

FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP /OH/

Form 8-K

January 21, 2004

**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: January 21, 2004

**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.)

300 High Street  
Hamilton, Ohio  
(Address of principal executive  
offices)

45011  
(Zip Code)

Registrant's telephone number, including area code: (513) 867-5447

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First Financial Bancorp

**Item 7. Exhibits.**

(a) Exhibit:

99.1 First Financial Bancorp. Press Release dated January 20, 2004.

**Item 9. Regulation FD Disclosure.**

On January 20, 2004, First Financial Bancorp. issued its earnings press release that included the results of operations and financial condition for the fourth quarter of 2003. A copy of the earnings press release is attached as Exhibit 99.1.

**Item 12. Disclosure of Results of Operation and Financial Condition.**

The earnings press release includes two non-GAAP financial measures. The first non-GAAP financial measure appears in the table entitled Consolidated Financial Data under the section Key Ratios. The second appears in the table entitled Additional Data Fully Tax Equivalent Net Interest Income. The tax equivalent adjustment to net interest income recognizes the income tax savings when comparing taxable and tax-exempt assets and assumes a 35% tax rate. Management believes that it is a standard practice in the banking industry to present net interest margin and net interest income on a fully tax equivalent basis. Therefore, management believes, these measures provide useful information to investors by allowing them to make peer comparisons. Management also uses these measures to make peer comparisons.

Below is a table showing net interest income calculated and presented in accordance with GAAP and the adjustments made to arrive at the non-GAAP financial measure net interest income tax equivalent. The table also shows net interest margin calculated and presented in accordance with GAAP and the method used to arrive at the non-GAAP financial measure net interest margin (fully tax equivalent).

	Dec. 31, 2003	Sep. 30, 2003	Three months ended, Jun. 30, 2003	Mar. 31, 2003	Dec. 31, 2002
Net interest income	\$ 34,093	\$ 36,373	\$ 37,179	\$ 37,236	\$ 39,447
Tax equivalent adjustment	885	900	918	938	984
Net interest income tax equivalent	<u>\$ 34,978</u>	<u>\$ 37,273</u>	<u>\$ 38,097</u>	<u>\$ 38,174</u>	<u>\$ 40,431</u>
Average earning assets	3,617,953	3,623,792	3,572,557	3,457,340	3,401,949
Net interest margin*	3.74%	3.98%	4.17%	4.37%	4.60%
Net interest margin (fully tax equivalent)*	3.84%	4.08%	4.28%	4.48%	4.72%

Margins are calculated using net interest income annualized divided by average earning assets.

**SIGNATURES**

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

**FIRST FINANCIAL BANCORP.**

By: /s/ C. Douglas Lefferson  
C. Douglas Lefferson  
Senior Vice President and  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: January 21, 2004

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**Exhibit Index**

<b>Exhibit No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
99.1	First Financial Bancorp. Press Release dated January 21, 2004.