

**Item 1. Cover Page for Part 2A of Form  
ADV: Firm Brochure  
April 2013**



**SHARP ADVISORS  
2359 PERIMETER POINTE PARKWAY, SUITE 175  
CHARLOTTE, NC 28208  
(704) 357-8500**

**FIRM CONTACT: RICK KENT, CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER**

This brochure provides information about the qualifications and business practices of Sharp Advisors. If you have any questions about the contents of this brochure, please contact us by telephone at (678) 867-7050 or email at [rkent@meritfinancialadvisors.com](mailto:rkent@meritfinancialadvisors.com). The information in this brochure has not been approved or verified by the United States Securities and Exchange Commission or by any State Securities Authority.

Additional information about Sharp Advisors also is available on the SEC's website at [www.adviserinfo.sec.gov](http://www.adviserinfo.sec.gov).

Please note that the use of the term "registered investment adviser" and description of Sharp Advisors and/or our associates as "registered" does not imply a certain level of skill or training. You are encouraged to review this Brochure and Brochure Supplements for our firm's associates who advise you for more information on the qualifications of our firm and its employees.

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## Item 2. Material Changes

**Sharp Advisors** is required to advise you of any material changes to our Firm Brochure ("Brochure") from our last annual update, identify those changes on the cover page of our Brochure or on the page immediately following the cover page, or in a separate communication accompanying our Brochure. We must state clearly that we are discussing only material changes since the last annual update of our Brochure, and we must provide the date of the last annual update of our Brochure.

Please note that we do not have to provide this information to a client or prospective client who has not received a previous version of our brochure. At this time, there are no material changes to report about our brochure.

**Our last annual updating amendment was March 13, 2012.**

### Item 3. Table of Contents

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## Item 4. Advisory Business

We specialize in the following types of services: asset management, LPL Financial Corporation sponsored advisory programs, financial planning and consultations, referrals to third party money managers. Our assets under management are \$457,913,315 as of December 2012.

A. Description of our advisory firm, including how long we have been in business and our principal owners.

We are dedicated to providing individuals and other types of clients with a wide array of investment advisory services. Our firm is a corporation formed in the State of Delaware. Our firm is owned as follows:

**Direct Owners:**

Merit Financial, Inc. – Fifty-nine percent (59%)

CPA Retirement Network, Inc. – Thirty-Five Percent (35%)

AFSG, LLC – Six Percent (6%)

**Indirect Owners:**

Rick Kent with One Hundred Percent (100%) ownership interest in Merit Financial, Inc.

William Traer with One Hundred Percent (100%) ownership interest in CPA Retirement Network, Inc.

Dennis Davis with One Hundred Percent (100%) ownership interest in AFSG, LLC

B. Description of the types of advisory services we offer.

(i) Asset Management:

We emphasize continuous and regular account supervision. As part of our asset management service, we generally create a portfolio, consisting of individual stocks or bonds, exchange traded funds (“ETFs”), options, mutual funds variable annuities and other public and private securities or investments. The client’s individual investment strategy is tailored to their specific needs and may include some or all of the previously mentioned securities. Each portfolio will be initially designed to meet a particular investment goal, which we determine to be suitable to the client’s circumstances. Once the appropriate portfolio has been determined, we review the portfolio periodically or as often as necessary, and may rebalance the portfolio based upon the client’s individual needs, stated goals and objectives. Each client has the opportunity to place reasonable restrictions on the types of investments to be held in the portfolio.

(ii) SEI Program:

The SEI Asset Management Program (SEI Program) is an institutional asset allocation program that we may use in the management of the client’s account assets. Our firm’s associated persons assist the client in establishing an SEI Program Account (the Account) at SEI Trust Company (SEI). All transactions in the Account will be processed and cleared through SEI. The SEI Program uses asset allocation portfolios developed by SEI Investments. The portfolios consist of SEI Family of Institutional Mutual Funds (Mutual Funds) and other securities approved by SEI to be held in an account. We provide SEI with the asset allocation

policy (Asset Allocation Policy) that the client selects for the Account. We direct SEI to reallocate the client's investments in accordance with the client's Asset Allocation Policy. In addition, we direct SEI to rebalance the investments within the Account at least quarterly, so that the market value of the shares of each mutual fund held in the Account is the same percentage of the total market value of the Account as required by the client's Asset Allocation Policy. SEI holds custody of all SEI Program Client Account assets.

(iii) LPL Financial Sponsored Advisory Programs:

We may provide advisory services through certain programs sponsored by LPL Financial LLC ("LPL"), a registered investment adviser and broker-dealer. Below is a brief description of each LPL advisory program available to us. For more information regarding the LPL programs, including more information on the advisory services and fees that apply, the types of investments available in the programs and the potential conflicts of interest presented by the programs please see the LPL Financial Form ADV Part 2 or applicable client agreement. LPL's applicable paperwork and client agreement shall not become effective until acceptance by us as evidenced by the signature of an authorized representative.

Advisory Services:

**Optimum Market Portfolios Program (OMP)**

OMP offers clients the ability to participate in a professionally managed asset allocation program using Optimum Funds Class I shares. Under OMP, client will authorize LPL on a discretionary basis to purchase and sell Optimum Funds pursuant to investment objectives chosen by the client. We will assist the client in determining the suitability of OMP for the client and assist the client in setting an appropriate investment objective. We will have discretion to select a mutual fund asset allocation portfolio designed by LPL consistent with the client's investment objective. LPL will have discretion to purchase and sell Optimum Funds pursuant to the portfolio selected for the client. LPL will also have authority to rebalance the account.

A minimum account value of \$15,000 is required for OMP.

**Personal Wealth Portfolios Program (PWP)**

PWP offers clients an asset management account using asset allocation model portfolios designed by LPL. We will have discretion for selecting the asset allocation model portfolio based on client's investment objective. We will also have discretion for selecting third party money managers (PWP Advisors) or mutual funds within each asset class of the model portfolio. LPL will act as the overlay portfolio manager on all PWP accounts and will be authorized to purchase and sell on a discretionary basis mutual funds and equity and fixed income securities.

A minimum account value of \$250,000 is required for PWP.

## **Model Wealth Portfolios Program (MWP)**

MWP offers clients a professionally managed mutual fund asset allocation program. Adviser will obtain the necessary financial data from the client, assist the client in determining the suitability of the MWP program and assist the client in setting an appropriate investment objective. We will initiate the steps necessary to open an MWP account and have discretion to select a model portfolio designed by LPL's Research Department consistent with the client's stated investment objective. LPL's Research Department is responsible for selecting the mutual funds within a model portfolio and for making changes to the mutual funds selected.

The client will authorize LPL to act on a discretionary basis to purchase and sell mutual funds (including in certain circumstances exchange traded funds) and to liquidate previously purchased securities. The client will also authorize LPL to effect rebalancing for MWP accounts.

In the future, the MWP program may make available model portfolios designed by strategists other than LPL's Research Department. If such models are made available, Adviser will have discretion to choose among the available models designed by LPL and outside strategists.

A minimum account value of \$100,000 is required for MWP.

## **Manager Access Select Program (MAS)**

Manager Access Select provides clients access to the investment advisory services of professional portfolio management firms for the individual management of client accounts. Adviser will assist client in identifying a third party portfolio manager (Portfolio Manager) from a list of Portfolio Managers made available by LPL. The Portfolio Manager manages client's assets on a discretionary basis. Adviser will provide initial and ongoing assistance regarding the Portfolio Manager selection process.

A minimum account value of \$100,000 is required for Manager Access Select, however, in certain instances, the minimum account size may be lower or higher.

## **Fees for LPL Advisory Programs**

The account fee charged to the client for each LPL advisory program is negotiable, subject to the following maximum account fees:

Manager Access Select	3.0%
OMP	2.5%
PWP	2.5%
MWP	2.5%

Account fees are payable quarterly in advance.

LPL serves as program sponsor, investment adviser and broker-dealer for the LPL advisory programs. Adviser and LPL may share in the account fee and other fees associated with program accounts. Our firm's associated persons may also be registered representatives of LPL.

### **Potential Conflicts of Interest**

Transactions in LPL advisory program accounts are generally effected through LPL as the executing broker-dealer.

We receive compensation as a result of a client's participation in an LPL program. Depending on, among other things, the size of the account, changes in its value over time, the ability to negotiate fees or commissions, and the number of transactions, the amount of this compensation may be more or less than what we would receive if the client participated in other programs, whether through LPL or another sponsor, or paid separately for investment advice, brokerage and other services.

#### **(iv) Financial Planning and Consultations:**

We provide a variety of financial planning and consultation services to individuals, families and other clients regarding the management of their financial resources based upon an analysis of client's current situation, goals, and objectives. Generally, such financial planning services will involve preparing a financial plan or rendering a financial consultation for clients based on the client's financial goals and objectives. This planning or consulting may encompass one or more of the following areas: Investment Planning, Retirement Planning, Estate Planning, Charitable Planning, Education Planning, Corporate and Personal Tax Planning, Cost Segregation Study, Corporate Structure, Real Estate Analysis, Mortgage/Debt Analysis, Insurance Analysis, Lines of Credit Evaluation, Business and Personal Financial Planning.

Our written financial plans or financial consultations rendered to clients usually include general recommendations for a course of activity or specific actions to be taken by the clients. For example, recommendations may be made that the clients begin or revise investment programs, create or revise wills or trusts, obtain or revise insurance coverage, commence or alter retirement savings, or establish education or charitable giving programs. It should also be noted that we refer clients to an accountant, attorney or other specialist, as necessary for non-advisory related services. For written financial planning engagements, we provide our clients with a written summary of their financial situation, observations, and recommendations. For financial consulting engagements, we usually do not provide our clients with a written summary of our observations and recommendations as the process is less formal than our planning service. Plans or consultations are typically completed within six (6) months of the client signing a contract with us, assuming that all the information and documents we request from the client are provided to us promptly. Implementation of the recommendations will be at the discretion of the client.

#### **(v) Merit 401(K) Maximizer Program:**

We provide consulting services based on our firm's Merit 401(K) Maximizer Program ("MMP"). MMP is offered to help clients realize the value of their benefits package, to help them understand all options available under that benefits package and to help them plan how to take advantage of those benefits to work towards a secure future. These services are offered on an employee participant level. Our firm's associated persons will analyze the client's situation and the client's employer benefits options in light of current market conditions. They will make recommendations to help the client minimize their risk but still take advantage of changing market conditions and trends to help their goals become reality.

Under no circumstances will we or our associated persons consider MMP to be an asset management service. If a client elects to follow any recommendations received from us or our associated persons, the client is responsible for implementation. We and our associated persons will not implement transactions or act as custodian for client accounts when providing these services.

(vi) Referrals to Third Party Money Managers:

We provide clients with a list of investment advisory services of third party professional portfolio management firms for the individual management of client accounts. As part of this process, we assist clients in identifying an appropriate third party money manager. We provide initial due diligence on third party money managers and ongoing reviews of their management of your account.

In order to assist clients in the selection of a third party money manager, we typically gather information from the client about their financial situation, investment objectives, and reasonable restrictions they can impose on the management of the account, which are often very limited. It is important to note that we do not offer advice on any specific securities or other investments in connection with this service. Investment advice and trading of securities is only offered by or through the third party money managers to clients.

We periodically review third party money managers' reports provided to the client, but no less often than on an annual basis. Our associates contact the clients from time to time, as agreed to with the client, in order to review their financial situation and objectives; communicate information to third party money managers as warranted; and, assist the client in understanding and evaluating the services provided by the third party money manager. The client will be expected to notify us of any changes in his/her financial situation, investment objectives, or account restrictions that could affect their account. The client may also directly contact the third party money manager managing the account or sponsoring the program.

C. Explanation of whether (and, if so, how) we tailor our advisory services to the individual needs of clients, whether clients may impose restrictions on investing in certain securities or types of securities.

(i) Individual Tailoring of Advice to Clients:

We offer individualized investment advice to clients utilizing our firm's Asset Management. Additionally, we offer general investment advice to clients utilizing the following services offered by our firm: Financial Planning and Consultations and Referrals to Third Party Money Managers.

(ii) Ability of Clients to Impose Restrictions on Investing in Certain Securities or Types of Securities:

We usually do not allow clients to impose restrictions on investing in certain securities or types of securities due to the level of difficulty this would entail in managing their account. In the rare instance that we would allow restrictions, it would be limited to our firm's Asset Management. We do not manage assets through our other services.



D. Participation in wrap fee programs.

We do not offer wrap fee programs.

E. Disclosure of the amount of client assets we manage on a discretionary basis and the amount of client assets we manage on a non-discretionary basis.

We manage \$407,979,981 on a discretionary basis and \$49,933,334 on a non discretionary basis as of December 2012.

## Item 5. Fees and Compensation

We are required to describe our brokerage, custody, fees and fund expenses so you will know how much you are charged and by whom for our advisory services provided to you. Our fees are generally negotiable.

A. Description of how we are compensated for our advisory services provided to you.

(i) Asset Management:

Our fees range from 1.00% to 2.25% of any assets under Management. Fees are billed on a pro-rata annualized basis quarterly in advance based on the value of your account on the last day of the previous quarter. Our fees may be negotiable.

(ii) SEI Asset Management Program:

The maximum total advisory fees charged to clients will not exceed 1.75% per year. Custodian fees and internal Mutual Fund expenses are separate from the SEI client fees. Complete details on the SEI fees and expenses, are disclosed in SEI's Disclosure Brochure which will be given to all clients. The exact fee and/or fee schedule for each client will be disclosed in SEI's Client Agreement.

SEI Trust Company may charge a separate custodial fee for the custody services it provides the client's Account. Mutual Funds held in the Account pay their own advisory fees and other expenses, which are explained in each Mutual Fund's prospectus. These fees and expenses are separate charges from the Account management fees.

SEI Program management fees (Management Fees) are payable quarterly, in arrears, based on assets under management at the end of the quarter. Management Fees are automatically deducted from the client's Account. Each quarter SEI will send the client an account statement that will include a Management Fee Notification, which will show the computed fee, any adjustments to fee, an explanation of any adjustment and the net

(iii) LPL Financial Sponsored Advisory Programs:

See Item 4(B)(iii) above.

(iv) Financial Planning and Consultations:

We charge on a flat fee basis for financial planning and consultation services. The total estimated fee, as well as the ultimate fee that we charge you, is based on the scope and complexity of our engagement with you. Our flat fees will generally not exceed \$50,000.

(v) Merit 401(K) Maximizer Program:

The fee is \$299 per year, payable at the time the client agreement is signed. We will never require payment of more than \$1,200 in fees, more than six months in advance.

(vi) Referrals to Third Party Money Managers:

We are paid by third party money managers when we refer you to them and you decide to open a managed account. Third party money managers pay us a portion of the investment advisory fee that they charge you for managing your account. Fees paid to us by third party money manager are generally ongoing. All fees we receive from third party money managers and the written separate disclosures made to you regarding these fees comply with Rule 206(4)-3 of the Investment Advisers Act of 1940. The separate written disclosures you need to be provided with include a copy of the third party money manager's Form ADV Part 2, all relevant Brochures, a Solicitation Disclosure Statement detailing the exact fees we are paid and a copy of the third party money manager's privacy policy. The third party money managers we recommend will not directly charge you a higher fee than they would have charged without us introducing you to them.

B. Description of whether we deduct fees from clients' assets or bill clients for fees incurred.

(i) Asset Management:

Our firm's fees are billed on a pro-rata annualized basis quarterly in advance based on the value of your account on the last day of the previous quarter. Fees will generally be automatically deducted from your managed account\*. As part of this process, you understand and acknowledge the following:

- 1) Your independent custodian sends statements at least quarterly to you showing all disbursements for your account, including the amount of the advisory fees paid to us;
- 2) You provide authorization permitting us to be directly paid by these terms;
- 3) If we send a copy of our invoice to you, we send a copy of our invoice to the independent custodian at the same time we send the invoice to you;
- 4) If we send a copy of our invoice to you, our invoice includes a legend as required by paragraph (a)(2) of Rule 206(4)-2 under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940.\*\*

\* We do not offer direct billing as an option to our asset management clients.

\*\*The legend urges the client to compare information provided in their statements with those from the qualified custodian in account opening notices and subsequent statements sent to the client for whom the adviser opens custodial accounts with the qualified custodian.

(ii) SEI Asset Management Program:

Our firm's fees are billed on a pro-rata annualized basis quarterly in arrears based on the value of your account on the last day of the previous quarter. Fees will generally be automatically deducted from your managed account\*. As part of this process, you understand and acknowledge the following:

- 1) Your independent custodian sends statements at least quarterly to you showing all disbursements for your account, including the amount of the advisory fees paid to us;
- 2) You provide authorization permitting us to be directly paid by these terms;
- 3) If we send a copy of our invoice to you, we send a copy of our invoice to the independent custodian at the same time we send the invoice to you;
- 4) If we send a copy of our invoice to you, our invoice includes a legend as required by paragraph (a)(2) of Rule 206(4)-2 under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940.\*\*

\* We do not offer direct billing as an option to our asset management clients.

\*\*The legend urges the client to compare information provided in their statements with those from the qualified custodian in account opening notices and subsequent statements sent to the client for whom the adviser opens custodial accounts with the qualified custodian.

(iii) LPL Financial Sponsored Programs:

For more information regarding the LPL programs, including more information on the advisory services and fees that apply, the types of investments available in the programs and the potential conflicts of interest presented by the programs please see the LPL Financial Form ADV Part 2 or applicable client agreement.

(iv) Financial Planning and Consultations:

We require a retainer of fifty-percent (50%) of the ultimate financial planning or consultation fee with the remainder of the fee directly billed to you and due to us within thirty (30) days of your financial plan being delivered or consultation rendered to you. In all cases, we will not require a retainer exceeding \$1,200 when services cannot be rendered within 6 (six) months.

(v) Merit 401(K) Maximizer Program:

Clients may elect to have fees billed directly to them, to have fees automatically deducted from an existing account or to have fees paid by a direct credit card payment authorization. If a client chooses to have fees automatically deducted from an existing account or to have fees paid by credit card, the client will be required to provide the account custodian with written authorization to have fees deducted and paid directly to us. Services continue throughout the one-year period of the client agreement. Services are automatically renewed on the anniversary date of the original agreement at the same price as was agreed upon unless terminated by the parties. Fees for the following year are due at the time of renewal.

(vi) Referrals to third party money managers:

Third party money managers establish and maintain their own separate billing processes which we have no control over. In general, they will directly bill you and describe how this works in their separate written disclosure documents.

C. Description of any other types of fees or expenses clients may pay in connection with our advisory services, such as custodian fees or mutual fund expenses.

Clients will incur transaction charges for trades executed in their accounts. These transaction fees are separate from our fees and will be disclosed by the firm that the trades are executed through. Also, clients will pay the following separately incurred expenses, which we do not receive any part of: charges imposed directly by a mutual fund, index fund, or exchange traded fund which shall be disclosed in the fund's prospectus (i.e., fund management fees and other fund expenses).

D. Client's advisory fees are due quarterly in advance and arrears.

Asset Management:

We charge our advisory fees quarterly in advance. In the event that you wish to terminate our services, we will refund the unearned portion of our advisory fee to you. You need to contact us in writing and state that you wish to terminate our services. Upon receipt of your letter of termination, we will proceed to close out your account and process a pro-rata refund of unearned advisory fees.

SEI Asset Management Program:

We charge our advisory fees quarterly in arrears. Clients may terminate the SEI Program account at any time by notifying us. Termination will be effective upon receipt of such notice. If services are terminated within five business days of executing the client agreement, services will be terminated without penalty. After the initial five business days, the client may be responsible for payment of fees for the number of days of services were provided by us prior to receipt of the notice of termination.

LPL Financial Sponsored Program:

For more information regarding the LPL programs, including more information on the advisory services and fees that apply, the types of investments available in the programs and the potential conflicts of interest presented by the programs please see the LPL Financial Form ADV Part 2 or applicable client agreement.

Financial Planning and Consultations:

Financial planning services automatically terminate upon presentation of the plan to the client. However, the parties may terminate the services earlier upon providing either oral or written notice to the other party, and termination will be effective immediately upon receipt. If oral notice is provided, written confirmation is required within five business days. If services are terminated within five business days of executing the client agreement, services will be terminated without penalty. After the initial five business days, the client will be responsible for the time expended to the date notice of termination was received. We will provide a statement detailing the time expended by its associated persons and the prorated amount refunded to or due from the client.

Merit 401(K) Maximizer Program:

Either party may terminate MMP services by providing either oral or written notice to the other. Termination will be effective immediately upon receipt of notice. If oral notice is provided, written confirmation is required within five business days. If services are terminated within five business days of executing the client agreement, services will be terminated without penalty. After the initial five business days, no refund will be provided to the client.

E. Commissionable securities sales.

We sell securities for a commission. In order to sell securities for a commission, our supervised persons are registered representatives of LPL Financial Corporation, member FINRA/SIPC. Our supervised persons may accept compensation for the sale of securities or other investment products, including distribution or service ("trail") fees from the sale of mutual funds. You should be aware that the practice of accepting commissions for the sale of securities:

- 1) Presents a conflict of interest and gives our firm and/or our supervised persons an incentive to recommend investment products based on the compensation received, rather than on your needs. We generally address commissionable sales conflicts that arise:
  - a) when explaining to clients that commissionable securities sales creates an incentive to recommend products based on the compensation we and/or our supervised persons may earn and may not necessarily be in the best interests of the client;
  - b) when recommending commissionable mutual funds, explaining that "no-load" funds are available through our firm if the client wishes to become an investment advisory client.
- 2) In no way prohibits you from purchasing investment products recommended by us through other brokers or agents which are not affiliated with us.
- 3) More than 50% of our revenue from advisory clients results from commissions and other compensation paid to our supervised persons by broker-dealers for the sale of investment products we or our supervised persons recommend to you, including trail fees from the sale of mutual funds. The commissions we earn provide our primary source of compensation.
- 4) We charge advisory fees in addition to commissions. In doing so, we reduce our advisory fees to offset the commissions our supervised persons receive.

## **Item 6. Performance-Based Fees and Side-By-Side Management**

We do not charge performance fees to our clients.

## **Item 7. Types of Clients and Account Requirements**

We have the following types of clients:

- Individuals and High-Net Worth Individuals;
- Trusts.

Our requirements for opening and maintaining accounts or otherwise engaging us:

- We do not require a minimum account balance for our asset management services.
- LPL sponsored programs require a minimum account balance. Please see Item 4B(iii).

We do not charge a minimum fee for financial plans.

## Item 8. Methods of Analysis, Investment Strategies and Risk of Loss

### A. Description of the methods of analysis and investment strategies we use in formulating investment advice or managing assets.

#### Methods of Analysis:

Our firm's primary method of analysis is the use of Fundamental Analysis. However, we will make tactical adjustments based on the complexity and scope of a client's project.

#### Investment Strategies we use:

Our firm's primary investment strategy is advising Long term purchases (securities held at least a year). However, we may advise other strategies based on the complexity and scope of a client's project.

#### Please note:

Investing in securities involves risk of loss that clients should be prepared to bear. While the stock market may increase and your account(s) could enjoy a gain, it is also possible that the stock market may decrease and your account(s) could suffer a loss. It is important that you understand the risks associated with investing in the stock market, are appropriately diversified in your investments, and ask us any questions you may have.

### B. Our practices regarding cash balances in client accounts, including whether we invest cash balances for temporary purposes and, if so, how.

We generally invest client's cash balances in money market funds, FDIC Insured Certificates of Deposit, high-grade commercial paper and/or government backed debt instruments. Ultimately, we try to achieve the highest return on our client's cash balances through relatively low-risk conservative investments. In most cases, at least a partial cash balance will be maintained in a money market account so that our firm may debit advisory fees for our services related to comprehensive portfolio management, asset management service and portfolio monitoring, as applicable.

## Item 9. Disciplinary Information

There are no legal or disciplinary events that are material to a client's or prospective client's evaluation of our advisory business or the integrity of our management.

## Item 10. Other Financial Industry Activities and Affiliations

Our firm's management persons are registered representatives of LPL Financial LLC, member FINRA/SIPC. Management persons may offer securities and receive normal and customary commissions as a result of securities transactions. This presents a conflict of interest to the extent that the management persons recommend that a client invest in a security which results in a commission being paid to him/her.

Additionally, our advisory representatives may be licensed insurance agents. As such, they may have an incentive to sell and recommend insurance products to advisory clients. When such recommendations or sales are made, a conflict of interest exists as they may earn insurance commissions for the sale of those products, which may create an incentive to recommend such products. Clients are under no obligation to purchase insurance products from us.

## **Item 11. Code of Ethics, Participation or Interest in Client Transactions and Personal Trading**

**A. Brief description of our Code of Ethics adopted pursuant to SEC rule 204A-1 and offer to provide a copy of our Code of Ethics to any client or prospective client upon request.**

We recognize that the personal investment transactions of members and employees of our firm demand the application of a high Code of Ethics and require that all such transactions be carried out in a way that does not endanger the interest of any client. At the same time, we believe that if investment goals are similar for clients and for members and employees of our firm, it is logical and even desirable that there be common ownership of some securities. Therefore, in order to prevent conflicts of interest, we have in place a set of procedures (including a pre-clearing procedure) with respect to transactions effected by our members, officers and employees for their personal accounts<sup>1</sup>. In order to monitor compliance with our personal trading policy, we have a quarterly securities transaction reporting system for all of our associates.

Furthermore, our firm has established a Code of Ethics which applies to all of our associated persons. An investment adviser is considered a fiduciary. As a fiduciary, it is an investment adviser's responsibility to provide fair and full disclosure of all material facts and to act solely in the best interest of each of our clients at all times. We have a fiduciary duty to all clients. Our fiduciary duty is considered the core underlying principle for our Code of Ethics which also includes Insider Trading and Personal Securities Transactions Policies and Procedures. We require all of our supervised persons to conduct business with the highest level of ethical standards and to comply with all federal and state securities laws at all times. Upon employment or affiliation and at least annually thereafter, all supervised persons will sign an acknowledgement that they have read, understand, and agree to comply with our Code of Ethics. Our firm and supervised persons must conduct business in an honest, ethical, and fair manner and avoid all circumstances that might negatively affect or appear to affect our duty of complete loyalty to all clients. This disclosure is provided to give all clients a summary of our Code of Ethics. However, if a client or a potential client wishes to review our Code of Ethics in its entirety, a copy will be provided promptly upon request.

**B. If our firm or a related person recommends to clients, or buys or sells for client accounts, securities in which our firm or a related person has a material financial interest (excluding an interest as a shareholder of an SEC-registered, open-end investment company), we must describe our practice and discuss the conflicts of interest it presents.**

We have nothing to disclose in this regards.

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of the policy, our associate's personal account generally includes any account (a) in the name of our associate, his/her spouse, his/her minor children or other dependents residing in the same household, (b) for which our associate is a trustee or executor, or (c) which our associate controls, including our client accounts which our associate controls and/or a member of his/her household has a direct or indirect beneficial interest in.

- C. If our firm or a related person invests in the same securities (or related securities, e.g., warrants, options or futures) that our firm or a related person recommends to clients, we are required to describe our practice and discuss the conflicts of interest this presents and generally how we address the conflicts that arise in connection with personal trading.

Related persons of our firm may buy or sell securities and other investments that are also recommended to clients. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's Code of Ethics, a copy of which is available upon request.

- D. If our firm or a related person recommends securities to clients, or buys or sells securities for client accounts, at or about the same time that you or a related person buys or sells the same securities for our firm's (or the related person's own) account, we are required to describe our practice and discuss the conflicts of interest it presents. We are also required to describe generally how we address conflicts that arise.

Related persons of our firm may buy or sell securities for themselves at or about the same time they buy or sell the same securities for client accounts. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's code of ethics, a copy of which is available upon request. Further, our related persons will refrain from buying or selling the same securities within 24 hours of buying or selling for our clients. If related persons' accounts are included in a block trade, our related persons will always trade personal accounts last.

## Item 12. Brokerage Practices

- A. Description of the factors that we consider in selecting or recommending broker-dealers for client transactions and determining the reasonableness of their compensation (e.g., commissions).

Our firm is independently owned and operated and not affiliated with any custodian. Regardless of the custodian chosen, the client is required to select Merit Financial Advisors, LLC as its adviser on their accounts. The chosen custodian will maintain custody of all client funds and securities.

Our firm may have non-soft-dollar arrangements with custodian of your choice under which we may receive non-soft-dollar services such as research and administrative functions including portfolio pricing, account statement generation and fee calculations, which are intended to support our firm in conducting business and in serving the best interests of our clients. These services do not incentivize us to recommend any particular custodian. Our recommendation to our clients is based on our clients' interests in receiving best execution and the level of competitive, professional services custodians provide. Our firm does not receive client brokerage commissions (or markups or markdowns) to obtain research or other products or services. We do not receive soft dollars, products or services acquired with client brokerage commissions. Each custodian may have different account fees, execution charges and execution capabilities. At times a client may incur higher account-related fees and execution charges based on the custodian chosen. Factors we consider include cost, anticipated level of asset safety, client confidentiality, communication and reporting. We base each decision on a client's individual goals, objectives, and circumstances. We do not direct client transactions to Custodians in return for soft-dollar benefits.



- B. Discussion of whether, and under what conditions, we aggregate the purchase or sale of securities for various client accounts in quantities sufficient to obtain reduced transaction costs (known as bunching). If we do not bunch orders when we have the opportunity to do so, we are required to explain our practice and describe the costs to clients of not bunching.

We do not aggregate the purchase or sale of securities for various client accounts but rather review accounts independently and place transactions accordingly. Whether or not securities are purchased or sold at approximately the same time, all client transactions will incur individual transaction fees. Whether or not we aggregate our orders, LPL Financial does bunch orders. The advantage of bunching is that orders are handled in a way that may mitigate market impact, when applicable and possible. If orders are bunched, each client gets the same average execution price.

### Item 13. Review of Accounts or Financial Plans

- A. Review of client accounts or financial plans, along with a description of the frequency and nature of our review, and the titles of our employees who conduct the review.

We review accounts periodically or as often as necessary for our clients subscribing to our firm's Asset Management. Third Party Money Management clients receive periodic reviews. The nature of these reviews is to learn whether clients' accounts are in line with their investment objectives, appropriately positioned based on market conditions, and investment policies, if applicable. Only our Financial Advisors or Portfolio Managers will conduct reviews.

Financial planning clients do not receive reviews of their written plans unless they take action to schedule a financial consultation with us. We do not provide ongoing services to financial planning clients, but are willing to meet with such clients upon their request to discuss updates to their plans, changes in their circumstances, etc.

- B. Review of client accounts on other than a periodic basis, along with a description of the factors that trigger a review.

We may review client accounts more frequently than described above. Among the factors which may trigger an off-cycle review are major market or economic events, the client's life events, requests by the client, etc.

- C. Description of the content and indication of the frequency of written or verbal regular reports we provide to clients regarding their accounts.

We do not provide written reports to clients, unless asked to do so. Verbal reports to clients take place on at least an annual basis when we meet with clients who subscribe our firm's Asset Management and Third Party Money Management services.

As mentioned in Item 13A of this Brochure, financial planning clients do not receive written or verbal updated reports regarding their financial plans unless they separately contract with us for a post-financial plan meeting or update to their initial written financial plan.

## Item 14. Client Referrals and Other Compensation

- A. If someone who is not a client provides an economic benefit to our firm for providing investment advice or other advisory services to our clients, we must generally describe the arrangement. For purposes of this Item, economic benefits include any sales awards or other prizes.

### **Investment or Brokerage Discretion**

We provide discretionary portfolio management services where the investment advice provided is custom tailored to meet the needs and investment objectives of each client. Accordingly, we are authorized to perform various functions, at the client's expense, without further approval from the client. Such functions include the determination of securities to be purchased/sold and the amount of securities to be purchased/sold. We do not have discretionary authority over the broker or dealer to be used.

### **Suggestion of Brokers to Clients**

We shall recommend LPL Financial. LPL is the broker-dealer and investment adviser with which our representatives are also associated. As a result of the individual association of the our representatives with LPL, we are generally required to utilize the brokerage/custodial services of LPL for investment advisory accounts. Our general policies relative to the execution of client securities brokerage transactions are as follows:

### **Execution of Brokerage Transactions (when applicable)**

If requested, we will arrange for the execution of securities brokerage transactions for the account through broker-dealers that we reasonably believe will provide "best execution". In seeking "best execution", the determinative factor is not the lowest possible commission cost, but whether the transaction represents the best qualitative execution. We also take into consideration the full range of a broker-dealer's services including execution capability, commission rates, and responsiveness. Although we will seek competitive commission rates, it may not necessarily obtain the lowest possible commission rates for account transactions.

Over-the-Counter (OTC) securities transactions for our clients are generally effected based on two (2) separate broker-dealers: (1) a "dealer" or "principal" acting as market-maker; and (2) the executing broker-dealer that acts in an agency capacity for the client's account. Dealers executing principal transactions typically include a mark-up/down, which is included in the offer or bid price of the securities purchased or sold. In addition to the dealer mark-up/down, the client may also incur the transaction fee imposed by the executing broker-dealer. We do not receive any portion of the dealer mark-up/down or the executing broker-dealer transaction fee.

Transactions for each client account generally will be effected independently, unless we decide to purchase or sell the same securities for several clients at approximately the same time. We may, but are not obligated to, combine or "batch" such orders to obtain "best execution", to negotiate more favorable commission rates, to allocate fairly among the clients' differences in prices and commissions or other transaction costs that might have been obtained had such orders been placed independently. Under this procedure, transactions will be averaged as to price and will be allocated among our clients in proportion to the purchase and sale orders placed for each client account on any given day. To the extent that we determine to aggregate

client orders for the purchase or sale of securities, including securities in which our principals) and/or associated persons) may invest, we shall generally do so in accordance with the parameters set forth in SEC No-Action Letter, SMC Capital, Inc. We shall not receive any additional compensation or remuneration as a result of the aggregation.

When referring clients to dealers, we will only refer clients to dealers registered in states where the clients reside.

### **Additional Compensation**

We may receive from LPL or a mutual fund company, without cost and/or at a discount support services and/or products, to assist us to better monitor and service client accounts maintained at such institutions. Included within the support services we may receive investment-related research, pricing information and market data, software and other technology that provide access to client account data, compliance and/or practice management-related publications, discounted or gratis consulting services, discounted and/or gratis attendance at conferences, meetings, and other educational and/or social events, marketing support, computer hardware and/or software and/or other products used by us to assist us in our investment advisory business operations. Our clients do not pay more for investment transactions effected and/or assets maintained at LPL as result of this arrangement. There is no commitment made by us to LPL or any other institution as a result of the above arrangement.

- B. If our firm or a related person directly or indirectly compensates any person who is not our employee for client referrals, we are required to describe the arrangement and the compensation.

We do not pay referral fees (non-commission based) to independent solicitors (non-registered representatives) for the referral of their clients to our firm in accordance with Rule 206 (4)-3 of the Investment Advisers Act of 1940.

## **Item 15. Custody**

All of our clients receive at least quarterly account statements directly from their custodians. Upon opening an account with a qualified custodian on a client's behalf, we promptly notify the client in writing of the qualified custodian's contact information. If we decide to also send account statements to clients, such notice and account statements include a legend that recommends that the client compare the account statements received from the qualified custodian with those received from our firm.

We encourage our clients to raise any questions with us about the custody, safety or security of their assets. The custodians we do business with will send you independent account statements listing your account balance(s), transaction history and any fee debits or other fees taken out of your account.

## **Item 16. Investment Discretion**

Our clients need to sign a discretionary investment advisory agreement with our firm for the management of their account. This type of agreement only applies to our Asset Management service. This Agreement shall not become effective until acceptance by us as evidenced by the signature of an authorized representative.

Upon receiving written authorization from the client, we may manage client's assets on a limited discretionary basis. When we do, discretionary authority is limited in that we will not have the authority to withdraw funds and/or securities from client accounts except when written authorization has been provided to have fees automatically deducted from the client's account and paid directly to us.

## **Item 17. Voting Client Securities**

We do not and will not accept the proxy authority to vote client securities. Clients will receive proxies or other solicitations directly from their custodian or a transfer agent. In the event that proxies are sent to our firm, we will forward them on to you and ask the party who sent them to mail them directly to you in the future. Clients may call, write or email us to discuss questions they may have about particular proxy votes or other solicitations.

However, third party money managers selected or recommended by our firm may vote proxies for clients. Therefore, except in the event a third party money manager votes proxies, clients maintain exclusive responsibility for: (1) directing the manner in which proxies solicited by issuers of securities beneficially owned by the client shall be voted, and (2) making all elections relative to any mergers, acquisitions, tender offers, bankruptcy proceedings or other type events pertaining to the client's investment assets. Therefore (except for proxies that may be voted by a third party money manager), our firm and/or you shall instruct your qualified custodian to forward to you copies of all proxies and shareholder communications relating to your investment assets.

## **Item 18. Financial Information**

We do not require nor do we solicit prepayment of more than \$1,200 in fees per client, six months or more in advance. Therefore we have not included a balance sheet for our most recent fiscal year. Neither have we been the subject of a bankruptcy petition at any time during the past ten years.