

Financially Speaking
With Trisha Arndt, CFP®

Turn Off the News and Spend Some Time Outside

Temperature tops 70 degrees in Verona on March 17.

S&P 500 gains over 15 percent in seven days ending March 18.

U.S. new home starts increase 22 percent for month of February.

If someone had asked you a month ago which of these statements you would be most likely to see, what would you have said? I'm guessing most of you would have just laughed at how ridiculous they all were.

And yet, all are true.

So why would they have seemed so ridiculous?

In the case of the weather, that opinion could have been based on your personal experience and observations of your immediate vicinity. After all, we recently experienced one of the coldest months on record for Wisconsin – and it's not like the normal winter temperatures are balmy.

For all that Verona has going for it, I'm afraid that the prospect of breaking out the shorts in March is not normally one of its selling points. Those of use who live and work here know that firsthand.

But when it comes to the economy, I'd venture to say that most of us base our opinions at least in part on what we hear and see in the news rather than on firsthand experience.

I don't in any way want to minimize the fact that many people, including those in our community, have been directly affected by the difficult economy in the form of lost jobs, decreased pay and declining retirement accounts. Trust me – I doubt that many are more aware or distressed about it than I am.

That being said, if you weren't told how terrible the economy is every time you turned on the television, clicked on the Internet or tuned in the radio would you view things the same as you do know? Would you be as worried, as anxious or even depressed?

After all, things in Verona aren't so bad.

The real-estate market, though arguably slowed, hasn't fallen dramatically as it has in some areas. We have a number of businesses that are doing relatively well – thriving even – and have been adding jobs. We even have several major development projects in

the works. And we are not alone – believe it or not, there are many communities and individuals in this country that continue to do just fine.

So why is nearly every news headline so extremely negative?

In part it's because of the facts of the difficult recession, compounded by a crisis in our financial system – I am in no way denying that. But I also believe it has a lot to do with the advent of 24-hour news sources and the need to fill all of those cable networks and Web sites with headlines that will grab people's attention – and we all know that bad news sells.

I believe history will reveal that the current crisis has been exacerbated by the constant and instant access to information we all have and our morbid tendency to focus on the negative. In some respects, it has morphed into a psychological event spurred by our own self-fulfilling actions.

How many financial decisions have you made recently because of feeling bad about “the economy” instead of based on your personal circumstances? I know of a number of people who have done just that.

And the worse we feel about things the more we hunker down, change our spending, alter our investing, etc., etc. and as the news gets worse, the worse we feel ... and so on.

So here is my unsolicited advice to the world – shut off the news and live your life.

Go outside and enjoy the spring. Spend time with your family and friends. Focus on the things that you can control and that really matter to you – your job, your home, your quality of life.

Stop watching the around-the-clock cable news and obsessively checking your 401k balance (yes, I know you do that).

I'd be willing to bet that if you took a break from all of the noise and focused on the things that really matter in your life you'd find that things aren't so bad after all. The sun still comes up every day, the birds do still sing and there is still joy to be found if you're willing to look for it.

Life will go on and we will get through this, just as we always have. And if we'd all just stop spending every second worrying about it we'd feel better – and then maybe things would really be better too.

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