancorp, Inc. (Guernsey). Headquartered in Worthington, Ohio, Guernsey conducted operations out of three full service branches and served commercial and consumer clients throughout Columbus and central Ohio. Under the terms of the merger agreement, First Financial acquired Guernsey for cash consideration and the transfer of a single bank-owned property to Guernsey's sole shareholder. The Company also paid off all amounts due under a promissory note to a third party on behalf of Guernsey. The Guernsey Bank, an Ohio state chartered bank and wholly-owned subsidiary of Guernsey, merged with and into First Financial as part of the merger agreement.

The First Bexley, Insight and Guernsey acquisitions, provide First Financial an entrance into the Columbus, Ohio market, and introduce the Company's diverse product set to commercial and consumer clients of those institutions. These acquisitions position the Bank as the largest community bank serving Franklin County and the metropolitan Columbus market.

### Market and Competitive Information

First Financial, through the regionalization efforts and business model of the Bank, delivers a community banking philosophy to its clients. First Financial currently serves a combination of metropolitan and non-metropolitan markets primarily in Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky through its full-service banking centers. Market selection is based upon a number of factors, but markets are primarily chosen for their potential for growth, long-term profitability, and customer reach. First Financial's goal is to develop a competitive advantage through a local market focus, building long-term relationships with clients and helping them reach greater levels of financial success.

We also compete on a nationwide basis with respect to franchisee lending through our franchise finance subsidiary, First Franchise Capital.

The Company's markets support many different types of business activities, such as manufacturing, agriculture, education, healthcare, and professional services. Within these markets, growth is projected to continue in key demographic groups and populations. First Financial's market evaluation includes demographic measures such as income levels, median household income, and population growth within key segments. The Midwest markets that First Financial serves have historically not experienced the level of economic highs and lows seen in other sections of the country. Its markets are generally marked by less volatility in business activity, although material fluctuations may occur. In recent years, the overall national economy was negatively impacted by the deterioration of the sub-prime lending market, which quickly developed into a credit and liquidity crisis in other sectors of the financial services industry. This resulted in the implementation of a number of government sponsored programs designed to invest capital and liquidity into the financial services sector for the purposes of strengthening consumer confidence and stimulating lending activity. However, First Financial's strong liquidity and capital position, combined with conservative lending practices, have allowed the Company, to this point, to significantly mitigate macro-economic risk.

First Financial believes that it is well positioned to compete in its markets. Smaller than super-regional and multi-national bank holding companies, First Financial believes that it can meet the needs of its markets through a decision-making network of local management. First Financial believes that it is better positioned to compete for business than other smaller banks that may have size or geographic limitations. First Financial's targeted customers include individuals and small to medium sized businesses within the geographic region of the Bank's banking center network. Through the delivery systems of banking centers, ATMs, internet banking, and telephone-based transactions, First Financial meets the needs of its customers in an ever-changing marketplace.

First Financial faces strong competition from financial institutions and other non-financial organizations. Its competitors include local and regional financial institutions, savings and loans, and bank holding companies, as well

as some of the largest banking organizations in the United States. In addition, other types of financial institutions, such as credit unions, offer a wide range of loan and deposit services that are competitive with those offered by First Financial. The consumer is also served by brokerage firms and mutual funds that provide checking services, credit cards, and other services similar to those offered by First Financial. Major stores compete for loans by offering credit cards and retail installment contracts. It is anticipated that competition from other financial and non-financial services entities will continue and, for certain products and services, intensify.

#### Supervision and Regulation

We, our subsidiary bank, and its subsidiaries, are subject to an extensive system of laws and regulations that are intended primarily for the protection of customers and depositors and not for the protection of security holders. These laws and regulations govern such areas as capital, permissible activities, allowance for loan and lease losses, loans and investments, and

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

rates of interest that can be charged on loans. Described below are elements of selected laws and regulations. The descriptions are not intended to be complete and are qualified in their entirety by reference to the full text of the statutes and regulations described.

### Bank Holding Company Regulation

We are subject to the provisions of the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956, as amended (the BHCA) and subject to supervision and examination by the Federal Reserve Board. The BHCA requires prior approval by the Federal Reserve Board of the acquisition of 5% or more of the voting stock or substantially all the assets of any bank within the United States. In addition, subject to regulatory approval, First Financial can acquire thrift institutions. Acquisitions are subject to certain anti-competitive limitations.

The BHCA and the regulations of the Federal Reserve Board prohibit a bank holding company and its subsidiaries from engaging in certain tie-in arrangements in connection with any extension of credit, lease or sale of property, or furnishing of services. The BHCA also imposes certain restrictions upon dealings by affiliated banks with the holding company and among themselves, including restrictions on inter-bank borrowing and upon dealings in the securities or obligations of the holding company or other affiliates.

In addition, bank holding companies that satisfy certain requirements may elect to become financial holding companies. Financial holding companies are permitted to engage in certain activities that are “financial in nature” (e.g. insurance underwriting, securities brokerage, merchant banking) and that are not permitted for bank holding companies. First Financial’s current strategic plans do not include utilizing these expanded activities and, as a result, it has not elected to become a financial holding company.

The Federal Reserve Board also has extensive enforcement authority over bank holding companies, including, among other things, the ability to assess civil money penalties, issue cease and desist or removal orders, and require that a bank holding company divest subsidiaries (including a subsidiary bank). In general, the Federal Reserve Board may initiate enforcement actions for violations of laws and regulations and unsafe or unsound practices. Under Federal Reserve Board policy, a bank holding company is expected to act as a source of financial strength to each subsidiary bank and to commit resources to support such subsidiary bank. Under this policy, the Federal Reserve Board may require a bank holding company to contribute additional capital to an undercapitalized subsidiary bank and may disapprove of the payment of dividends to the shareholders if the Federal Reserve Board believes the payment of such dividends would be an unsafe or unsound practice.

### Depository Institution Regulation

The Bank, as a national banking association, is subject to supervision and regular examination by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC). All depository institutions and their deposits are insured up to the legal limits by the Deposit Insurance Fund (DIF) which is administered by the FDIC and is subject to the provisions of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act (FDIA).

### Insurance of Accounts

The FDIC currently maintains the DIF, which was created in 2006 in the merger of the Bank Insurance Fund and the Savings Association Insurance Fund. The deposit accounts of the Bank are insured by the DIF to the maximum amount provided by law. The general insurance limit is \$250,000. This insurance is backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Government.

As insurer, the FDIC is authorized to conduct examinations of and to require reporting by DIF-insured institutions. It also may prohibit any DIF-insured institution from engaging in any activity the FDIC determines by regulation or order to pose a serious threat to the DIF. The FDIC also has the authority to take enforcement actions against insured institutions.

The FDIC assesses deposit insurance premiums on each insured institution quarterly based on annualized rates for one of four risk categories. 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 minor weaknesses are assigned to Risk Category I. Risk Categories II, III and IV present progressively greater risks to the DIF. The Bank currently is in Risk Category I.

As required by the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Dodd-Frank Act), the FDIC adopted rules, under which insurance premium assessments are based on an institution's quarterly average total assets minus its quarterly average tangible equity (defined as Tier 1 capital) instead of its deposits. Under these rules, an institution with total assets of

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

less than \$10 billion is assigned to a Risk Category as described above, and a range of initial base assessment rates applies 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. All base assessment rates are 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 rule-making. In an emergency, the FDIC may also impose a special assessment.

In addition, all institutions with deposits insured by the FDIC are required to pay assessments to fund interest payments on bonds issued by the Financing Corporation, a mixed-ownership government corporation established to recapitalize a predecessor to the DIF. These assessments will continue until the Financing Corporation bonds mature in 2019.

Insurance of deposits may be terminated by the FDIC upon a finding that the institution has engaged or is engaging in unsafe and unsound practices, is in an unsafe or unsound condition to continue operations or has violated any applicable law, regulation, rule, order or condition imposed by the FDIC or written agreement entered into with the FDIC. The management of the Bank does not know of any practice, condition or violation that might lead to termination of deposit insurance.

Pursuant to the Dodd-Frank Act, the FDIC has established 2.0% as the designated reserve ratio (DRR), that is, the ratio of the DIF to insured deposits of the total industry. 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 on institutions with assets of less than \$10 billion of the increase in the statutory minimum DRR to 1.35% 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.

### Community Reinvestment Act

Under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), every FDIC-insured institution is obligated, consistent with safe and sound banking practices, to help meet the credit needs of its entire community, including low and moderate income neighborhoods. The CRA requires the appropriate federal banking regulator, in connection with the examination of an insured institution, to assess the institution's record of meeting the credit needs of its community and to consider this record in its evaluation of certain applications, such as a merger or the establishment of a branch. An unsatisfactory rating may be used as the basis for the denial of an application and will prevent a bank holding company of the institution from making an election to become a financial holding company. As of its last examination, the Bank received a CRA rating of "satisfactory."

### Privacy Rules

Federal banking regulators, as required under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, have adopted rules limiting the ability of banks and other financial institutions to disclose nonpublic information about consumers to non-affiliated third parties. The rules require disclosure of privacy policies to consumers and, in some circumstances, allow consumers to prevent disclosure of certain personal information to non-affiliated third parties. The privacy provisions of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act affect how consumer information is transmitted through diversified financial services companies and conveyed to outside vendors.

### Fiscal and Monetary Policies

The earnings of banks, and, therefore, the earnings of First Financial (and its subsidiaries), are affected by the fiscal and monetary policies of the United States government and its agencies, including the Federal Reserve Board. An important function of the Federal Reserve Board is to regulate the national supply of bank credit in an effort to prevent recession and to restrain inflation. Among the procedures used to implement these objectives are open market operations in U.S. Government securities, changes in the discount rate on member bank borrowings, and changes in reserve requirements on member bank deposits. These policies are used in varying degrees and combinations to directly affect the availability of bank loans and deposits, as well as the interest rates charged on loans and paid on deposits.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Limits on Dividends and Other Payments

There are various legal limitations on the extent to which a subsidiary bank may finance or otherwise supply funds to its parent holding company. Under applicable federal and state laws, a subsidiary bank may not, subject to certain limited exceptions, make loans or extensions of credit to, or investments in the securities of, its bank holding company. A subsidiary bank is also subject to collateral security requirements for any loan or extension of credit permitted by such exceptions. The Bank may not pay dividends out of its surplus if, after paying these dividends, it would fail to meet the required minimum levels under the risk-based capital guidelines and minimum leverage ratio requirements established by the OCC. In addition, the Bank must have the approval of the OCC if a dividend in any year would cause the total dividends for that year to exceed the sum of the Bank's current year's net income and the retained net income for the preceding two years, less required transfers to surplus. Payment of dividends by the Bank may be restricted at any time at the discretion of its regulatory authorities, if such regulatory authorities deem such dividends to constitute unsafe and/or unsound banking practices or if necessary to maintain adequate capital.

The ability of First Financial to obtain funds for the payment of dividends and for other cash requirements is largely dependent on the amount of dividends which may be declared by the Bank. However, because the Federal Reserve Board expects us to serve as a source of strength to the Bank, as discussed above, payment of dividends by the Bank may be restricted at any time at the discretion of the OCC if the OCC deems such dividends to constitute an unsafe and/or unsound banking practice. These provisions could have the effect of limiting our ability to pay dividends on our shares.

The Federal Reserve Board has issued a policy statement with regard to the payment of cash dividends by bank holding companies. The policy statement provides that, as a matter of prudent banking, a bank holding company should not maintain a rate of cash dividends unless its net income available to common shareholders has been sufficient to fully fund the dividends, and the prospective rate of earnings retention appears to be consistent with the bank holding company's capital needs, asset quality, and overall financial condition. Accordingly, a bank holding company should not pay cash dividends that exceed its net income or can only be funded in ways that weaken the bank holding company's financial health, such as by borrowing.

### The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act

The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act which implemented far-reaching changes to the regulation of the financial services industry, was signed into law in 2010. The Dodd-Frank Act requires various federal agencies to adopt a broad range of regulations with significant discretion. Although many of the regulations have been adopted, some still have not, and the effect they will have on us and our subsidiaries cannot currently be known. Among the provisions already implemented that have or may have an effect on us are the:

- formation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which has broad powers to adopt and enforce consumer protection regulations that would apply to all banks and thrifts;

- a federal law prohibiting the payment of interest on commercial demand deposit accounts was eliminated effective July 21, 2011;

- the standard maximum amount of deposit insurance per customer was permanently increased to \$250,000;

- the assessment base for determining deposit insurance premiums was expanded; and

- new capital regulations for bank holding companies, which impose stricter requirements as discussed below.

Additionally, we are still awaiting new corporate governance requirements under the Dodd-Frank Act that will be applicable generally to all public companies in all industries. These changes will require new compensation practices and disclosure requirements, including requiring companies to “claw back” incentive compensation under certain circumstances, to consider the independence of compensation advisors and to make additional disclosures in proxy statements with respect to compensation matters.

#### Regulatory Capital

Financial institutions and their holding companies are required to maintain capital as a way of absorbing losses that can, as well as losses that cannot, be predicted. The Federal Reserve Board has adopted risk-based capital guidelines for financial holding companies as well as state banks that are members of the Federal Reserve Bank. The OCC and the FDIC have adopted risk-based capital guidelines for national banks and state non-member banks, respectively. The guidelines provide a systematic



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

analytical framework that makes regulatory capital requirements sensitive to differences in risk profiles among banking organizations, takes off-balance sheet exposures expressly into account in evaluating capital adequacy and minimizes disincentives to holding liquid, low-risk assets. Capital levels as measured by these standards are also used to categorize financial institutions for purposes of certain prompt corrective action regulatory provisions.

Prior to January 1, 2015, the guidelines included a minimum for the ratio of total capital to risk-weighted assets of 8%, with at least half of the ratio composed of common shareholders' equity, minority interests in certain equity accounts of consolidated subsidiaries and a limited amount of qualifying preferred stock and qualified trust preferred securities, less goodwill and certain other intangible assets (known as "Tier 1" risk-based capital). The guidelines also provided for a minimum ratio of Tier 1 capital to average assets, or "leverage ratio," of 3% for financial holding companies and bank holding companies that meet certain criteria, including having the highest regulatory rating, and 4% for all other financial holding companies and bank holding companies.

The risk-based capital guidelines adopted by the federal banking agencies are based on the "International Convergence of Capital Measurement and Capital Standard" (Basel I), published by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (the Basel Committee) in 1988. In 2004, the Basel Committee published a new capital adequacy framework (Basel II) for large, internationally active banking organizations, and in December 2010 and January 2011, the Basel Committee issued an update to Basel II (Basel III). The Basel Committee frameworks did not become applicable to banks supervised in the United States until adopted into United States law or regulations. Although the United States banking regulators imposed some of the Basel II and Basel III rules on banks with \$250 billion or more in assets or \$10 billion of on-balance sheet foreign exposure, it was not until July 2013 that the United States banking regulators issued final (or, in the case of the FDIC, interim final) new capital rules applicable to smaller banking organizations which also implement certain of the provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act (the Basel III Capital Rules). Community banking organizations, including First Financial and the Bank, began transitioning to the new rules on January 1, 2015. The new minimum capital requirements became effective on January 1, 2015, whereas a new capital conservation buffer and deductions from common equity capital phase in from January 1, 2016, through January 1, 2019, and most deductions from common equity tier 1 capital will phase in from January 1, 2015, through January 1, 2019.

The new rules include (a) a new common equity tier 1 capital ratio of at least 4.5%, (b) a Tier 1 capital ratio of at least 6.0%, rather than the former 4.0%, (c) a minimum total capital ratio that remains at 8.0%, and (d) a minimum leverage ratio of 4%.

Common equity for the common equity tier 1 capital ratio includes common stock (plus related surplus) and retained earnings, plus limited amounts of minority interests in the form of common stock, less the majority of certain regulatory deductions.

Tier 1 capital includes common equity as defined for the common equity tier 1 capital ratio, plus certain non-cumulative preferred stock and related surplus, cumulative preferred stock and related surplus and trust preferred securities that have been grandfathered (but which are not permitted going forward), and limited amounts of minority interests in the form of additional Tier 1 capital instruments, less certain deductions.

Tier 2 capital, which can be included in the total capital ratio, includes certain capital instruments (such as subordinated debt) and limited amounts of the allowance for loan and lease losses, subject to new eligibility criteria, less applicable deductions.

The deductions from common equity tier 1 capital include goodwill and other intangibles, certain deferred tax assets, mortgage-servicing assets above certain levels, gains on sale in connection with a securitization, investments in a banking organization's own capital instruments and investments in the capital of unconsolidated financial institutions

(above certain levels). The deductions phase in from 2015 through 2019.

Under the guidelines, capital is compared to the relative risk related to the balance sheet. To derive the risk included in the balance sheet, one of several risk weights is applied to different balance sheet and off-balance sheet assets, primarily based on the relative credit risk of the counterparty. The capital amounts and classification are also subject to qualitative judgments by the regulators about components, risk weightings and other factors. Some of the risk weightings have been changed effective January 1, 2015.

The new rules also place restrictions on the payment of capital distributions, including dividends, and certain discretionary bonus payments to executive officers if the Company does not hold a capital conservation buffer of greater than 2.5% composed of common equity tier 1 capital above its minimum risk-based capital requirements, or if its eligible retained income is negative in that quarter and its capital conservation buffer ratio was less than 2.5% at the beginning of the quarter. The capital conservation buffer phases in starting on January 1, 2016, at 0.625%. The implementation of Basel III is not expected to have a material impact on the Company's or the Bank's capital ratios.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Effective January 1, 2015, in order to be “well-capitalized,” a bank must have a common equity tier 1 capital ratio of at least 6.5%, a total risk-based capital ratio of at least 10%, a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of at least 8% and a leverage ratio of at least 5%, and the bank must not be subject to any written agreement, order, capital directive or prompt corrective action directive to meet and maintain a specific capital level or any capital measure. The Company’s management believes that the Bank meets the ratio requirements to be deemed “well-capitalized” according to the guidelines described above.

### Executive and Incentive Compensation

In June 2010, the Federal Reserve Board, the OCC and the FDIC issued joint interagency guidance on incentive compensation policies (the Joint Guidance) intended to ensure that the incentive compensation policies of banking organizations do not undermine the safety and soundness of such organizations by encouraging excessive risk-taking. This principles-based guidance, which covers all employees that have the ability to materially affect the risk profile of an organization, either individually or as part of a group, is based upon the key principles that a banking organization’s 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.

Pursuant to the Joint Guidance, the Federal Reserve Board will review as part of a regular, risk-focused examination process, the incentive compensation arrangements of financial institutions such as us. These reviews will be tailored to each organization based on the scope and complexity of the organization’s activities and the prevalence of incentive compensation arrangements. The findings of the supervisory initiatives will be included in reports of examination and deficiencies will be incorporated into the institution’s supervisory ratings, which can affect the institution’s ability to make acquisitions and take other actions. Enforcement actions may be taken against an institution if its incentive compensation arrangements, or related risk-management control or governance processes, are considered a risk to the organization’s safety and soundness and prompt and effective measures are not being taken to correct the deficiencies.

On February 7, 2011, federal banking regulatory agencies jointly issued proposed rules on incentive-based compensation arrangements under applicable provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act (the Proposed Joint Rules). The Proposed Joint Rules generally apply to financial institutions with \$1 billion or more in assets that maintain incentive-based compensation arrangements for certain covered employees. The Proposed Joint Rules: (i) prohibit covered financial institutions from maintaining incentive-based compensation arrangements that encourage covered persons to expose the institution to inappropriate risk by providing the covered person with “excessive” compensation; (ii) prohibit covered financial institutions from establishing or maintaining incentive-based compensation arrangements for covered persons that encourage inappropriate risks that could lead to a material financial loss; (iii) require covered financial institutions to maintain policies and procedures appropriate to their size, complexity and use of incentive-based compensation to help ensure compliance with the Proposed Joint Rules; and (iv) require covered financial institutions to provide enhanced disclosure to regulators regarding their incentive-based compensation arrangements for covered persons within 90 days following the end of each fiscal year.

Pursuant to rules adopted by the stock exchanges and approved by the SEC in January 2013 under the Dodd-Frank Act, public company compensation committee members must meet heightened independence requirements and consider the independence of compensation consultants, legal counsel and other advisors to the compensation committee. A compensation committee must have the authority to hire advisors and to have the public company fund reasonable compensation of such advisors.

Public companies will be required, once stock exchanges impose additional listing requirements under the Dodd-Frank Act, to implement “clawback” procedures for incentive compensation payments and to disclose the details

of the procedures which allow recovery of incentive compensation that was paid on the basis of erroneous financial information necessitating a restatement due to material noncompliance with financial reporting requirements. This clawback policy is intended to apply to compensation paid within a three-year look-back window of the restatement and would cover all executives who received incentive awards.

#### Volcker Rule

In December 2013, five federal agencies adopted a final regulation implementing the so-called Volcker Rule provision of the Dodd-Frank Act (the Volcker Rule). The Volcker Rule places limits on the trading activity of insured depository institutions and entities affiliated with a depository institution, subject to certain exceptions. The trading activity includes a purchase or sale as principal of a security or a derivative, commodity future or option on a security in order to benefit from short-term price movements or to realize short-term profits. The Volcker Rule exempts specified U.S. Government, agency and/or municipal obligations, and it excepts trading conducted in certain capacities, including as a broker or other agent, through a deferred compensation or pension plan, as a fiduciary on behalf of customers, to satisfy a debt previously contracted, repurchase and

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

securities lending agreements and risk-mitigating hedging activities. The Volcker Rule also prohibits a banking entity from having an ownership interest in, or certain relationships with, a hedge fund or private equity fund, with a number of exceptions. The Bank from time to time may engage in trading activities or own the types of funds regulated by the Volcker Rule.

Transactions with Affiliates, Directors, Executive Officers and Shareholders

Sections 23A and 23B of the Federal Reserve Act and Federal Reserve Board Regulation W generally:

• limit the extent to which a bank or its subsidiaries may engage in “covered transactions” with any one affiliate;  
• limit the extent to which a bank or its subsidiaries may engage in “covered transactions” with all affiliates; and  
• require that all such transactions be on terms substantially the same, or at least as favorable to the bank or subsidiary, as those provided to a non-affiliate.

An affiliate of a bank is any company or entity which controls, is controlled by or is under common control with the bank. The term “covered transaction” includes the making of loans to the affiliate, the purchase of assets from the affiliate, the issuance of a guarantee on behalf of the affiliate, the purchase of securities issued by the affiliate and other similar types of transactions.

A bank’s authority to extend credit to executive officers, directors and greater than 10% shareholders, as well as entities such persons control, is subject to Sections 22(g) and 22(h) of the Federal Reserve Act and Regulation O promulgated thereunder by the Federal Reserve Board. Among other things, these loans must be made on terms (including interest rates charged and collateral required) substantially the same as those offered to unaffiliated individuals or be made as part of a benefit or compensation program and on terms widely available to employees, and must not involve a greater than normal risk of repayment. In addition, the amount of loans a bank may make to these persons is based, in part, on the bank’s capital position, and specified approval procedures must be followed in making loans which exceed specified amounts.

Patriot Act

In response to the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, the Uniting and Strengthening of America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (the Patriot Act) was signed into law in October 2001. The Patriot Act gives the United States government powers to address terrorist threats through enhanced domestic security measures, expanded surveillance powers, increased information sharing and broadened anti-money laundering requirements. Title III of the Patriot Act takes measures intended to encourage information sharing among bank regulatory agencies and law enforcement bodies. Further, certain provisions of Title III impose affirmative obligations on a broad range of financial institutions. Among other requirements, Title III and related regulations require regulated financial institutions to establish a program specifying procedures for obtaining identifying information from customers seeking to open new accounts and establish enhanced due diligence policies, procedures and controls designed to detect and report suspicious activity. The Bank has established policies and procedures that are believed to be compliant with the requirements of the Patriot Act.

Internet Website

We maintain a website with the address [www.bankatfirst.com](http://www.bankatfirst.com). The information contained on our website is not included as a part of, or incorporated by reference into, this Annual Report on Form 10-K. Other than an investor's own Internet access charges, we make available free of charge through our website our Annual Reports on Form 10-K, Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q and Current Reports on Form 8-K, and amendments to these reports, as soon as reasonably practicable after we have electronically filed such material with, or furnished such material to, the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Item 1A. Risk Factors.

The risks listed here are not the only risks we face. Additional risks that are not presently known, or that we presently deem to be immaterial, also could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition, results of operations, business, and prospects. (See also “Item 7. Management’s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations” for certain forward looking statements.)

Recent Market, Legislative, and Regulatory Events

Difficult market conditions adversely affect our industry.

Dramatic declines in the housing market in 2008 and 2009, with falling home prices and increasing foreclosures, unemployment and under-employment, negatively impacted the credit performance of real estate related loans and resulted in significant write-downs of asset values by financial institutions. These write-downs, initially of mortgage-backed securities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(MBS) but spreading to other securities and loans, caused many financial institutions to seek additional capital, to reduce or eliminate dividends, to merge with larger and stronger institutions and, in some cases, to fail. Reflecting concern about the stability of the financial markets generally and the strength of counterparties, many lenders and institutional investors reduced or ceased providing funding to borrowers, including to other financial institutions. This market turmoil and tightening of credit led to an increased level of commercial and consumer delinquencies, lack of consumer confidence, increased market volatility, and widespread reduction of business activity generally. The resulting economic pressure on consumers and lack of confidence in the financial markets adversely affected our business, financial condition, and results of operations and any similar economic conditions could have similar or worse consequences in the future. These types of market developments also may affect consumer confidence levels and may cause adverse changes in payment patterns, causing increases in delinquencies and default rates, which may impact our charge-offs and provision for credit and fraud losses.

Market volatility could have an adverse effect on our business.

The capital and credit markets may experience volatility and disruption. The markets could produce downward pressure on stock prices and credit availability for certain issuers without regard to their underlying financial strength. During times of market disruption and volatility, there can be no assurance that we will not experience an adverse effect, which may be material, on our ability to access capital and on our business, financial condition and results of operations. Numerous facts and circumstances are considered when evaluating the carrying value of our goodwill. One of those considerations is our market capitalization, evaluated over a reasonable period of time, in relation to the aggregate estimated fair value of the reporting units. While this comparison provides some relative market information regarding the estimated fair value of the reporting units, it is not determinative and needs to be evaluated in the context of the current economic and political environment. However, significant and/or sustained declines in First Financial's market capitalization, especially in relation to First Financial's book value, could be an indication of potential impairment of goodwill.

Europe's debt crisis could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and liquidity.

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.

The soundness of other financial institutions could adversely affect us.

Our ability to engage in routine funding transactions could be adversely affected by the actions and commercial soundness of other financial institutions. Financial services institutions are interrelated as a result of trading, clearing, counterparty, or other relationships. As a result, defaults by, or even rumors or questions about, one or more financial services institutions, or the financial services industry generally, have led in the past to market-wide liquidity problems and could in the future lead to losses or defaults by us or by other institutions. A default or threatened default of a large institution could negatively impact the entire financial system, and could expose us to credit risk in the event of default of our counterparty or client. In addition, our credit risk may be exacerbated when the collateral held by us cannot be realized upon or is liquidated at prices not sufficient to recover the full amount of the financial instrument exposure due us. There is no assurance that any such losses would not materially and adversely affect our results of operations.

Recently enacted and potential further financial regulatory reforms could have a significant impact on our business, financial condition and results of operations.

The Dodd-Frank Act has had and will continue to have a broad impact on the financial services industry, including significant regulatory and compliance changes. Many of the requirements called for in the Dodd-Frank Act will be implemented over time and the full extent of the impact such requirements will have on our operations is unclear. The changes resulting from the Dodd-Frank Act may impact the profitability of business activities, require changes to certain business practices, impose more stringent capital, liquidity and leverage requirements, or otherwise adversely affect our business. In particular, the potential impact of the Dodd-Frank Act on our operations and activities, both currently and prospectively, include, among others:

- a reduction in the ability to generate or originate revenue-producing assets as a result of compliance with heightened capital standards;

- increased cost of operations due to greater regulatory oversight, supervision and examination of banks and bank holding companies, and higher deposit insurance premiums;



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

a reduction in fee income due to limits on interchange fees applicable to larger institutions which could effectively reduce the fees we can charge; and

the limitation on the ability to expand consumer product and service offerings due to anticipated stricter consumer protection laws and regulations.

Further, we may be required to invest significant management attention and resources to evaluate and make any changes necessary to comply with new statutory and regulatory requirements under the Dodd-Frank Act, which may negatively impact results of operations and financial condition.

Additionally, we cannot predict whether there will be additional proposed laws or reforms that would affect the U.S. financial system or financial institutions, whether or when such changes may be adopted, how such changes may be interpreted and enforced or how such changes may affect us. However, the costs of complying with any additional laws or regulations could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.

The fiscal and monetary policies of the federal government and its agencies could have a material adverse effect on our earnings.

The Federal Reserve Board regulates the supply of money and credit in the United States. Its policies determine in large part the cost of funds for lending and investing and the returns earned on those loans and investments, both of which affect the net interest margin. The resultant changes in interest rates can also materially decrease the value of certain financial assets we hold, such as debt securities. Its policies can also adversely affect borrowers, potentially increasing the risk that they may fail to repay their loans. Changes in Federal Reserve Board policies are beyond our control and difficult to predict; consequently, the impact of these changes on our activities and results of operations is difficult to predict.

### Risks Relating to Our Business

When we loan money, commit to loan money or enter into a letter of credit or other contract with a counterparty, we incur credit risk, or the risk of losses if our borrowers do not repay their loans or our counterparties fail to perform according to the terms of their contracts.

As lending is one of our primary business activities, the credit quality of our portfolio can have a significant impact on our earnings. We estimate and establish reserves for credit risks and credit losses inherent in our total loan portfolio. This process, which is critical to our financial results and condition, requires difficult, subjective and complex judgments, including forecasts of economic conditions and how these economic predictions might impair the ability of our borrowers to repay their loans. As is the case with any such assessments, there is always the chance that we will fail to identify the proper factors or that we will fail to accurately estimate the impacts of factors that we identify. In addition, large loans, letters of credit and contracts with individual counterparties in our portfolio magnify the credit risk that we face, as the impact of large borrowers and counterparties not repaying their loans or performing according to the terms of their contracts has a disproportionately significant impact on our credit losses and reserves.

Weakness in the economy and in the real estate market, including specific weakness within our geographic footprint may adversely affect us, including requiring us to take additional loan loss provisions or to write down loans.

If the strength of the U.S. economy in general and the strength of the local economies in which we conduct operations decline, this could result in, among other things, a deterioration of credit quality or a reduced demand for credit, including a resultant effect on our loan portfolio and allowance for loan and lease losses. These factors could result in

higher delinquencies and greater charge-offs in future periods, which would materially and adversely affect our financial condition and results of operations.

There is no assurance that our non-impaired loans will not become impaired or that the impaired loans will not suffer further deterioration in value. The fluctuations in national, regional and local economic conditions, including those related to local residential, commercial real estate and construction markets, which may increase the level of charge-offs that we make to our loan portfolio, and, consequently, 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.

Weakness in the real estate market, including the secondary residential mortgage loan markets, could adversely affect us.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Disruptions in the secondary market for residential mortgage loans limit the market for and liquidity of many mortgage loans. The effects of mortgage market challenges, combined with reductions in residential real estate market prices and reduced levels of home sales, could adversely affect the value of collateral securing mortgage loans that we hold, mortgage loan originations, and profits on sales of mortgage loans. Such conditions could result in higher losses, write downs, and impairment charges in our mortgage and other lines of business. Declines in real estate values, home sale volumes, financial stress on borrowers as a result of job losses, interest rate resets on adjustable rate mortgage loans or other factors could have further adverse effects on borrowers that could result in higher delinquencies and greater charge-offs in future periods, which adversely affect our financial condition or results of operations. Additionally, decreases in real estate values might adversely affect the creditworthiness of state and local governments and this might result in decreased profitability or credit losses from loans made to such governments. A decline in home values or overall economic weakness could also have an adverse impact upon the value of real estate or other assets which we own upon foreclosing a loan and our ability to realize value on such assets.

Real estate volatility and future changes in our disposition strategies could result in net proceeds that differ significantly from our OREO fair value appraisals.

Our other real estate owned (OREO) portfolio consists of properties that we obtained through foreclosure or through an in-substance foreclosure in satisfaction of loans. Properties in our OREO portfolio are recorded at the lower of the recorded investment in the loans for which the properties previously served as collateral or the “fair value”, which represents the estimated sales price of the properties on the date acquired, less estimated selling costs. Generally, in determining “fair value” an orderly disposition of the property is assumed, except where a different disposition strategy is expected. Significant judgment is required in estimating the fair value of OREO, and the period of time within which such estimates can be considered current is significantly shortened during periods of market volatility.

In response to market conditions and other economic factors, we may utilize alternative sale strategies other than orderly disposition as part of our OREO disposition strategy, such as immediate liquidation sales. In this event, as a result of the significant judgments required in estimating fair value and the variables involved in different methods of disposition, the net proceeds realized from such sales transactions could differ significantly from appraisals, comparable sales, and other estimates used to determine the fair value of our OREO properties.

The information that we use in managing our credit risk may be inaccurate or incomplete, which may result in an increased risk of default and otherwise have an adverse effect on our business, results of operations and financial condition.

In deciding whether to extend credit or enter into other transactions with clients and counterparties, we may rely on information furnished by or on behalf of clients and counterparties, including financial statements and other financial information. We also may rely on representations of clients and counterparties as to the accuracy and completeness of that information and, with respect to financial statements, on reports of independent auditors. Although we regularly review our credit exposure to specific clients and counterparties and to specific industries that we believe may present credit concerns, default risk may arise from events or circumstances that are difficult to detect, such as fraud. Moreover, such circumstances, including fraud, may become more likely to occur and/or be detected in periods of general economic uncertainty. We may also fail to receive full information with respect to the risks of a counterparty. In addition, in cases where we have extended credit against collateral, we may find that we are under secured, for example, as a result of sudden declines in market values that reduce the value of collateral or due to fraud with respect to such collateral. If such events or circumstances were to occur, it could result in a potential loss of revenue and have an adverse effect on our business, results of operations and financial condition.

Declining values of real estate, increases in unemployment, and the related effects on local economies may increase our credit losses, which would negatively affect our financial results.

We offer a variety of secured loans, including commercial lines of credit, commercial term loans, real estate, construction, home equity, consumer and other loans. Many of our loans are secured by real estate (both residential and commercial) in our market area. A major change in the real estate market, such as deterioration in the value of this collateral, or in the local or national economy, could adversely affect our customer's ability to pay these loans, which in turn could adversely impact us. Additionally, increases in unemployment also may adversely affect the ability of certain clients to pay loans and the financial results of commercial clients in localities with higher unemployment, which may result in loan defaults and foreclosures and which may impair the value of our collateral. Loan defaults and foreclosures are unavoidable in the banking industry, and we try to limit our exposure to this risk by monitoring our extensions of credit carefully. We cannot fully eliminate credit risk, and as a result credit losses may increase in the future.

The overall economy, while showing signs of improvement, remains fragile. Deterioration in the quality of our credit portfolio could significantly increase nonperforming loans, require additional increases in loan loss reserves, elevate charge-off levels

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

and have a material adverse effect on our capital, financial condition, and results of operations. Furthermore, given the size of our loan portfolio, it is possible that deterioration in the credit quality of one or two of our largest credits could have a material adverse effect on our capital, financial condition, and results of operations.

Our allowance for loan and lease losses may prove to be insufficient to absorb losses in our loan portfolio.

Like all financial institutions, we maintain an allowance for loan and lease losses to provide for loans in our portfolio that may not be repaid in their entirety. We believe that our allowance for loan and lease losses is maintained at a level adequate to absorb probable losses inherent in our loan portfolio as of the corresponding balance sheet date. However, our allowance for loan and lease losses may not be sufficient to cover actual loan losses, and future provisions for loan losses could materially and adversely affect our operating results. The accounting measurements related to impairment and the allowance for loan and lease losses require significant estimates which are subject to uncertainty and change related to new information and changing circumstances. Our estimates of the risk of loss and amount of loss on any loan are complicated by the significant uncertainties surrounding our borrowers' abilities to successfully execute their business models through changing economic environments, competitive challenges and other factors. Because of the degree of uncertainty and susceptibility of these factors to change, our actual losses may vary from our current estimates.

Our regulators, as an integral part of their examination process, periodically review our allowance for loan and lease losses and may require us to increase our allowance for loan and lease losses by recognizing additional provisions for losses charged to expense, or to decrease our allowance for loan and lease losses by recognizing loan charge-offs, net of recoveries. Any such additional provisions for loan losses or charge-offs, as required by these regulatory agencies, could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.

Fluctuations in the allowance for loan and lease losses are not uncommon primarily as a result of changing economic conditions.

The introduction, implementation, withdrawal, success and timing of business initiatives and strategies, including, but not limited to, the opening of new banking centers or entering into new product lines, may be less successful or may be different than anticipated, which could adversely affect our business.

The Bank makes certain projections and develops plans and strategies for its banking and financial products. If we do not accurately determine demand for our banking and financial products, it could result in us incurring significant expenses without the anticipated increases in revenue, which could result in a material adverse effect on its our business.

Changes in market interest rates or capital markets could adversely affect our revenue and expense, the value of assets and obligations, and the availability and cost of capital or liquidity.

Given our business mix, and the fact that most of the assets and liabilities are financial in nature, we tend to be sensitive to market interest rate movements and the performance of the financial markets. In addition to the impact of the general economy, changes in interest rates or in valuations in the debt or equity markets could directly impact us in one or more of the following ways:

• the yield on earning assets and rates paid on interest bearing liabilities may change in disproportionate ways;

• the value of certain balance sheet and off-balance sheet financial instruments or the value of equity investments that we hold could decline;

the value of assets for which we provide processing services could decline;

the demand for loans and refinancings may decline, which could negatively impact income related to loan originations; or

to the extent we access capital markets to raise funds to support our business, such changes could affect the cost of such funds or the ability to raise such funds.

Although we have implemented procedures we believe will reduce the potential effects of changes in interest rates on our results of operations, these procedures may not always be successful. In addition, any substantial or prolonged change in market interest rates could adversely affect our financial condition, results of operation and liquidity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We may be required to repurchase mortgage loans or indemnify mortgage loan purchasers as a result of breaches of representations and warranties, borrower fraud, or certain borrower defaults, which could harm our liquidity, results of operations, and financial condition.

When we sell mortgage loans, whether as whole loans or pursuant to a securitization, we are required to make customary representations and warranties to the purchaser about the mortgage loans and the manner in which they were originated. Our whole loan sale agreements require us to repurchase or substitute mortgage loans in the event we breach any of these representations or warranties. In addition, we may be required to repurchase mortgage loans as a result of borrower fraud. Likewise, we are required to repurchase or substitute mortgage loans if we breach a representation or warranty in connection with our securitizations. While we have taken steps to enhance our underwriting policies and procedures, there can be no assurance that these steps will be effective or reduce risk associated with loans sold in the past. If the level of repurchase and indemnity activity becomes material, our liquidity, results of operations and financial condition will be adversely affected.

Clients could pursue alternatives to bank deposits, causing us to lose a relatively inexpensive source of funding.

Checking and savings account balances and other forms of client deposits could decrease if clients perceive alternative investments as providing superior expected returns. When clients move money out of bank deposits in favor of alternative investments, we can lose a relatively inexpensive source of funds, increasing our funding costs.

Consumers may decide not to use banks to complete their financial transactions, which could affect net income.

Technology and other changes now allow parties to complete financial transactions without banks. For example, consumers can pay bills and transfer funds directly without banks. This process could result in the loss of fee income, as well as the loss of client deposits and the income generated from those deposits, as well as increasing our funding costs.

Our asset management business subjects us to a variety of risks.

At December 31, 2014, we had \$2.4 billion in assets under management. A sharp decline in the stock market could negatively impact the amount of assets under management and thus subject our earnings to a broader variety of risks and uncertainties.

Negative public opinion could damage our reputation and adversely impact business and revenues.

As a financial institution, our earnings and capital are subject to risks associated with negative public opinion. Negative public opinion could result from our actual or alleged conduct in any number of activities, including lending practices, the failure of any product or service sold by us to meet our clients' expectations or applicable regulatory requirements, corporate governance and acquisitions, or from actions taken by government regulators and community organizations in response to those activities. Negative public opinion can adversely affect our ability to keep and attract and/or retain clients and can expose us to litigation and regulatory action. Actual or alleged misconduct by one of our businesses can result in negative public opinion about our other businesses. Negative public opinion could also affect our ability to borrow funds in the unsecured wholesale debt markets.

We rely on other companies to provide key components of our business infrastructure.

Third parties provide key components of our business infrastructure such as banking services, processing, and Internet connections and network access. Any disruption in such services provided by these third parties or any failure of these third parties to handle current or higher volumes of use could adversely affect our ability to deliver products and

services to clients and otherwise to conduct business. Technological or financial difficulties of a third party service provider could adversely affect our business to the extent those difficulties result in the interruption or discontinuation of services provided by that party. These vendors provide services that support our operations, including the storage and processing of sensitive consumer and business customer data, as well as our sales efforts. A cyber security breach of a vendor's system may result in theft of our data or disruption of business processes. A material breach of customer data security at a service provider's site may negatively impact our business reputation and cause a loss of customers, result in increased expense to contain the event and/or require that we provide credit monitoring services for affected customers, result in regulatory fines and sanctions, and may result in litigation. In most cases, we will remain primarily liable to our customers for losses arising from a breach of a vendor's data security system. We rely on our outsourced service providers to implement and maintain prudent cyber security controls. Furthermore, we may not be insured against all types of losses as a result of third party failures and our insurance coverage may be inadequate to cover all losses resulting from system failures or other disruptions. Failures in our business infrastructure could interrupt the operations or increase the costs of doing business.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We rely on our systems, employees, and certain counterparties, and certain failures, such as a security breach, could materially adversely affect our operations.

We are exposed to many types of operational risk, including the risk of fraud by employees and outsiders, clerical and record-keeping errors, and computer/telecommunications systems malfunctions. Our businesses are dependent on our ability to process a large number of increasingly complex transactions. If any of our financial, accounting, or other data processing systems fail or have other significant shortcomings, we could be materially adversely affected. A cyber security breach may result in theft of such data or disruption of our transaction processing systems. We depend on internal systems and outsourced technology to support these data storage and processing operations. Our inability to use or access these information systems at critical points in time could unfavorably impact the timeliness and efficiency of our business operations.

A material breach of customer data security may negatively impact our business reputation and cause a loss of customers, result in increased expense to contain the event and/or require that we provide credit monitoring services for affected customers, result in regulatory fines and sanctions, and may result in class action litigation. Cyber security risk management programs are expensive to maintain and will not protect us from all risks associated with maintaining the security of customer data and our proprietary data from external and internal intrusions, disaster recovery and failures in the controls used by our vendors. In addition, Congress and the legislatures of states in which we operate regularly consider legislation that would impose more stringent data privacy requirements.

We are similarly dependent on our employees. We could be materially adversely affected if one of our employees causes a significant operational break-down or failure, either as a result of human error or where an individual purposefully sabotages or fraudulently manipulates our operations or systems. Third parties with which we do business could also be sources of operational risk to us, including relating to break-downs or failures of such parties' own systems or employees.

Any of these occurrences could result in our diminished ability to operate one or more of our businesses, potential liability to clients, reputational damage and regulatory intervention, which could materially adversely affect us. We may also be subject to disruptions of our operating systems arising from events that are wholly or partially beyond our control, which may include, for example, computer viruses or electrical or telecommunications outages or natural disasters, or events arising from local or regional politics, including terrorist acts. Such disruptions may give rise to losses in service to clients and loss or liability to us. In addition there is the risk that our controls and procedures as well as business continuity and data security systems prove to be inadequate. Any such failure could affect our operations and could materially adversely affect our results of operations by requiring us to expend significant resources to correct the defect, as well as by exposing us to litigation or losses not covered by insurance.

### **We May Be Subject to General Claims and Litigation Liability.**

In the ordinary course of business, we may be named as defendant or may otherwise face claims or legal action, including class actions, from a variety of sources including, among others, customers, vendors, regulatory agencies, employees, federal, state or local governments. Such claims or legal action may include, among others, breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty, discrimination, harassment, fraud, and infringement of patents, copyrights or trademarks. Such claims or legal action may also make demands for substantial monetary damages and require substantial amounts of time and resources to defend. Should we be named as defendant or otherwise face such claims or legal actions, there can be no assurance that we would be successful in its defense against such actions, which could have a material adverse impact on our financial position, results of operations and liquidity. Additional information related to litigation is included in Note 6 to the consolidated financial statements and in Item 3, Part I of this Annual Report on Form 10-K.

Regulation by federal and state agencies could adversely affect the business, revenue, and profit margins.

We are heavily regulated by federal and state agencies. This regulation is to protect depositors, the federal deposit insurance fund and the banking system as a whole. Congress and state legislatures and federal and state regulatory agencies continually review banking laws, regulations, and policies for possible changes. Changes to statutes, regulations, or regulatory policies, including interpretation or implementation of statutes, regulations, or policies, could affect us adversely, including limiting the types of financial services and products we may offer and/or increasing the ability of non-banks to offer competing financial services and products. Also, if we do not comply with laws, regulations, or policies, we could receive regulatory sanctions and damage to our reputation.

Competition in the financial services industry is intense and could result in losing business or reducing margins.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We operate in a highly competitive industry that could become even more competitive as a result of legislative, regulatory and technological changes, and continued consolidation. We face aggressive competition from other domestic and foreign lending institutions and from numerous other providers of financial services. The ability of non-banking financial institutions to provide services previously limited to commercial banks has intensified competition. Because non-banking financial institutions are not subject to the same regulatory restrictions as banks and bank holding companies, they can often operate with greater flexibility and lower cost structures. Securities firms and insurance companies that elect to become financial holding companies may acquire banks and other financial institutions. This may significantly change the competitive environment in which we conduct business. Some of our competitors have greater financial resources and/or face fewer regulatory constraints. As a result of these various sources of competition, we could lose business to competitors or be forced to price products and services on less advantageous terms to retain or attract clients, either of which would adversely affect our profitability.

Future legislation could harm our competitive position.

Federal, state, and local legislatures increasingly have been considering proposals to substantially change the financial institution regulatory system and to expand or contract the powers of banking institutions and bank holding companies. Various legislative bodies have also recently been considering altering the existing framework governing creditors' rights, including legislation that would result in or allow loan modifications of various sorts. Such legislation may change banking statutes and the operating environment 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. We cannot predict whether new legislation will be enacted and, if enacted, the effect that it, or any regulations, would have on our activities, financial condition, or results of operations.

Maintaining or increasing market share depends on market acceptance and regulatory approval of new products and services.

Our success depends, in part, on our ability to adapt products and services to evolving industry standards. There is increasing pressure to provide products and services at lower prices. This can reduce net interest income and noninterest income from fee-based products and services. In addition, the widespread adoption of new technologies could require us to make substantial capital expenditures to modify or adapt existing products and services or develop new products and services. We may not be successful in introducing new products and services in response to industry trends or development in technology or those new products may not achieve market acceptance. As a result, we could lose business, be forced to price products and services on less advantageous terms to retain or attract clients, or be subject to cost increases.

We may not pay dividends on our common shares.

Holders of our common shares are only entitled to receive such dividends as our Board of Directors may declare out of funds legally available for such payments. Although we have historically declared cash dividends on our common shares, we are not required to do so and may reduce or eliminate our common share dividend in the future. Additionally, our funds to pay dividends rely in large part on dividends paid to us by the Bank, which are subject to regulatory restrictions in certain circumstances. A reduction in our dividend rate could adversely affect the market price of our common shares.

There may be future sales or other dilution of our equity, which may adversely affect the market price of our common shares.

Generally, we are not restricted from issuing additional common shares, including any securities that are convertible into or exchangeable for, or that represent the right to receive, common shares. We are currently authorized to issue up to 160 million common shares, of which 61,456,547 shares are outstanding at December 31, 2014. Our board of directors has authority, without action or vote of the shareholders, to issue all or part of the authorized but unissued shares, and our shareholders do not have preemptive rights to purchase newly issued shares. These authorized but unissued shares could be issued on terms or in circumstances that could dilute the interests of other shareholders.

The issuance of additional common shares as a result of the exercise of our outstanding warrants or the issuance of securities convertible or exercisable into common shares would dilute the ownership interest of our existing common shareholders. The market price of our common shares could decline as a result of an equity offering as well as other sales of a large block of common shares or similar securities in the market after this offering, or the perception that such sales could occur.

Our liquidity is dependent upon our ability to receive dividends from our subsidiaries, which accounts for most of our revenue and could affect our ability to pay dividends, and we may be unable to enhance liquidity from other sources.

We are a separate and distinct legal entity from our subsidiaries, notably First Financial Bank. We receive substantially all of our revenue from dividends from our subsidiaries. These dividends are the principal source of funds to pay dividends on our

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

common shares and interest and principal on our debt. Various federal and/or state laws and regulations limit or restrict the amount of dividends that the Bank and certain of our non-bank subsidiaries may pay us. Additionally, if our subsidiaries' earnings are not sufficient to make dividend payments to us while maintaining adequate capital levels, we may not be able to make dividend payments to our common shareholders.

To enhance liquidity, we may from time to time borrow under credit facilities or other indebtedness. Turbulence in the capital and credit markets may cause many lenders and institutional investors to reduce or cease to provide funding to borrowers and, as a result, we may not be able to further increase liquidity through additional borrowings.

Limitations on our ability to receive dividends from our subsidiaries or an inability to increase liquidity through additional borrowings, or inability to maintain, renew or replace existing credit facilities, could have a material adverse effect on our liquidity and on our ability to pay dividends on our common shares and interest and principal on our debt.

Our results of operations depend upon the results of operations of our subsidiaries.

We are a holding company that conducts substantially all of our operations through the Bank and other subsidiaries. As a result, our ability to make dividend payments on our common shares will depend primarily upon the receipt of dividends and other distributions from the Bank and our subsidiaries. There are various regulatory restrictions on the ability of the Bank to pay dividends or make other payments to us. As of the close of business on December 31, 2014, the Bank had \$35.1 million available to pay dividends to First Financial without prior regulatory approval.

Significant legal actions could subject us to substantial uninsured liabilities.

We are from time to time subject to claims related to our operations. These claims and legal actions, including supervisory actions by our regulators, could involve large monetary claims and significant defense costs. Substantial legal liability or significant regulatory action against us could have material adverse financial effects or cause significant reputational harm to us, which in turn could seriously harm our business prospects. We may be exposed to substantial uninsured liabilities, which could adversely affect our results of operations and financial condition.

If our regulators deem it appropriate, they can take regulatory actions that could impact our ability to compete for new business, constrain our ability to fund our liquidity needs, and increase the cost of our services.

First Financial and its subsidiaries are subject to the supervision and regulation of various State and Federal regulators, including the OCC, the Federal Reserve Board, the FDIC, SEC, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), and various state regulatory agencies. As such, we are subject to a wide variety of laws and regulations. As part of their supervisory process, which includes periodic examinations and continuous monitoring, the regulators have the authority to impose restrictions or conditions on our activities and the manner in which we manage the organization. These actions could impact the organization in a variety of ways, including subjecting us to monetary fines, restricting our ability to pay dividends, precluding mergers or acquisitions, limiting our ability to offer certain products or services, or imposing additional capital, operating, or oversight requirements.

Disruptions in our ability to access capital markets may negatively affect our capital resources and liquidity.

In managing our consolidated balance sheet, we depend on wholesale capital markets to provide us with sufficient capital resources and liquidity to meet our commitments and business needs, and to accommodate the transaction and cash management needs of our clients. Other sources of funding available to us, and upon which we rely as regular components of our liquidity risk management strategy, include inter-bank borrowings, repurchase agreements, and borrowings from the Federal Home Loan Bank system. Any occurrence that may limit our access to these sources,

such as a decline in the confidence of debt purchasers or our depositors or counterparties participating in the capital markets, may adversely affect our capital costs and our ability to raise capital and, in turn, our liquidity.

Management's ability to retain key officers and employees may change.

Our future operating results depend substantially upon the continued service of our executive officers and key personnel. Our future operating results also depend in significant part upon our ability to attract and retain qualified management, lending, financial, technical, marketing, sales, and support personnel. Competition for qualified personnel is intense and we cannot ensure success in attracting or retaining qualified personnel. There may be only a limited number of persons with the requisite skills to serve in these positions, and it may be increasingly difficult for us to hire personnel over time.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our ability to retain key officers and employees may be further impacted by legislation and regulation affecting the financial services industry. For example, legislation and bank regulatory action that places restrictions on executive compensation at, and the pay practices of, financial institutions may further impact management's ability to compete for talent with other industries that are not subject to the same limitations as financial institutions.

Our business, financial condition, or results of operations could be materially adversely affected by the loss of any of its key employees, or our inability to attract and retain skilled employees.

Potential acquisitions may disrupt our business and dilute shareholder value and we may not be able to successfully consummate or integrate such acquisitions.

Acquiring other banks, businesses, or branches involves various risks commonly associated with acquisitions, including, among other things:

- potential exposure to unknown or contingent liabilities of the target company;
- exposure to potential asset quality issues of the target company;
- difficulty and expense of integrating the operations and personnel of the target company;
- difficulty or added costs in the wind-down of non-strategic operations;
- potential disruption to our business;
- potential diversion of our management's time and attention;
- the possible loss of key employees and customers of the target company;
- difficulty in estimating the value (including goodwill) of the target company;
- difficulty in receiving appropriate regulatory approval for any proposed transaction;
- difficulty in estimating the fair value of acquired assets, liabilities and derivatives of the target company; and
- potential changes in accounting, banking, or tax laws or regulations that may affect the target company.

We regularly evaluate merger and acquisition opportunities and conduct due diligence activities related to possible transactions with other financial institutions and financial services companies. As a result, merger or acquisition discussions and, in some cases, negotiations may take place and future mergers or acquisitions involving cash, debt or equity securities may occur at any time. Acquisitions could involve the payment of a premium over book and market values, and, therefore, some dilution of our tangible book value and net income per common share may occur in connection with any future transaction.

Any merger or acquisition opportunity that we decide to pursue will ultimately be subject to regulatory approval and other closing conditions. We may expend substantial time and resources pursuing potential acquisitions which may not be consummated because regulatory approval is not received or other closing conditions are not satisfied. In addition, our existing credit facility and the terms of other indebtedness that we may subsequently incur may restrict our ability to consummate certain acquisitions. Additionally, the banking regulators and applicable regulations may

restrict our ability to engage in acquisitions under certain circumstances. Furthermore, any difficulty integrating businesses acquired as a result of a merger or acquisition and the failure to realize the expected revenue increases, cost savings, increases in geographic or product presence, and/or other projected benefits from an acquisition could have an adverse impact on our liquidity, results of operations, and financial condition and any such integration could divert management's time and attention from managing our company in an effective manner and could be significantly more expensive than we anticipate.

Our accounting policies and processes are critical to how we report our financial condition and results of operations. They require management to make estimates about matters that are uncertain.

Accounting policies and processes are fundamental to how we record and report the financial condition and results of operations. Management must exercise judgment in selecting and applying many of these accounting policies and processes so they comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles in the United States (GAAP).



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Management has identified certain accounting policies as being critical because they require management's judgment to ascertain the valuations of assets, liabilities, commitments, and contingencies. A variety of factors could affect the ultimate valuation that is made either when recording income, recognizing an expense, recovering an asset, valuing an asset or liability, or reducing a liability. We have established detailed policies and control procedures that are intended to ensure these critical accounting estimates and judgments are well controlled and applied consistently. In addition, the policies and procedures are intended to ensure that the process for changing methodologies occurs in an appropriate manner. Because of the uncertainty surrounding our judgments and the estimates pertaining to these matters, we cannot guarantee that we will not be required to adjust accounting policies or restate prior period financial statements.

See the "Critical Accounting Policies" in the MD&A and Note 1, "Summary Of Significant Accounting Policies," to the Consolidated Financial Statements, in our Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2014 for more information.

Changes in our accounting policies or in accounting standards could materially affect how we report our financial results and condition.

From time to time, the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and SEC change the financial accounting and reporting standards that govern the preparation of our financial statements. These changes can be hard to predict and can materially impact how we record and report our financial condition and results of operations. In some cases, we could be required to apply a new or revised standard retroactively, resulting in us restating prior period financial statements.

Our disclosure controls and procedures may not prevent or detect all errors or acts of fraud.

Our disclosure controls and procedures are designed to reasonably assure that information required to be disclosed by us in reports we file or submit under the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 (Exchange Act) is accurately accumulated and communicated to management, and recorded, processed, summarized, and reported within the time periods specified in the SEC's rules and forms. We believe that any disclosure controls and procedures or internal controls and procedures, no matter how well conceived and operated, can provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance that the objectives of the control system are met.

These inherent limitations include the realities that judgments in decision-making can be faulty, that alternative reasoned judgments can be drawn, or that breakdowns can occur because of a simple error or mistake. Additionally, controls can be circumvented by the individual acts of some persons, by collusion of two or more people or by an unauthorized override of the controls. Accordingly, because of the inherent limitations in our control system, misstatements due to error or fraud may occur and not be detected.

Our financial instruments carried at fair value expose us to certain market risks.

We maintain an available for sale investment securities portfolio which includes assets with various types of instruments and maturities. At times, we also maintain certain assets that are classified and accounted for as trading assets. The changes in fair value of the available for sale securities are recognized in shareholders' equity as a component of other comprehensive income. The changes in fair value of financial instruments classified as trading assets are carried at fair value and recognized in earnings. The fair value of financial instruments carried at fair value is exposed to market risks related to changes in interest rates and market liquidity. We manage the market risks associated with these instruments through broad asset/liability management strategies. Changes in the market values of these financial instruments could have a material adverse impact on our financial condition or results of operations.

We may classify additional financial assets or financial liabilities at fair value in the future.

Our revenues derived from our investment securities may be volatile and subject to a variety of risks.

We generally maintain investment securities and trading positions in the fixed income markets. Unrealized gains and losses associated with our investment portfolio and mark to market gains and losses associated with our trading portfolio are affected by many factors, including our credit position, interest rate volatility, volatility in capital markets, and other economic factors. Our return on such investments could experience volatility and such volatility may materially adversely affect our financial condition and results of operations. Additionally, accounting regulations may require us to record a charge prior to the actual realization of a loss when market valuations of such securities are impaired and such impairment is considered to be other than temporary.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

We are subject to ongoing tax examinations in various jurisdictions. The Internal Revenue Service and other taxing jurisdictions may propose various adjustments to our previously filed tax returns. It is possible that the ultimate resolution of such proposed adjustments, if unfavorable, may be material to the results of operations in the period it occurs.

In the ordinary course of business, we operate in various taxing jurisdictions and are subject to income and non-income taxes. The effective tax rate is based in part on our interpretation of the relevant current tax laws. We believe the aggregate liabilities related to taxes are appropriately reflected in our consolidated financial statements. We review the appropriate tax treatment of all transactions taking into consideration statutory, judicial, and regulatory guidance in the context of our tax positions. In addition, we rely on various tax opinions, recent tax audits, and historical experience.

From time to time, we engage in business transactions that may have an effect on our tax liabilities. Where appropriate, we have obtained opinions of outside experts and have assessed the relative merits and risks of the appropriate tax treatment of business transactions taking into account statutory, judicial, and regulatory guidance in the context of the tax position. However, changes to our estimates of accrued taxes can occur due to changes in tax rates, implementation of new business strategies, resolution of issues with taxing authorities regarding previously taken tax positions prior to acquisition and newly enacted statutory, judicial, and regulatory guidance. Such changes could affect the amount of our accrued taxes and could be material to our financial position and/or results of operations. In addition, the tax treatment of FDIC-assisted acquisitions is complex and subject to interpretations that may result in future adjustments of deferred taxes as of the acquisition dates.

In the event the Internal Revenue Service, State of Ohio, or other state tax officials propose adjustments to our previously filed tax returns (or those of our subsidiaries), it is possible that the ultimate resolution of the proposed adjustments, if unfavorable, may be material to the results of operations in the period it occurs.

Changes in tax laws could adversely affect our performance.

We are subject to extensive federal, state and local taxes, including income, excise, sales/use, payroll, franchise, withholding and ad valorem taxes. Changes to our taxes could have a material adverse effect on our results of operations. In addition, our customers are subject to a wide variety of federal, state and local taxes. Changes in taxes paid by our customers may adversely affect their ability to purchase homes or consumer products, which could adversely affect their demand for our loans and deposit products. In addition, such negative effects on our customers could result in defaults on the loans we have made and decrease the value of mortgage-backed securities in which we have invested.

The benefits of our FDIC loss-sharing agreements may be reduced or eliminated.

In connection with the Bank's assumption of the banking operations of Peoples, Irwin Union Bank and Irwin FSB, the Bank and the FDIC entered into Whole Bank Purchase and Assumption Agreements with Loss-Share. Our decisions regarding the fair value of assets acquired, including the FDIC loss-sharing assets, could be inaccurate which could materially and adversely affect our business, financial condition, results of operations, and future prospects. Management makes various assumptions and judgments about the collectibility of the acquired loans, including the creditworthiness of borrowers and the value of the real estate and other assets serving as collateral for the repayment of secured loans. In FDIC-assisted acquisitions that include loss-sharing agreements, we record a loss-sharing asset that reflects our estimate of the timing and amount of future losses that are anticipated to occur in, and used to value, the acquired loan portfolio. In determining the size of the loss-sharing asset, we analyze the loan portfolio based on historical loss experience, volume and classification of loans, volume and trends in delinquencies and nonaccruals, local economic conditions, and other pertinent information.

If our assumptions relating to the timing or amount of expected losses are incorrect, there could be a negative impact on our operating results. Increases in the amount of future losses in response to different economic conditions or adverse developments in the acquired loan portfolio may result in increased credit loss provisions. Changes in our estimate of the timing of those losses, specifically if those losses are to occur beyond the applicable loss-sharing periods, may result in impairments of the FDIC indemnification asset.

Under the Purchase and Assumption Agreements, loss-sharing coverage for loans that are not single family residential loans expired in 2014. Loss-sharing coverage for single family residential loans will expire ten years from each respective acquisition date.

Item 1B. Unresolved Staff Comments.

None.

20

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item 2. Properties.

At December 31, 2014, the Company operates from 106 banking centers. Our strategic operating markets are located within the three state regions of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, where we operate 61 banking centers located in Ohio, as well as First Financial's executive office in Cincinnati, Ohio; 41 banking centers located in Indiana; and four banking centers located in Kentucky.

Item 3. Legal Proceedings.

We are from time to time engaged in various matters of litigation assertions of improper or fraudulent loan practices or lending violations, and other matters, and we have a number of unresolved claims pending. In addition, as part of the ordinary course of business, we are parties to litigation involving claims to the ownership of funds in particular accounts, the collection of delinquent accounts, challenges to security interests in collateral, and foreclosure interests, that are incidental to our regular business activities. While the ultimate liability with respect to these other litigation matters and claims cannot be determined at this time, we believe that damages, if any, and other amounts relating to pending matters are not likely to be material to our consolidated financial position or results of operations, except as described above. Reserves are established for these various matters of litigation, when appropriate under FASB ASC Topic 450, Contingencies, based in part upon the advice of legal counsel.

On at least a quarterly basis, First Financial assesses its liabilities and contingencies in connection with outstanding legal proceedings utilizing the latest information available. For those matters where it is probable that First Financial will incur a loss and the amount of the loss can be reasonably estimated, First Financial records a liability in its consolidated financial statements. These legal reserves may be increased or decreased to reflect any relevant developments on a quarterly basis. For other matters, where a loss is not probable or the amount of the loss is not estimable, First Financial has not accrued legal reserves. While the outcome of legal proceedings is inherently uncertain, based on information currently available, advice of counsel and available insurance coverage, First Financial's management believes that its established legal reserves are currently adequate. However, in the event of unexpected future developments, it is possible that the ultimate resolution of these matters, if unfavorable, may be material to First Financial's consolidated financial position, consolidated results of operations or consolidated cash flows.

Item 4. Mine Safety Disclosures.

Not applicable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Supplemental Item. Executive Officers of the Registrant.

The following table sets forth information concerning the executive officers of First Financial as of February 10, 2015. The executive officers are either officers of First Financial or officers of a subsidiary of First Financial, as indicated in the below table, who perform policy-making functions for First Financial. The officers are elected annually at the organizational meetings of the boards of directors of their respective affiliates and serve until the next organizational meeting, or until their successors are elected and duly qualified.

	Position with First Financial Bancorp	Position with First Financial Bank	Age
Claude E. Davis	Chief Executive Officer	Chief Executive Officer	54
Anthony M. Stollings	President, Chief Operating Officer	Chief Operating Officer	60
John M. Gavigan	Chief Financial Officer and Principal Accounting Officer	Chief Financial Officer and Principal Accounting Officer	36
Matthew B. Burgess	Chief Internal Auditor	Chief Internal Auditor	55
Holly M. Foster	Chief Compliance Officer	Chief Compliance Officer	38
Shannon M. Kuhl	Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary	Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary	44
Alisa E. Poe	Chief of Staff and Chief Talent Officer	Chief of Staff and Chief Talent Officer	53
William J. Sorg	Chief Risk Officer	Chief Risk Officer	41
Richard Barbercheck		Chief Credit Officer	57
Kevin T. Langford		President, Community Banking	47
C. Douglas Lefferson		President, Community Banking	50
Bradley J. Ringwald		President, Specialty Banking	41
Jill A. Stanton		President, Mortgage Banking	52

The following is a brief description of the business experience over the past five years of the individuals named above.

Claude E. Davis — Claude Davis has held the position of Chief Executive Officer of both First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank since October 1, 2004. He has served on the board of directors of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank since October 1, 2004 and also has been Chairman of the Board of Directors of First Financial Bank since October 1, 2004. From October 1, 2004 until December 1, 2014, Mr. Davis held the title of President First Financial Bancorp. From October 1, 2004 until August 20, 2013, Mr. Davis held the title of President of First Financial Bank. Prior to joining First Financial, Mr. Davis spent 17 years with Irwin Financial Corporation in various executive positions.

Anthony M. Stollings — Anthony Stollings presently holds the title of President and Chief Operating Officer of First Financial Bancorp and Chief Operating Officer of First Financial Bank following his appointment to these positions in December 2014. He served as the Chief Financial Officer of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from January 2013

22

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

through November 2014. Mr. Stollings also served as the Chief Risk Officer of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from September 2011 through January 2013. Mr. Stollings served as the Chief Accounting Officer of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from his hire in December 2006 until September 2011. He previously spent 13 years with Provident Financial Group, Inc., a commercial banking and financial services company headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he was the Senior Vice President, Chief Accounting Officer and Controller from 2002 to 2004 and Senior Vice President and Controller from 1998 to 2002.

John M. Gavigan — John Gavigan was appointed Chief Financial Officer of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank in December 2014, where he is responsible for the Company's Finance, Accounting, Treasury and Investor Relations areas. He previously served as Corporate Controller from 2011 through 2014 and as Assistant Controller from 2008 through 2011. Mr. Gavigan is a certified public accountant (inactive).

Matthew B. Burgess — Matt Burgess is the Chief Internal Auditor of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank, a role he has held since joining First Financial in October 2011. Before joining First Financial, he was the Internal Audit Leader for GE Capital Retail Bank from 2010 until October 2011 and an Audit Director of Ally Financial Services from 2007 through 2009. Mr. Burgess is a certified public accountant, certified internal auditor (CIA), and certified information systems auditor (CISA).

Holly M. Foster — Holly Foster was appointed the Chief Compliance Officer of each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank in December 2014. Before her current role, she served as the Chief Risk Officer for each of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from February 2013 until December 2014. Ms. Foster served as Operational Risk Director from 2010 until 2013 and as Compliance Officer and Regulatory Risk Manager from 2006 until 2010. She has been employed with the company since 1999.

Shannon M. Kuhl — Shannon Kuhl was appointed the Chief Legal Officer of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank effective November 2013. She served as Chief Bank Counsel from August 2013 until November 2013. Ms. Kuhl served as Associate General Counsel from her hire in 2006 until August 2013.

Alisa E. Poe — Alisa Poe presently holds the positions of Chief Talent Officer, to which she was appointed in April 2010, and Chief of Staff, to which she was appointed in January 2014. She holds these positions for both First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank. Ms. Poe joined the company in September 2009 as Chief Human Resources Officer. Prior to joining First Financial, Ms. Poe was employed by The Midland Company and Structural Dynamics Research Corporation where she held various leadership roles in human resources, compensation and benefit management and corporate administration. Ms. Poe has over 25 years of experience in the human resources profession.

William J. Sorg — William "Skip" Sorg was appointed as the Chief Risk Officer of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank effective December 1, 2014. He previously served as the First Vice President of Financial Planning and Balance Sheet Management from April 2013 through November 2014. Mr. Sorg joined First Financial in October 2009 as the Vice President of Asset Liability Management, a position he held through March 2013.

Richard Barbercheck — Richard Barbercheck was appointed to the position of Chief Credit Officer in July 2006. He first joined First Financial in 2005 as the Chief Risk Officer. Prior to joining First Financial, Mr. Barbercheck oversaw the Credit Risk Evaluation Group at Irwin Financial Corporation. Earlier in his career he served at several banks in executive-level positions located in southern Indiana. Mr. Barbercheck has over 33 years of banking experience with a predominance of experience in the commercial lending and credit administration areas.

Kevin T. Langford — Kevin Langford presently holds the position of President, Community Banking of First Financial Bank. He was appointed to this position effective December 2014 and focuses his attention on First Financial's Indiana



operations. Mr. Langford served as President, Western Markets and President, Consumer Banking from September 2013 until December 2014. He served as the Chief Administrative Officer of First Financial from April 2011 until September 2013. Mr. Langford joined First Financial in January 2006 as the Chief Information Officer.

C. Douglas Lefferson — Doug Lefferson presently holds the position of President, Community Banking of First Financial Bank. He was appointed to this position effective December 2014 and focuses his attention on First Financial's Ohio and Kentucky operations. Mr. Lefferson previously served as President, Eastern Markets effective January 2014 until December 2014 and as President, Commercial Banking and Wealth Management from September 2013 until January 2014. He served as the Chief Banking Officer of First Financial Bank from November 2010 until September 2013. Mr. Lefferson also previously served as the Chief Operating Officer of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from April 2005 until November 2010 and as the Chief Financial Officer of First Financial Bancorp and First Financial Bank from January 2002 until April

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2005. Mr. Lefferson joined First Financial in 1986 and has spent his entire banking career in various positions within the company.

Bradley J. Ringwald — Mr. Ringwald was appointed President, Specialty Banking of First Financial Bank in July 2014. In this role, he is responsible for business capital lending, equipment financing and franchise lending. Prior to his current role, he was the President of Corporate Banking from September 2013 until July 2014, the Commercial and Industrial Lending Product Manager from July 2011 to September 2013, and the Senior Vice President of Commercial and Industrial Lending from February 2010 to July 2011. Mr. Ringwald first joined First Financial in 2006 as the Special Assets Manager. Prior to joining First Financial Bank, he held positions in special assets and asset based lending at several regional financial institutions. Mr. Ringwald has over 19 years of commercial banking experience and is a certified public accountant (inactive).

Jill A. Stanton — Jill Stanton presently serves as the President, Mortgage Banking, a position she has held since September 2013. She previously served as the Co-Chief Retail Banking Officer from June 2010 until September 2013. Ms. Stanton joined First Financial as the Senior Vice President of Retail and Small Business Lending in 2008. Prior to joining First Financial, she served as Senior Vice President at Irwin Union Bank and Trust Company, Columbus, Indiana. Ms. Stanton has over 25 years of experience within the financial services industry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART II

Item 5. Market for Registrant's Common Equity, Related Stockholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities.

(a) Market information, holders, dividends

First Financial's common shares are listed on The NASDAQ Global Select Stock Market® under the symbol "FFBC". The information contained in the "Quarterly Financial And Common Stock Data" in First Financial's Annual Report to Shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2014 with respect to our stock price and dividends, is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

As of February 23, 2015, our common stock was held by approximately 2,736 shareholders of record, a number that does not include beneficial owners who hold shares in "street name", or shareholders from previously acquired companies that have not exchanged their stock. At December 31, 2014, a total of 413,126 stock options and 494,452 shares of restricted stock were outstanding. Additional information about stock options, restricted stock and restricted stock units is included in Note 17 of the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report and in Item 12 below.

The payment of future cash dividends is at the discretion of our Board and subject to a number of factors, including results of operations, general business conditions, growth, financial condition and other factors deemed relevant by the Board of Directors. Further, our ability to pay future cash dividends is subject to certain regulatory requirements and restrictions discussed in the Supervision and Regulation section in Item 1 above. For further information see Note 3 of the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements of First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), which is incorporated by reference in response to this item.

We have a dividend reinvestment plan that permits shareholder participants to purchase shares at the then-current market price in lieu of the receipt of cash dividends. Shares issued in connection with the dividend reinvestment plan are purchased in open market transactions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Equity Compensation Plan Information

The following table sets forth information as of December 31, 2014 with respect to compensation plans under which of our common shares may be issued:

## Securities authorized for issuance under equity compensation plans

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 (excluding securities reflected in column (a))
	(a)	(b)	(c) (1)
Equity compensation plans approved by security holders	413,126	\$14.32	1,276,243
Equity compensation plans not approved by security holders	N/A	N/A	N/A

The securities included in this column are available for issuance under the First Financial Bancorp. 2012 Stock Plan (2012 Plan), 2009 Employee Stock Plan (Stock Plan), Amended and Restated 2009 Non-Employee Director Stock Plan (Director Plan), 1999 Stock Option Plan for Non-Employee Directors (1999 Directors Plan) and the 1999 Stock Incentive Plan for Officers and Employees (Incentive Plan). All five plans include provisions regarding adjustments to the number of securities available for future issuance under the respective plans in the event of a merger, reorganization, consolidation, recapitalization, reclassification, split-up, spin-off, separation, liquidation, stock dividend, stock split, reverse stock split, property dividend, share repurchase, share combination, share exchange, issuance of warrants, rights or debentures or other change in corporate structure of First Financial affecting First Financial's common shares. In any of the foregoing events, the Director Plan permits the Board of Directors and the Incentive Plan permits the Board of Directors or the Compensation Committee to make such substitution or adjustments in the aggregate number and kind of shares available for issuance under the respective plans as the Board of Directors (or, in the cases of the Stock Plan and the Incentive Plan, the Compensation Committee) may determine to be appropriate in its sole discretion. Of the securities reported in column (c) 7,371 are available for future issuance under the Director Plan and 1,268,872 are available under the 2012 Plan.

N/A - Not applicable.

## Stock Performance Graph

The stock performance graph contained in "Total Return to Shareholders" of First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

## (b) Unregistered Sales of Equity Securities and Use of Proceeds

Not applicable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(c) The following table shows the total number of shares repurchased in the fourth quarter of 2014.

## Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities

Period	(a) Total Number of Shares Purchased <sup>(1)</sup>	(b) Average Price Paid Per Share	(c) Total Number of Shares Purchased as Part of Publicly Announced Plans <sup>(2)</sup>	(d) Maximum Number of Shares that may yet be purchased Under the Plans
October 1 to October 31, 2014				
Share repurchase program	0	\$0.00	0	3,749,100
Director Fee Stock Plan	0	0.00	N/A	N/A
Stock Plans	0	0.00	N/A	N/A
November 1 to November 30, 2014				
Share repurchase program	0	\$0.00	0	3,749,100
Director Fee Stock Plan	0	0.00	N/A	N/A
Stock Plans	48,862	18.05	N/A	N/A
December 1 to December 31, 2014				
Share repurchase program	0	\$0.00	0	3,749,100
Director Fee Stock Plan	0	0.00	N/A	N/A
Stock Plans	225,709	18.57	N/A	N/A
Total				
Share repurchase program	0	\$0.00	0	
Director Fee Stock Plan	0	\$0.00	N/A	
Stock Plans	274,571	\$18.48	N/A	

Except with respect to the share repurchase program, the number of shares purchased in column (a) and the average price paid per share in column (b) include the purchase of shares other than through publicly announced plans. The shares purchased other than through publicly announced plans were purchased pursuant to First Financial's Director Fee Stock Plan, 1999 Stock Option Plan for Non-Employee Directors, 1999 Stock Incentive Plan for Officers and Employees, 2009 Employee Stock Plan, Amended and Restated 2009 Non-Employee Director Stock Plan and 2012 Stock Plan (the last five plans are referred to hereafter as the Stock Plans). The table shows the number of shares purchased pursuant to those plans and the average price paid per share. Purchases for the Director Fee Stock Plan were made in open-market transactions directly for each director's account. Under the Stock Plans, shares were purchased from plan participants at the then current market value in satisfaction of stock option exercise prices.

First Financial has one remaining previously announced stock repurchase plan under which it is currently authorized to purchase shares of its common stock. The plan has no expiration date. The table that follows provides additional information regarding this plan.

Announcement Date	Total Shares Approved for Repurchase	Total Shares Repurchased Under The Plan	Expiration Date
10/25/2012	5,000,000	1,250,900	None

Item 6. Selected Financial Data.

The information contained in Table 1 of the Management's Discussion and Analysis section of First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item 7. Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results Of Operations.

The information contained in the Management's Discussion and Analysis section (including certain forward looking statements) of First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report) is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

Item 7A. Quantitative and Qualitative Disclosure About Market Risk.

The information contained in the Market Risk section and in Table 15-Market Risk Disclosure of the Management's Discussion and Analysis section in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

Item 8. Financial Statements and Supplementary Data.

The consolidated financial statements and the reports of our independent registered public accounting firm included in the Consolidated Financial Statements and the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), are incorporated herein by reference.

The Quarterly Financial and Common Stock Data at the end of the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), is incorporated herein by reference.

Item 9. Changes in and Disagreements with Accountants on Accounting and Financial Disclosure.

None.

Item 9A. Controls and Procedures.

Evaluation of Disclosure Controls and Procedures

Management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective disclosure controls and procedures, as defined under Rule 13a-15 of the Exchange Act that are designed to cause the material information required to be disclosed by First Financial in the reports it files or submits under the Exchange Act to be recorded, processed, summarized, and reported to the extent applicable within the time periods required by the Securities and Exchange Commission's rules and forms (the disclosure controls and procedures). In designing and evaluating the disclosure controls and procedures, management recognizes that a control system, no matter how well designed and operated, can provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurance that the objectives of the control system are met. Because of the inherent limitations in all control systems, no evaluation of controls can provide absolute assurance that all control issues and instances of fraud, if any, within a company have been detected.

First Financial's chief executive officer and chief financial officer, together with other members of senior management, have evaluated the disclosure controls and procedures as of the end of the period covered by this report. Based upon that evaluation, First Financial's chief executive officer and chief financial officer have concluded that the disclosure controls and procedures are effective (i) to ensure that material information relating to First Financial, including its consolidated subsidiaries, is communicated to them on a timely basis, and (ii) to accomplish the purposes for which they were designed.

Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

Management's Report On Internal Control Over Financial Reporting and the Report Of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm included in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report), are incorporated herein by reference.

Changes in Internal Controls

First Financial maintains a system of internal accounting controls, which includes internal control over financial reporting, that is designed to provide reasonable assurance that First Financial's financial records can be relied upon for preparation of its financial statements and that its assets are safeguarded against loss from unauthorized use or

disposition. There were no changes in First Financial's internal control over financial reporting that have materially affected, or are reasonably likely to materially affect, First Financial's internal control over financial reporting during the year ended December 31, 2014.

Item 9B. Other Information.

Effective February 20, 2015, First Financial entered into an Agreement for Stock Award between First Financial and Claude E. Davis, Chief Executive Officer of First Financial, relating to the award of shares to Mr. Davis pursuant to the Key Executive Short Term Incentive Plan approved by shareholders at the Annual Meeting of Shareholders on May 24, 2011.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART III

Item 10. Directors, Executive Officers and Corporate Governance.

Certain information concerning executive officers of First Financial has been supplied in the “Supplemental Item. Executive Officers of the Registrant” of this Form 10-K. Information appearing under “Election of Directors,” “Corporate Governance - Board Committees,” “Compliance with Section 16(a) of the Exchange Act,” and “Shareholder Nominations for Election to the Board” of First Financial's Definitive Proxy Statement with respect to the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on

May 26, 2015, and which is expected to be filed with the SEC, pursuant to Regulation 14A of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (First Financial's Proxy Statement) within 120 days of the close of our fiscal year, is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

First Financial has adopted a code of ethics, the First Financial Bancorp. Code of Conduct, which applies to First Financial's directors, officers and employees. In addition, the Company maintains a Code of Ethics for the CEO and Senior Financial Officers. Both documents are available through First Financial's website, [www.bankatfirst.com](http://www.bankatfirst.com) under the “Investor Information” link, under “Corporate Governance.”

Item 11. Executive Compensation.

The information appearing under the headings “Meetings of the Board of Directors and Committees of the Board,” “Compensation Discussion and Analysis,” “Executive Compensation,” “Compensation Committee Interlocks and Insider Participation,” and “Compensation Committee Report” in First Financial's Proxy Statement is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

Item 12. Security Ownership of Certain Beneficial Owners and Management and Related Stockholder Matters.

The information appearing under the headings “Securities Authorized for Issuance Under Equity Compensation Plans” set forth in Part II, Item 5 and “Shareholdings of Directors, Executive Officers, and Nominees for Director” of First Financial's Proxy Statement is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

Item 13. Certain Relationships and Related Transactions.

The information appearing in Note 20 of the Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements included in First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report) is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item. Reference is also made to information appearing under the heading “Corporate Governance - Transactions with Related Parties” in First Financial's Proxy Statement in response to this item.

Item 14. Principal Accounting Fees and Services.

Information appearing under the heading “Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm Fees” in First Financial's Proxy Statement is incorporated herein by reference in response to this item.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART IV

Item 15. Exhibits, Financial Statement Schedules.

- (a) (1) The consolidated financial statements (and report thereon) listed below are incorporated herein by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report (included as Exhibit 13 of this report) as noted:

Reports of Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Consolidated Balance Sheets as of December 31, 2014 and 2013 - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Consolidated Statements of Income for years ended December 31, 2014, 2013, and 2012 - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Consolidated Statements of Comprehensive Income for years ended December 31, 2014, 2013, and 2012 - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Consolidated Statements of Changes in Shareholders' Equity for the years ended December 31, 2014, 2013, and 2012 - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows for years ended December 31, 2014, 2013, and 2012 - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements - Incorporated by reference from First Financial's 2014 Annual Report

- (2) Financial Statement Schedules: Schedules to the consolidated financial statements required by Regulation S-X are not required under the related instructions, or are inapplicable, and therefore have been omitted

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(a)(3) Exhibits:

The documents listed below are filed/furnished with this Annual Report on Form 10-K as exhibits or incorporated into this Annual Report on Form 10-K by reference as noted:

Exhibit  
Number

- 2.1 Purchase and Assumption Agreement Whole Bank All Deposits, among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, receiver of Peoples Community Bank, West Chester, Ohio, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and First Financial Bank, National Association, dated as of July 31, 2009 (filed as Exhibit 2.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on July 31, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (Certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K)(File No. 000-12379).
- 2.2 Purchase and Assumption Agreement Modified Whole Bank All Deposits, among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, receiver of Irwin Union Bank and Trust Company, Columbus, Indiana, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and First Financial, dated as of September 18, 2009 (filed as Exhibit 2.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on September 23, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (Certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K) (File No. 000-12379).
- 2.3 Purchase and Assumption Agreement Modified Whole Bank All Deposits, among the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, receiver of Irwin Union Bank, F.S.B., Louisville, Kentucky, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and First Financial, dated as of September 18, 2009 (filed as Exhibit 2.2 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on September 23, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (Certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K) (File No. 000-12379).
- 2.4 Agreement and Plan of Merger between First Financial, First Financial Bank, National Association and The First Bexley Bank dated as of December 17, 2013 (filed as Exhibit 2.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on December 23, 2013 and incorporated herein by reference)(certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K) (File No. 001-34762)
- 2.5 Agreement and Plan of Merger between First Financial Bancorp., First Financial Bank, National Association, and Insight Bank, dated as of December 19, 2013 (filed as Exhibit 2.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on December 23, 2013 and incorporated herein by reference)(certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K) (File No. 001-34762)
- 2.6 Agreement of Merger among First Financial Bancorp, Guernsey Bancorp, Inc., and Robert D. Patrella, dated as of April 29, 2014 (filed as Exhibit 2.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on May 5, 2014 and incorporated herein by reference)(certain schedules and exhibits have been omitted pursuant to Item 601(b)(2) of Regulation S-K) (File No. 001-34762)
- 3.1 Amended Articles of Incorporation of First Financial Bancorp (reflecting all amendments filed with the Ohio Secretary of State) [for purposes of SEC reporting compliance only - not filed with the Ohio Secretary of State] (filed as exhibit 3.1 to the Form S-3 on July 31, 2014 and incorporated hereby by reference)(File No. 333-197771).
- 3.2 Amended and Restated Regulations of First Financial Bancorp., as amended as of May 1, 2007 (filed as Exhibit 3.2 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2007 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).
- 3.3 Amended Article II, Section 2.2 of the Regulations of First Financial Bancorp. (filed as Exhibit 3.2 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on May 27, 2011 and incorporated herein by reference) (File

No. 001-34762)

4.1 Letter Agreement, dated as of December 23, 2008, between First Financial Bancorp. and the United States Department of the Treasury, which includes the Securities Purchase Agreement - Standard Terms (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on December 30, 2008, and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).

4.2 Warrant to Purchase up to 930,233 shares of Common Stock dated as of December 23, 2008 (filed as Exhibit 4.1 to the Form 8-K filed on December 30, 2008 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).

4.3 No instruments defining the rights of holders of long-term debt of First Financial Bancorp. are filed herewith. Pursuant to (b)(4)(iii) of Item 601 of Regulation S-K, First Financial Bancorp. agrees to furnish a copy of any such agreements to the Securities and Exchange Commission upon request.

10.1 Agreement for Stock Award pursuant to the 2011 Key Executive Incentive Plan between First Financial Bancorp. and Claude E. Davis.\*

10.2 First Financial Bancorp. Amended and Restated Key Management Severance Plan effective January 1, 2013 (as approved November 28, 2012).

10.3 First Financial Bancorp. Dividend Reinvestment and Share Purchase Plan, dated April 24, 1997 (incorporated herein by reference to a Registration Statement on Form S-3)(File No. 333-25745).

10.4 First Financial Bancorp. 1999 Stock Incentive Plan for Officers and Employees, dated April 27, 1999 (incorporated herein by reference to a Registration Statement on Form S-3) (File No. 333-86781).\*

31

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

10.5 First Financial Bancorp. 1999 Non-Employee Director Stock Plan, as dated April 27, 1999 and amended and restated as of April 26, 2006 (filed as Exhibit 10.11 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended March 31, 2006 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.6 First Financial Bancorp. Director Fee Stock Plan amended and restated effective April 20, 2004 (filed as Exhibit 10.12 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2004 and incorporated herein by reference).\*

10.7 Form of Executive Supplemental Retirement Agreement (filed as Exhibit 10.7 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended March 31, 2010 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.8 Form of Endorsement Method Split Dollar Agreement (filed as Exhibit 10.8 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended March 31, 2010 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.9 First Financial Bancorp. Amended and Restated Deferred Compensation Plan (filed as Exhibit 10.9 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended March 31, 2010 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.10 Form of Stock Option Agreement for Incentive Stock Options (2005 - 2008) (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Form 8-K filed on April 22, 2005 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.11 Form of Stock Option Agreement for Non-Qualified Stock Options (2005-2008) (filed as Exhibit 10.2 to the Form 8-K filed on April 22, 2005 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.12 Amended and Restated Employment and Non-Competition Agreement between Claude E. Davis and First Financial Bancorp. dated December 30, 2011 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to First Financial Bancorp's Form 8-K filed on January 5, 2012 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.13 Amended and Restated Employment and Non-Competition Agreement between C. Douglas Lefferson and First Financial Bancorp. dated December 31, 2010 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to First Financial Bancorp's Form 8-K filed on January 3, 2011 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.14 First Financial Bancorp. 2009 Employee Stock Plan (filed as Appendix A to the Definitive Proxy Statement filed on April 23, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.15 First Financial Bancorp. Amended and Restated 2009 Non-Employee Director Stock Plan (filed as Appendix B to the Definitive Proxy Statement filed on April 13, 2012 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.16 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Awards for 2009 Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 1999 Stock Incentive Plan for Officers and Employees (filed as Exhibit 10.30 for the Form 10-Q filed on November 16, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.17 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Awards for Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 2009 Employee Stock Plan (filed as Exhibit 10.31 for the Form 10-Q filed on November 16, 2009 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 000-12379).\*

10.18 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 2009 Employee Plan (3-year vesting/accrual of dividends) (filed as Exhibit 10.33 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2010 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.19 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 2009 Non-Employee Directors Stock Plan (filed as Exhibit 10.34 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2010 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.20 First Financial Bancorp. Short-Term Incentive Plan (filed as Appendix C to the Definitive Proxy Statement filed on April 19, 2011 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.21 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Award under the First Financial Bancorp. 2009 Employee Stock Plan (2011-12 grants) (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2011 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.22 First Financial Bancorp. 2012 Stock Plan (filed as Appendix A to the Definitive Proxy Statement filed on April 13, 2012 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

10.23 Form of Agreement for Restricted Stock Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 2012 Stock Plan (3-year vesting/accrual of dividends)(filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Registrant's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2013)(File No. 001-34762).\*

- 10.24 Agreement for Performance-Based Restricted Stock Awards under the First Financial Bancorp. 2012 Stock Plan between First Financial Bancorp. and Claude E. Davis (filed as Exhibit 10.2 to the Registrant's Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q for the quarter ended June 30, 2013)(File No. 001-34762).\*
- 10.25 Employment and Non-Competition Agreement between First Financial Bancorp and Anthony M. Stollings, EVP - Chief Financial Officer and Chief Administrative Officer dated November 1, 2013 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Form 8-K filed on November 5, 2013 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*
- 10.26 Severance and Change in Control Agreement between First Financial Bancorp. and Kevin T. Langford, President - Consumer Banking dated November 1, 2013 (filed as Exhibit 10.2 to the Form 8-K filed on November 5, 2013 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).\*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

10.27	Executive Supplemental Savings Agreement between First Financial Bancorp. and Claude E. Davis, President and Chief Executive Officer dated December 31, 2013 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Form 8-K filed on January 7, 2014 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).*
10.28	Terms of First Financial Bancorp. Short Term Incentive Plan (incorporated by reference to the Form 8-K filed on March 6, 2014) (File No. 001-34762).*
10.29	Repayment Agreement between First Financial Bancorp. and Kevin T. Langford, President, Western Markets, and President of Consumer Banking, effective July 17, 2014 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Form 8-K filed on July 22, 2014 and incorporated herein by reference)(File No. 001-34762).*
10.30	Amended and Restated Employment and Non-Competition Agreement between Richard Barbercheck and First Financial Bancorp. dated November 19, 2009 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to First Financial Bancorp's Form 10-Q filed on May 7, 2014 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).*
13	Registrant's annual report to shareholders for the year ended December 31, 2014.
14.1	First Financial Bancorp. Code of Conduct, as approved October 23, 2012 (filed as Exhibit 10.1 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on October 29, 2012 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762).
14.2	Code of Ethics for the CEO and Senior Financial Officers (filed as Exhibit 10.2 to the Registrant's Current Report on Form 8-K filed on October 29, 2012 and incorporated herein by reference) (File No. 001-34762)
21	First Financial Bancorp. Subsidiaries.
23	Consent of Ernst & Young LLP, Independent Registered Public Accounting Firm.
31.1	Certification of Chief Executive Officer Pursuant to Section 302 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 filed herewith.
31.2	Certification of Chief Financial Officer Pursuant to Section 302 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 filed herewith.
32.1	Certification of Chief Executive Officer Pursuant to Section 906 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 furnished herewith.
32.2	Certification of Chief Financial Officer Pursuant to Section 906 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 furnished herewith.
101.1	Financial statements from the Annual Report on Form 10-K of the Company for the year ended December 31, 2014, formatted in XBRL: (i) Consolidated Balance Sheets, (ii) Consolidated Statements of Income, (iii) Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows, (iv) Consolidated Statements of Shareholders' Equity, and (v) Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements, as blocks of text and in detail.**

First Financial will furnish, without charge, to a security holder upon request a copy of the documents, portions of which are incorporated by reference (Annual Report to Shareholders and Proxy Statement), and will furnish any other Exhibit upon the payment of reproduction costs.

\* Compensation plan(s) or arrangement(s).

\*\* As provided in Rule 406T of Regulation S-T, this information shall not be deemed "filed" for purposes of Section 11 and 12 of the Securities Act of 1933 and Section 18 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 or otherwise subject to liability under those sections.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

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.

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP.

By: /s/ Claude E. Davis  
Claude E. Davis, Director  
Chief Executive Officer

Date 2/24/2015

Pursuant to the requirements of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, the report has been signed below by the following persons on behalf of the registrant and in the capacities and on the dates indicated.

/s/ Claude E. Davis  
Claude E. Davis, Director  
Chief Executive Officer

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Murph Knapke  
Murph Knapke, Director  
Chairman of the Board

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ J. Wickliffe Ach  
J. Wickliffe Ach, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Cynthia O. Booth  
Cynthia O. Booth, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Corinne R. Finnerty  
Corinne R. Finnerty, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Anthony M. Stollings  
Anthony M. Stollings  
President and Chief Operating Officer

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ John M. Gavigan  
John M. Gavigan, Senior Vice President and Chief  
Financial Officer  
(Principal Accounting Officer)

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ David S. Barker  
David S. Barker, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Mark A. Collar  
Mark A. Collar, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Peter E. Geier  
Peter E. Geier, Director

Date 2/24/2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

/s/ Susan L. Knust  
Susan L. Knust, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Jeffrey D. Meyer  
Jeffrey D. Meyer, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Maribeth S. Rahe  
Maribeth S. Rahe, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ William J. Kramer  
William J. Kramer, Director

Date 2/24/2015

/s/ Richard E. Olszewski  
Richard E. Olszewski, Director

Date 2/24/2015