

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP /OH/  
Form 8-K  
December 30, 2008

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SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Washington, D.C. 20549

FORM 8-K

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

Date of Report: December 23, 2008

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP.  
(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

Ohio  
(State or other jurisdiction  
of incorporation)

0-12379  
(Commission File Number)

31-1042001  
(IRS Employer  
Identification No.)

4000 Smith Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
(Address of principal executive  
offices)

45209  
(Zip Code)

Registrant's telephone number, including area code: (513) 979-5837

Check the appropriate box below if the Form 8-K filing is intended to simultaneously satisfy the filing obligation of the registrant under any of the following provisions (see General Instruction A.2. below):

- Written communications pursuant to Rule 425 under the Securities Act (17 CFR 230.425)
  - Soliciting material pursuant to Rule 14a-12 under the Exchange Act (17 CFR 240.14a-12)
  - Pre-commencement communications pursuant to Rule 14d-2(b) under the Exchange Act (17 CFR 240.14d-2(b))
  - Pre-commencement communications pursuant to Rule 13e-4(c) under the Exchange Act (17 CFR 240.13e-4(c))
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- Item 1.01 Entry into a Material Definitive Agreement.
- Item 3.02 Unregistered Sales of Equity Securities.
- Item 3.03 Material Modification of the Rights of Security Holders.
- Item 5.02 Departure of Directors or Certain Officers; Election of Directors; Appointment of Certain Officers; Compensatory Arrangements of Certain Officers.

On December 23, 2008, as part of the Capital Purchase Program established by the U.S. Department of the Treasury (“Treasury”) under the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (the “EESA”), First Financial Bancorp. (the “Company”) entered into a Letter Agreement (including the Securities Purchase Agreement—Standard Terms incorporated by reference therein, the “Purchase Agreement”) with Treasury dated December 23, 2008. Pursuant to the Purchase Agreement, the Company issued and sold to Treasury (i) 80,000 shares of the Company’s Fixed Rate Cumulative Perpetual Preferred Stock, Series A, having a liquidation preference of \$1,000 per share (the “Series A Preferred Stock”), and (ii) a warrant (“Warrant”) to purchase up to 930,233 Company common shares, without par value (“Common Stock”), at an initial exercise price of \$12.90 per share, subject to certain anti-dilution and other adjustments, for an aggregate purchase price of \$80 million.

Cumulative dividends on the Series A Preferred Stock will accrue on the liquidation preference at a rate of 5% per annum for the first five years, and at a rate of 9% per annum thereafter, but will be paid only if, as, and when declared by the Company’s Board of Directors. The Series A Preferred Stock has no maturity date and ranks senior to the Common Stock (and pari passu with the Company’s other authorized series of preferred stock) with respect to the payment of dividends and distributions and amounts payable upon liquidation, dissolution and winding up of the Company. The Series A Preferred Stock generally is non-voting.

The Company may redeem the Series A Preferred Stock at par after December 23, 2011. Prior to this date, the Company may redeem the Series A Preferred Stock at par if (i) the Company has raised aggregate gross proceeds in one or more Qualified Equity Offerings (as defined in the Purchase Agreement and set forth below) in excess of \$20 million, and (ii) the aggregate redemption price does not exceed the aggregate net proceeds from such Qualified Equity Offerings. Any redemption is subject to the consent of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

The Purchase Agreement defines a “Qualified Equity Offering” to mean the sale and issuance for cash by the Company, to persons other than the Company or any Company subsidiary after the closing, of shares of perpetual Preferred Stock, Common Stock or any combination of such stock, that, in each case, qualify as and may be included in Tier 1 capital of the Company at the time of issuance under the applicable risk-based capital guidelines of the Company’s federal banking agency (other than any such sales and issuances made pursuant to agreements or arrangements entered into, or pursuant to financing plans which were publicly announced, on or prior to October 13, 2008).

Prior to December 23, 2011, unless we have redeemed the Series A Preferred Stock or the Treasury Department has transferred the Series A Preferred Stock to a third party, the consent of the Treasury Department will be required for us to (1) declare or pay any dividend or make any distribution on our common stock (other than regular quarterly cash dividends of not more than \$0.17 per share of Common Stock) or (2) redeem, purchase or acquire any shares of our Common Stock or other equity or capital securities, other than in connection with benefit plans consistent with past practice and certain other circumstances specified in the Purchase Agreement.

The Series A Preferred Stock and the Warrant were issued in a private placement exempt from registration pursuant to Section 4(2) of the Securities Act of 1933, as amended. Neither the Series A Preferred Stock nor the Warrant are subject to any contractual restrictions on transfer, except that Treasury may only transfer or exercise an aggregate of one-half of the Warrant Shares prior to the earlier of (i) the third anniversary date of the issuance of the Series A Preferred Stock or (ii) the date on which the Series A Preferred Stock has been redeemed in whole or Treasury has transferred all of the Series A Preferred Stock to third parties.

The Warrant is immediately exercisable. In the event the Company completes one or more Qualified Equity Offerings on or prior to December 31, 2009 that result in the Company receiving aggregate gross proceeds of not less than \$80 million, the number of the shares of Common Stock underlying the portion of the Warrant then held by Treasury will be reduced by one-half of the shares of Common Stock originally covered by the Warrant.

In the Purchase Agreement, the Company agreed that, until such time as Treasury ceases to own any debt or equity securities of the Company acquired pursuant to the Purchase Agreement, the Company will take all necessary action to ensure that its benefit plans with respect to its senior executive officers comply with Section 111(b) of EESA as implemented by any guidance or regulation under the EESA that has been issued and is in effect as of the date of issuance of the Series A Preferred Stock and the Warrant, and has agreed to not adopt any benefit plans with respect to, or which covers, its senior executive officers that do not comply with the EESA. Additionally, each of Messrs. Claude E. Davis, C. Douglas Lefferson, J. Franklin Hall, Samuel J. Munafa and Gregory A. Gehlmann (the "Senior Executive Officers"), (i) executed a waiver (the "Waiver") voluntarily waiving any claim against Treasury or the Company for any changes to such Senior Executive Officer's compensation or benefits that are required to comply with the regulation issued by Treasury under the Capital Purchase Program and acknowledging that the regulation may require modification of the compensation, bonus, incentive and other benefit plans, arrangements and policies and agreements (including so-called "golden parachute" agreements) (collectively, "Benefit Plans") as they relate to the period Treasury holds any equity or debt securities of the Company acquired through the Capital Purchase Program; and (ii) entered into a letter agreement (the "Letter Agreement") with the Company amending the Benefit Plans with respect to such Senior Executive Officer as may be necessary, during the period that Treasury owns any debt or equity securities of the Company acquired pursuant to the Purchase Agreement or the Warrant, to comply with Section 111(b) of the EESA.

Copies of the Purchase Agreement, the Warrant, the Certificate of Amendment with respect to the Series A Preferred Stock, the form of Waiver executed by the Senior Executive Officers, and the form of Letter Agreement are included as exhibits to this Report on Form 8-K and are incorporated by reference into these Items 1.01, 3.02, 3.03 and 5.02. The foregoing summary of certain provisions of these documents is qualified in its entirety by reference thereto.

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Item 9.01. Financial statements and exhibits.

(d) Exhibits.

The following exhibits are filed herewith:

- 3.1 Certificate of Amendment to the Company's Articles of Incorporation establishing the terms of the Series A Preferred Stock (incorporated by reference to Exhibit 3.1 to the Company's Form 8-K filed on December 24, 2008).
  - 4.1 Warrant to Purchase up to 930,233 shares of Common Stock.
  - 4.2 Form of Series A Preferred Stock Certificate.
  - 10.1 Letter Agreement, dated December 23, 2008, including Securities Purchase Agreement – Standard Terms incorporated by reference therein, between the Company and the United States Department of the Treasury.
  - 10.2 Form of Waiver, executed by each of Messrs. Claude E. Davis, C. Douglas Lefferson, J. Franklin Hall, Samuel J. Munafo and Gregory A. Gehlmann.
  - 10.3 Form of Letter Agreement, executed by each of Messrs. Claude E. Davis, C. Douglas Lefferson, J. Franklin Hall, Samuel J. Munafo and Gregory A. Gehlmann.
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SIGNATURES

Pursuant to the requirements of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934, the registrant has duly cause this report to be signed on its behalf by the undersigned hereto duly authorized.

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP.

By: /s/ J. Franklin Hall  
J. Franklin Hall  
Executive Vice President Chief  
Financial Officer

Date: December 30, 2008