

*Savant Capital Management*

## Sharing Quality Investment Advice for 30 Years



(Blake Nunes photos)

(L-R) Savant Capital Management principals Richard A. Bennett, Thomas A. Muldowney and Brent R. Brodeski believe there's power in developing personal relationships with clients to better serve their financial needs.

By Eron Harvey

**T**om Muldowney is not your typical investment advisor. The founder and board chairman of Savant Capital Management, which is headquartered in Rockford, considers himself more a philosopher than a numbers guy.

With ease, he can quote “Seinfeld” lines, write poetry and exude joy at helping people to pursue their financial goals. His effervescent personality bubbles with a love for knowledge, philosophy and people.

To Muldowney – and, by extension, the people he hires – being a great advisor is knowing clients on a personal level. It’s more about helping clients to gain peace of mind than focusing on balance sheets.

The firm Muldowney started in 1986 has taken the same unique, personal approach to wealth management. As this unique investment firm enters its third decade, it remains more committed than ever to building lasting relationships.

Savant’s financial advisors offer a wide range of services, from assisting with financial planning, investment portfolios and retirement plans to providing family wealth transfer guidance, tax consulting and private trust management.

The company’s financial planning solutions and investment management serve individuals as well as families, foundations, trust funds, retirement plans and nonprofit organizations.

Savant continues to expand its services and coverage area. Last year, it acquired firms in McLean, Va., and Winnetka, Ill., along with an accounting firm in St. Charles. That’s on top of existing offices in Rockford, Chicago, Freeport, Geneva, Hoffman Estates, Naperville, Sterling, Peoria, Ill., Madison and Park Falls, Wis., and an existing office in McLean, Va.

Savant serves customers in 49 states as well as in Asia, Australia and Europe, and has received significant local and national recognition. The team manages about \$4.4 billion in assets.

When Muldowney launched Savant Planning Group in 1986, the investment world was a different place. During the 1970s and ‘80s, advisors tended to focus more on selling products than helping people. Three events enabled Muldowney to introduce a contradictory philosophy: deregulation of financial services in 1975, the computerization of the financial industry in the early ‘80s and the credentialing of individual advisors.

“Before credentialing, we were only trained in sales and selling financial products,” says Muldowney. “Those three events were tectonic changes because they created the platform for real fee-only, impartial advice to be offered to the financial world.”

Changing the paradigm appealed to Muldowney.

“This was really a new phenomenon in the financial and investment world, to move away from product sales,” Muldowney

says. “For years, people had been so used to getting bad financial advice for free – so long as they got a financial product – that they didn’t know what to do with good advice they had to pay for.”

Muldowney’s push to focus on relationships and client needs, rather than prepackaged financial products, was a revolutionary business model in the 1980s. Now, it’s becoming more of an industry standard as consumers demand more transparency.

“Over the course of 30 years, our friends on Wall Street have found that’s a pretty good game plan, and they’ve started emulating what we started,” he says.

Savant still distinguishes itself through personal relationships, backed up by thorough research. A dedicated team of researchers and professionals provide quality guidance and advice on financial actions, allowing the advisor to spend more time building relationships and helping clients to accomplish their unique goals.

Building and maintaining trust is at the core of what makes Savant tick. But people can’t build trust without being trustworthy, Muldowney says. Without establishing trust, clients won’t truly open up about their motivations.

“It’s deeply personal,” he says. “They want to know that it’s personal not just to them, but to you as well. Can they share their secrets, their goals, their life’s ambitions? Can they know that they’re going to be cared for and that their advisor is going to try to help move them toward those goals, without compromising them, and to do so with integrity? Can you do it with proper stewardship of the relationship? It’s not just stewardship of the money, it’s the relationship as well.”

Savant CEO Brent Brodeski partnered with Muldowney in 1992 to create Savant Capital Management, which combines fee-only financial planning with investment portfolio models. Brodeski is a big believer in client trust. Without it, he says, it’s impossible to truly advocate for a client’s best interests.

“From day one, Savant served clients in a fiduciary capacity,”

says Brodeski. “This means we always stood in our client’s shoes, looked through their eyes and advised them as if we were making decisions for ourselves or our families. This core principal of providing unbiased and objective advice was a foundational idea at Savant in 1986, and it’s a principal that still rings true today. Many financial professionals advise. But only a few do so in a way that is transparent and is aligned with their client’s best interest. We believe this is the best way to help our clients build their vision of their ideal future.”

Muldowney and Brodeski aren’t unique at Savant. They’ve made sure to hire like-minded people. They now have 141 employees scattered through 13 locations.

“When Tom and I agreed to go into business, one of the first decisions we made was that we would only hire the best and the brightest,” Brodeski says. “The ‘best’ means high-character, smart, hard-working people who work as a team and always put the client’s interest first. This decision has allowed us to grow from one person to a team that has depth and breadth, and is well-situated to serve our clients for decades to come. In the early days, it was a one or two-man shop. Today we are a team that can provide our clients far more robust and confident advice.”

Muldowney says Savant continues to grow because of the reputation it’s built for providing personalized advice and the education to understand that advice.

“Whenever clients are taking an action, they want the best education possible so that, when they make their decisions, they know they’re making them in their own best interest,” he says. “If you are the deliverer of the knowledge, the information and the capability for that client to take care of themselves, you win a friend – you win an affiant for the rest of your life.”

Savant advises a wide range of clients, from the affluent retiree to the new employee. A growing part of the business lies in corporate 401(k) plans, which help people at all levels of a company to invest in the future.

“Regardless of where that client fits on a net worth statement, you have a unique responsibility to help that person steward those assets, regardless of how big or small the share is,” says Muldowney. “If I can make your life better, I’m going to do it and it doesn’t matter who you are.”

At the core of this personal approach to financial advising is a servant’s heart, something Muldowney has infused into the company culture at Savant Capital Management.

“Our advisors genuinely love their jobs, they love their careers,” he says. “The talk I hear in the halls is that we have the opportunity, when we’re brought in on a client invitation, to help them. Our advisors don’t have to be anxious about selling whatever the company’s widget du jour is. They can help clients, and they’re lifted by lifting someone else.” ■



Professionals like Savant’s Lora Stevens McKee (left), Mike Cyrs and Stephanie Souza provide quality guidance and advice for clients, so that advisors can spend more time building relationships.