Harford Financial Group
Retirement Income Specialists

NEWSLETTER
SECOND QUARTER 2024

Create a Life of Meaning

As you read this, we will be in the throes of summer. I sincerely hope that you are having a fantastic summer and enjoying great experiences with the people you love, family, and friends. We know that is the rocket fuel for most clients and what energizes them. Having those experiences or being able to help the people we love is essential to the type of people we best serve.

We continue to go through this quarter's newsletter and focus on a specific value. The acronym embodies the values that one of our previous owners, Paul Smeton, created: Teamwork with HEART. Our values are Teamwork and Collaboration, Hospitality, Expertise, Adaptability, Relationships and Trust. In previous newsletters, we covered teamwork and collaboration; last quarter, we talked about hospitality. Each value matters to us, drives us, and provides standards for our conduct. We try to live the values every day. This quarter's value is expertise!

Each of the six values is interwoven with one another. For us, expertise goes hand in hand with relationships and trust. When you work with professionals, you want to make sure you trust them. There are two components of trust. The first part is what we traditionally think of when we think of trust. Are they honest? Are they ethical? Do they act in your best interests and serve as a fiduciary? Ultimately, we must believe those professionals will avoid doing illegal things and taking advantage of us. Indeed, all of that is important. However, there is a second component of trust. We must trust that they are competent and can do the thing we are paying them to do. For instance, we may have a surgeon who checks off the first box of trust and is a good person who is honest and ethical. But if they are incompetent at what they do, lacking in knowledge and ability, our life is in their hands.

That is why expertise is of significant value to us. We want good relationships where clients know we act in their best interests. However, we also want them to know they can be confident that we are good at what we do. There are so many things we do to enhance our expertise. Three things I'd like to highlight:

1. Training and Credentials – Many know I served in the Navy as Training Manager on Aberdeen Proving Grounds and taught for Dale Carnegie. Training is in my blood. For us at HFG, our team is constantly training and giving training. One of the best ways to learn something is to train someone else. Particularly for our advisors, two things stand out. One of the requirements we want all our advisors to have in the long term is to become certified financial planners (CFP). Right now, that is one of the top credentials in our field, and currently, Melissa, Bryce, and I have that credential. It took us over three years to get the credentials. We had to take six individual classes in holistic wealth management, including retirement income, financial planning, estate planning, tax management, asset protection, and asset management, and we had to pass individual exams in each. Then, we had to take a comprehensive exam, one of my toughest exams. They added a requirement after I went through where Melissa and Bryce also had to do a case study. Michael is working on his CFP certification, and John and Bryan will start within the next several years. Additionally, Melissa leads our Advisory Group and has created career paths for our advisors based on the CFP Board Career Path. It has milestones and capabilities that people must meet to become Lead Advisors, where they can effectively handle all aspects of helping a client.

2. Network of Relationships Outside of HFG of Specialists – Having complete expertise in all facets is complicated in holistic wealth management. That is why, in each of the five areas, we have built a network of specialists outside our organization where we partner with firms with expertise. We work with CPAs and other tax management specialists from tax attorneys and CPAs for estate planning. Beyond our investment committee, we work with Chartered Financial Analysts (CFA's), the top designation for asset management. We have a whole team of professionals with whom we work with advanced asset protection strategies. For us, it is so important not to try to know it all ourselves but to know who we need to go to on specific items.

3. Continuous Drive Towards Growth and Excellence – I recently read a biography on the late Kobe Bryant. His story left me so inspired because he was always on a journey towards greatness; as the world evolved, so did Kobe's desire to evolve along with it. At HFG, we never rest on our laurels. Paradigms change, and yesterday's conventional wisdom no longer applies. For instance, our views on tax management have evolved. As we have communicated recently, the traditional trend was to maximize pre-tax accounts because there was an assumption that tax brackets would lower as we neared retirement. However, there is now a growing concern surrounding the $34 trillion in US debt and what that will look like for taxes. This looming concern has not only caught our attention, but it has led us to pivot and research tax management alternatives for our clients.

Expertise is a value that we cherish and will never lose. We must constantly strive to maintain and gain more to continue to serve you in the best possible way.

Adam Freeland
President

Dedicated to life-centered financial planning through the pursuit of inner wealth.

The Role of the Investment Committee in Financial Planning

By Bryce Harrsion

At Harford Financial Group, we take the management of our clients' assets very seriously. It takes a team of people to stay on top of the ever-evolving landscape of financial markets. Central to our commitment to excellence is our Investment Committee. In this article, we explain the significance of an investment committee within a financial planning firm and offer a glimpse into how ours functions seamlessly to serve our client's best interests.

Why an Investment Committee Matters:
An investment committee brings together experts to make informed decisions about managing investments. These decisions can have a big impact on people's financial futures. The committee looks at market trends, risks, and opportunities to help investors make the best choices for their goals.

The Partnership with Horizon Investments:
In the spirit of delivering top-notch service to our clients, we have forged a strategic partnership with Horizon Investments, a pioneer in goals-based investment management. Horizon is based out of Charlotte, NC. It focuses on building goals-based investment strategies, developing modern planning tools, and conducting investment research to empower financial advisors to help clients achieve their individual, real-world financial goals. We have constructed portfolios to fit all client needs by leveraging Horizon's cutting-edge research and technology. Horizon is a valued partner in our Investment Committee.

How Our Investment Committee Works:
Our investment committee operates with precision and purpose, following a structured approach to portfolio management:

1. Quarterly Reviews: We conduct thorough quarterly reviews of our clients' portfolios, scrutinizing performance metrics, asset allocations, and market trends.

2. Risk Assessment: We employ sophisticated risk assessment models to gauge portfolio resilience and identify potential vulnerabilities.

3. Strategic Adjustments: Based on our comprehensive analysis, we make strategic adjustments to optimize portfolio performance and mitigate risk exposure.

The Impact on Our Clients:
Ultimately, the true measure of our investment committee's success lies in the tangible benefits it delivers to our clients. By harnessing the power of expertise and collaboration, we empower our clients to navigate the complexities of the financial markets with confidence and clarity. Whether they are planning for retirement, saving for their children's education, or building wealth for future generations, our investment committee is here to help.

Understanding Certified Financial Planners and Their Importance

By Michael Clayton

In today's complex financial landscape, where navigating the myriad of investment options, retirement plans, insurance policies, and tax implications can be daunting, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) offers invaluable expertise and guidance. At Harford Financial Group, we recognize the importance of this expertise, which is why we require all our advisors to either have the CFP designation or be working towards it. Currently, Adam Freeland, Melissa Mullan, and Bryce Harrison are Certified Financial Planners, and the remainder of the advisory team is working towards this, ensuring that our clients receive the highest level of financial planning.

A Certified Financial Planner (CFP) helps individuals and families manage their finances effectively. They are trained and certified to provide comprehensive financial planning services, including investment management, retirement planning, tax planning, estate planning, insurance analysis, and more.

To become a CFP, individuals must meet specific education, examination, experience, and ethics requirements set by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards (CFP Board). This rigorous process ensures CFPs possess the necessary knowledge and skills to offer competent and ethical financial advice.

CFPs begin by assessing a client's current financial situation, including assets, liabilities, income, and expenses. They also evaluate the client's risk tolerance, time horizon, and other relevant factors. Based on the client's aspirations and financial circumstances, CFPs assist in setting realistic and achievable financial goals. These may include retirement savings, funding education expenses, purchasing a home, or building an emergency fund. Once goals are established, CFPs create a comprehensive financial plan outlining strategies to reach those objectives. This may involve investment portfolio construction, tax optimization, debt management, insurance coverage, and estate planning.

Financial planning is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires regular monitoring and adjustments. CFPs continually review their clients' financial situations, investment performance, and changing life circumstances to ensure the plan remains aligned with their goals. This commitment to ongoing support is what we at Harford Financial Group refer to as life-centered financial planning, providing our clients with the reassurance that their financial futures are in good hands.

Lastly, CFPs are held to a fiduciary standard of care, which means they are obligated to always act in the best interests of their clients. This fiduciary duty is a fundamental principle that guides the ethical behavior and professional conduct of CFPs. This position of trust is not something we take lightly at Harford Financial Group, and we strive to continue to earn that trust among the families we serve.

Commitment to Expertise

By John Sierecki IV

Pictured with Adam is Jason L Smith, CEO and founder of JL Smith Holistic Wealth Management and author of The Bucket Plan. Pictured at the bottom with John and Adam is Bryan Bibbo, President, and CFO at JL Smith.

During March of 2024, Adam and I had the opportunity to attend the Bucket Plan 2.0 training in Clevland, Ohio. As many of you know, HFG believes in the bucket plan. In a quest to constantly improve our processes and the client experience, we have made a dedication to continuing our training and self-improvement. For myself, it was the first time that I had the opportunity to bucket plan 2.0. Adam has been multiple times, and still gets tremendous value each time we attend. The team looks forward to sharing all that we have learned during your next strategy meeting!

My Spring Break Abroad
By Ava Freeland

Although we work hard on our expertise in the office, we certainly have taken some time to take a break here and there.

Over spring break, I traveled to Ricaurte, Ecuador, where I lodged at the Regeneration Field Institute, a hub for students intrigued by land restoration, agroforestry, and bamboo construction. Situated on former cattle farming grounds, the campus is now undergoing a transformation into a flourishing jungle ecosystem. Immersed in this environment, I learned the importance of meticulous land management and contributed to a bamboo dam project to combat erosion. The bulk of the trip, though, was centered on bamboo construction. Attending lectures led by seasoned architects, I delved into bamboo's properties and its diverse applications in building. Armed with newfound insights, my student team collaborated with architects to erect a bamboo pavilion at a local elementary school in Pavón. This experience introduced me to an extraordinary community dedicated to environmental restoration and sustainable construction. Their unwavering passion and commitment left an indelible mark on me, and I hope to carry their expertise forward.

Finding Expertise During and After Retirement
By Donna Freeland

Every quarter, I look forward to sharing a recipe in our newsletter. This quarter's theme is expertise, so I contacted local chef, Ellie Doyle, for help. She is the owner of Your Day Gourmet. I have had the pleasure of enjoying her delicious creations and learning about Ellie's journey from educator to chef. She is thankful for her many blessings and seeks opportunities to give back to the community. Whether supporting The Hope Center of Maryland in Churchville or teaching cooking classes at HCC, Ellie takes her passion for food and positively impacts people's lives. Ellie's energy, love for her family, and positive outlook are inspiring. She is a fantastic role model.

Ellie's story in her own words: I taught first grade in Harford County Public Schools for 30 years. Upon retirement, I enrolled in culinary school in 2006. Because of my previous college degrees from teaching, I finished with an Associate of Arts degree in one year.

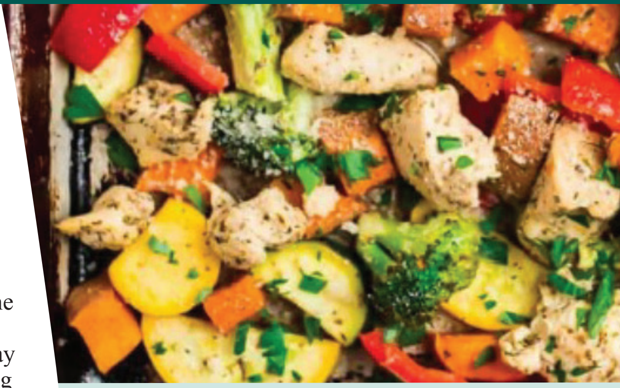
I enjoyed culinary school very much. I had excellent chef instructors and met some great people.

The school had two campuses—one in Little Italy and the other at the Inner Harbor. Morning classes began at 7 a.m. and included one hour of lecturing and three hours of cooking. I would walk from that campus to the Inner Harbor (about 20-25 minutes) for my afternoon classes, which were traditional classes such as Nutrition and Purchasing.

After school, I found a commercial kitchen space to rent and obtained a license from the Health Department. I worked at Ladew Gardens for ten years, running the Café and doing various events. Now, I do private catering and teach cooking classes at Harford Community College. I love making pasta from scratch and creating new dishes.

Chef Tips

1. Invest in a digital meat thermometer. This will ensure your meat will not be undercooked or overcooked.
2. Baking is a science; always weigh your ingredients on a digital scale.
3. Always use parchment paper when baking.
4. Use fresh fruits and vegetables in season and buy locally.
5. Chicken breasts can dry out when cooked. Place them in a lukewarm brine for 15-20 minutes, drain, and then cook.
6. Buy organic when you can.



One Pan Healthy Roasted Chicken and Veggies

INGREDIENTS
- 2 medium chicken breasts, chopped
- 1 cup bell pepper, chopped (Any colors you like)
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- 1 cup broccoli florets
- ½ grape tomatoes, halved
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

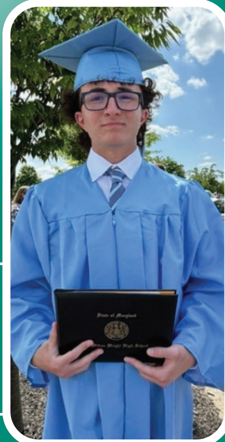
INSTRUCTIONS
1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Chop all the veggies into large pieces.
3. On another cutting board, chop chicken into cubes.
4. Place the chicken and veggies in a medium roasting dish or sheet pan.
5. Add olive oil, salt and pepper, Italian seasoning, and paprika.
6. Toss to combine.
7. Bake for 10 minutes.
8. Stop and toss the chicken and veggies.
9. Continue cooking for about 10 more minutes.

If you would like to speak to Ellie about Your Day Gourmet catering your next event, she can be reached at 410-459-1199 and lepetitechef@gmail.com

CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

Nancy Longnecker and Bill Longnecker took a picture while traveling to Holland and Belgium to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year.

Congratulations to them!



Harford Financial Group would like to Congratulate the Fischer Family on the graduation of Owen! He graduated from C. Milton Wright High School in Bel Air, MD on May 24, 2024.

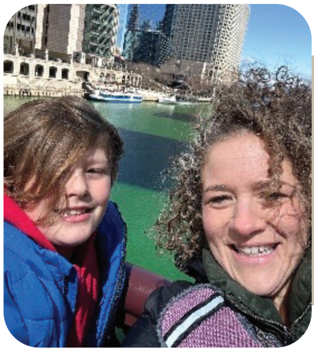
Allen Heaps just retired from the Post Office after 26 years. His career started at the White Marsh and Parkville locations, but he spent 23 years serving Harford County residents at the Bel Air Post Office.

He says the most surprising non-financial aspect of retirement is his morning routine. He sleeps in and can take his time to leave the house on most days.

When asked what the smartest thing he did to prepare for retirement, he said having a Financial Planner whom he trusted, and that he was thankful to have worked with Harford Financial Group over all these years.

Although he loves retirement he misses serving the visitors in the passport department.

HFG OUT AND ABOUT



Meghan and her youngest son traveled to Chicago during spring break. They caught a Chicago Bulls game and saw the Chicago River green!

Melissa Anne's daughter, Ellie graduated from HCC this May and will be heading to Millersville University to get a master's degree in social work with a minor in Spanish this fall. Her desire is to work with children and help them.

Melissa and her family enjoyed Florida while touring colleges for her son Toby, a junior at Havre de Grace High School. Toby is interested in Aerospace Engineering with a focus on aviation and toured Florida Institute of Technology and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Daytona Campus. Here Melissa, husband Andy, and sons Toby, Jayden and Seth are at the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse

We are always open to client recommendations for future events. If there is a topic you would like to see covered in a future seminar or webinar, please reach out to Meghan Flanders at meghan@harfordfinancialgroup.com. We would love to hear from you!

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