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[21765001]

BankAmerica Corp. reported a 34 % jump in third-quarter earnings , as its rocket-like recovery from nearly ruinous losses several years ago continued to be fueled by growth in consumer loans , higher interest margins and negligible loan losses .

[21765002]

For the quarter , BankAmerica said it earned \$ 254 million , or \$ 1.16 a share , compared with \$ 190 million , or 97 cents a share , a year earlier .

[21765003]

BankAmerica spokesmen said preliminary reports indicate the company was n't materially affected by the Tuesday earthquake .

[21765004]

All but eight of the 850 branches , which had some structural damage , reopened yesterday for business .

[21765005]

Automated teller machine operations also were up and operating yesterday , a bank spokesman said .

[21765006]

For the first time in nearly two years , BankAmerica results failed to improve in consecutive quarters , but the decline from the second quarter was attributable to special factors .

[21765007]

Third-quarter profit was 16 % below the \$ 304 million , or \$ 1.50 a share , earned in the 1989 second quarter .

[21765008]

The company cited higher tax credits in the second quarter , totaling \$ 63 million , compared with \$ 28 million in the third quarter .

[21765009]

Excluding tax credits , profit was 6 % below the second quarter .

[21765010]

But that drop was caused entirely by a decline in Brazilian interest paid , to \$ 5 million from \$ 54 million the second quarter .

[21765011]

Moreover , BankAmerica continued to build its reserve against troubled foreign loans by boosting its loan-loss provision to \$ 170 million , about the same as the previous quarter but well above the \$ 100 million in the year-earlier quarter .

[21765012]

The provision rate was far above BankAmerica 's actual net credit losses of \$ 24 million in the third quarter , compared with \$ 18 million in the second period and \$ 38 million a year earlier .

[21765013]

As a result , BankAmerica said its reserve against troubled foreign-country loans , once below 25 % , now amounts to 45 % of the \$ 6.4 billion of non-trade debt it calculates it is owed by those nations .

[21765014]

That level is about the same as some other big banks , but far below the 85 % and 100 % reserves of Bankers Trust New York Corp. and J.P. Morgan & Co. , respectively .

By any measure , third-quarter earnings were still robust , equivalent to a 0.92 % return on assets even excluding tax credits .

By that key measure of operating efficiency , BankAmerica turned in a better performance than its well-regarded Los Angeles-based competitor , Security Pacific Corp. , which posted a 0.89 % return in the third quarter .

But it continued to badly trail its San Francisco neighbor , Wells Fargo & Co. , which reported an extraordinary 1.25 % return on assets .

Both returns do n't include any tax credits .

" They { BankAmerica } continue to show good performance , " said Donald K. Crowley , an analyst with Keefe , Bruyette & Woods Inc. , San Francisco .

In composite trading yesterday on the New York Stock Exchange , BankAmerica common stock edged up 12.5 cents to close at \$ 32 a share .

Shareholder equity improved to 4.68 % from 4.23 % in the previous quarter .

The 4.52 % net interest margin , or the difference between the yield on a bank 's investments and the rate it pays for deposits and other borrowings , was still markedly higher than the 3.91 % ratio a year earlier , and is among the best in the industry , analysts said .

The high margin partly stems from continued strong growth in high-yielding consumer loans , which jumped 31 % to \$ 17.47 billion from a year earlier , and residential mortgages , which rose 25 % to \$ 12 billion .

BankAmerica 's total loans rose 8 % to \$ 71.36 billion .

For the nine months , BankAmerica profit soared 81 % to \$ 833 million , or \$ 4.07 a share , from \$ 461 million , or \$ 2.40 a share .