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FINANCIAL SERVICES

Fee-only comprehensive financial planning
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*Investments, retirement, tax strategies, estate planning,
corporate benefits and college planning.*

January 24, 2018

A heartfelt "thank you" to my clients and team – Alex III

2017 was a very trying year for me both personally and professionally. I am very fortunate to have such understanding clients and an amazing team supporting me and you. There is absolutely no way I could have managed last year without each one of my team members. As a result of the team's spirit and dedication, we navigated my father's passing as best as anyone could have expected. So to our clients, Sandi, Jim, Marsy, Jeannine, Ann, LaDonna, Marilyn and Bryson, I am grateful. Here's to a better 2018!

The Year Ahead: Still Optimistic and Still Cautious – Alex III

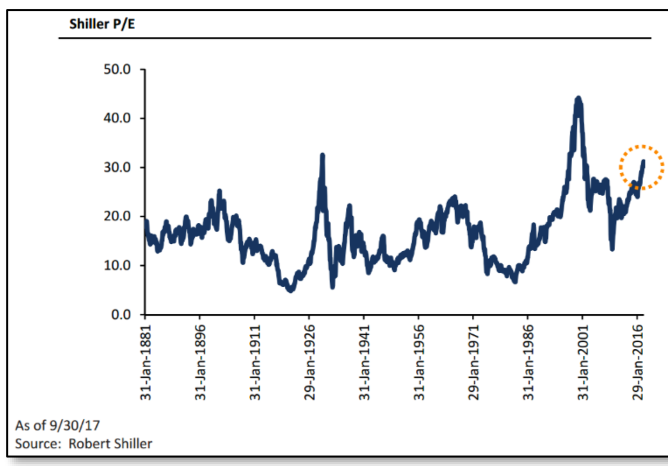
On the heels of a wonderful 2017 global stock market rally, several clients have expressed concern for what 2018 might bring. Ultimately, we believe the global economic expansion has further room to run, but still think we are in the latter stages of this economic expansion and bull stock market.

We would be surprised if U.S. stocks perform close to 2017 returns given that we believe much of the good news is currently baked into stock prices. Consensus forecasts are for just 5% returns for large U.S. stocks. We have more optimism for international stocks in 2018 because those stocks don't seem as expensive and seem better poised for continued earnings growth. Given the lack of any meaningful stock correction (a 5-20% downturn) since February 2016, we expect stocks moves in 2018 to be bumpier unless the good news continues rolling in unabated.

We have muted expectations in 2018 regarding bonds. Rising interest rates provide a natural headwind for bond returns; therefore, we are expecting zero to low single-digit returns. The role of bonds in our portfolios, given their low yields and rising interest rates in the U.S., is primarily to help mitigate a stock bear market. We hate our bonds in a bull market but love them in a bear.

The following are our reasons to be cautious for 2018.

First, U.S. stocks and some other countries' stock markets look expensive, meaning that based on certain various metrics (including the Shiller Price/Earnings Ratio shown to the right) these stocks' prices seem high in an historical context. Most commentary we read, even the bullish ones, agree that stocks, particularly in the U.S., might have risen too high, too fast, compared to their corporate earnings. However, high prices or valuations are not usually the only factor for a bubble.



To quote Jeremy Grantham of GMO, who has done extensive research on investment bubbles (underlines are mine):

> *So let's start by looking very hard at all the great bubbles of the past, searching for useful guides to the future. The classic examples are not just characterized by higher-than-average prices. Price alone seems to me now to be by no means a sufficient sign of an impending bubble break. Among other factors, indicators of extremes of euphoria seem much more important than price. Ben Graham, as quoted two quarterly letters ago, said that as far as he could see no bubble had ever broken (by 1963) without being accompanied by signs of real excess such as those found in 1929. Two months ago, Robert Shiller also made the point (in the Sunday New York Times) – as I*

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> *will do – that not nearly enough signs of euphoria were yet present to make this look like a late-stage bubble. (Although in my opinion they have finally begun to pick up in the last two or three months.) And Robert Shiller was one of a very small group predicting a future market collapse in 1999, and one of a few handfuls with us in 2006 focusing on the future risks from an unprecedented US housing bubble breaking due to vulnerable mortgages.* *(Bracing Yourself for a Possible Near-Term Melt-Up, 1/3/2018)*

Now, a bear market can certainly occur without a bubble. A bear market is defined as a loss of more than 20%, and most bear markets are a result of a recession. Bubbles usually 'pop' with losses much more than 20%. For example, the S&P 500 lost almost 57% from the high in October 2007 to the low in April 2009.

Second, the lack of meaningful stock market corrections in the U.S. since February 2016 is a bit concerning. Since then we have barely had a correction of 5%. Plus, the S&P 500 Index experienced no calendar month of negative returns in 2017 and only one in the past 21 months. The global economic and earnings surprises in 2017 were good news, but we have not had even a minor correction in almost two years. This does not mean the next downturn will lead us right into in a bear market, but we do think some bad news (or just not as good as 2016/2017) could push stocks down 10-20%.

Third, inflation rising much faster than anticipated might cause the Federal Reserve to increase interest rates more than the two or three times currently anticipated for 2018. This might cause investors to worry that much higher interest rates will push the U.S. into a recession more quickly. Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) was 2.1% at year-end. The Federal Reserve's target is 2%. So, right now inflation and much higher rates are not a threat if the current trend continues. However, if significant wage pressures or high oil prices negatively surprise the markets, then this could add to the reasons to be bearish. Note: The rest of the world, like the U.S., still has relatively low, persistent inflation.

Fourth, geopolitical risks have seemingly increased. How the U.S. handles the NAFTA and other trade deals, including those with China, are of important consequence to our financial markets. China's reliance on substantial corporate debt to spur investment and economic growth for the past nine years is concerning. The standoff between the U.S. and North Korea has no good outcomes but, hopefully, both sides choose to avoid a war that, even if not nuclear, would likely cause significant damage to South Korea, one of our democratic and industrial allies. If rising tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalate to outright confrontation, this could further destabilize the Middle East and potentially push oil prices higher.

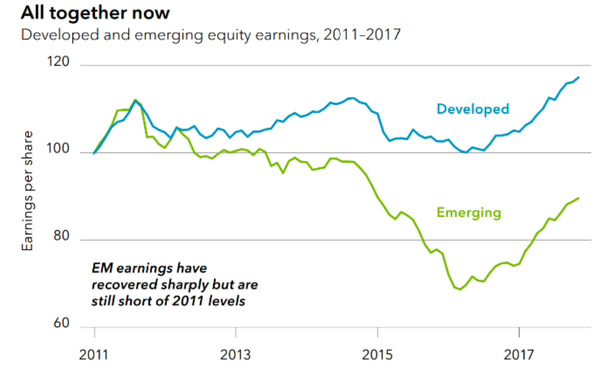
Now, let's turn our attention to the reasons for optimism.

First, we do not see a U.S. recession around the corner in the next 6-12 months. Recessions are always hard to forecast, but with low inflation, low unemployment, good consumer balance sheets and good consumer sentiment, we believe there is currently a low probability of a U.S. recession. The current U.S. forecasts for growth and inflation are around 2.5% and 2.3% respectively. With this said, the U.S. may be entering the late stages of its economic expansion. Recent U.S. tax reform (or more accurately, corporate tax cuts) should have a minor positive impact on U.S. growth in the near-term, but the current consensus amongst economists is that it will have little positive long-term impact.

Second, the global economy is in a synchronized uptick that has not been seen in several years. The U.S., Europe, Japan and many emerging market countries are growing a bit faster than in the past and, at the same time. The breadth of the global recovery has also expanded – manufacturing figures are up in about 80% of countries, a share that has steadily increased over the past year.

Third, even though U.S. interest rates are anticipated to rise further in 2018, they will still be below the Fed's target of less than 3%. The Federal Reserve has embarked on reversing its Quantitative Easing program, which helped keep long-term interest rates low for years, but the rate of reversal is very gradual at this point. On the other hand, the Bank of Japan and the European Central Bank still maintain "loose" monetary policy, thereby continuing to stimulate their economies.

Fourth, corporate earnings around the globe continue to support increasing stock prices, or at least a bullish tone. In 2017 Thomson Reuters data show all major regions increased earnings at a clip faster than 10%, the strongest growth since the post-crisis bounce. We expect more good things in 2018, but 2017 will be a tough act to follow. Year-over-year increases will be harder to replicate. Still, we see the economic and earnings backdrop as positive for stocks, with higher valuations a potential drag, especially in the U.S. The S&P 500 is projected to post an earnings per share (EPS) gain of 10.8% for all of 2017. For 2018, the EPS of companies in the S&P 500 Index is projected to climb 13.6%. S&P 500 company revenues are expected to rise 6.8% for all of 2017 and 5.8% in 2018.



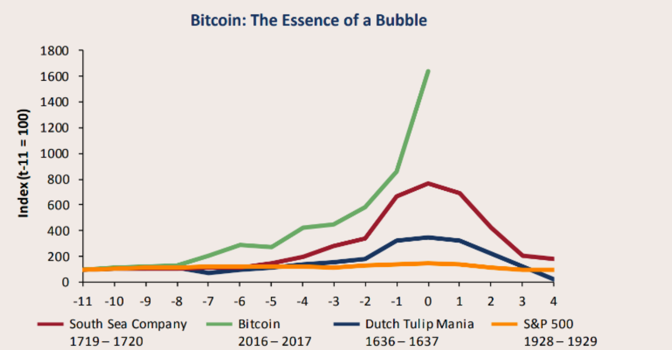
Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Thomson Reuters, November 2017.
Notes: The lines show analysts' 12-month forward earnings-per-share estimates for the MSCI World and MSCI Emerging Markets indexes, rebased to 100 at the start of 2011.

In conclusion, we are cautiously optimistic for 2018 and beyond. In many client meetings, especially for those clients approaching or in retirement, we are starting to discuss the idea of taking less stock risk. No one has a crystal ball, but it's important to have these discussions to weigh the pros and cons of any potential changes in risk.

<u>Bitcoin: Now this seems like a bubble!</u>

This chart comes from GMO Jeremy Grantham's January 3, 2018 commentary. Hindsight is of course 20/20, but Bitcoin started the year at $963.38 and ended at $13,850.40 for a gain of 1,338%. It nearly reached $20,000 coming close at $19,870.62 on December 17th. As of January 18, Bitcoin is down almost 19% in 2018.

Maybe Bitcoin, or some other cryptocurrency, will become a useful, widely accepted global currency in the future. I am certainly not an expert on digital currencies, but right now it looks like a very speculative bubble.



As you can see, Bitcoin dwarfs even the legendary South Sea Bubble! Having no clear fundamental value and largely unregulated markets, coupled with a storyline conducive to delusions of grandeur, makes this more than anything we can find in the history books the very essence of a bubble. Historical analogy suggests this junior bubble, by size, may well crash and burn even before the broad market peaks.

Work and data from my colleague Philip Pilkington.

<u>Market Recap – Jim Stoutenborough, CFP®</u>

Let's do the numbers:

- The U.S. stock markets kept their strong momentum through year-end. December showed gains with the S&P 500 up 1.1%, the Dow Jones Industrial Average up 1.9% and the Russell 2000, the only laggard, down slightly with a -0.4% loss. International markets carried on with a 2.5% gain and bonds were up a bit 0.5%.
- Year-to-date returns for 2017 – Large U.S. companies, the S&P 500 Index and Dow continued the rising tide with 21.8% and 28.1% gains respectively and the Russell 2000 Index (small U.S. companies) trailed the bigger concerns with a 14.7% gain. The international index, the MSCI World ex US lost its lead to the Dow but was still up an impressive 24.2% for the year. The Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index (quality U.S. corporate and gov't bonds) was up 3.5%.

Asset Class	Index/Category	2017	2016	2015
Cash and cash alternatives	Average 1-yr CD Rate	0.29%*	0.32%**	0.27%**
U.S. Bonds	Barclays US Aggregate Bond Index	3.5%	2.7%	0.6%
U.S. Large Companies	S&P 500 Index	21.8%	12.0%	1.4%
U.S Small Companies	Russell 2000 Index	14.7%	21.3%	-4.4%
International Markets	MSCI EAFE NR USD	24.2%	1.0%	-0.8%

Numbers come from Morningstar.com, *FDIC.gov and **Bankrate.com

Inclusion of these indexes and other information herein is for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered indicative of future results. Individual investor's results will vary. Information included herein has been obtained from sources considered to be reliable, but we do not guarantee that such material is accurate or complete. Expressions of opinion are as of this date and are subject to change. Nothing contained herein should be considered an investment recommendation. You should consider any tax or legal manners with the appropriate professional.

You Can't Know Where You Are Going Until You Know Where You Have Been – Sandi Weaver, CPA, CFP®, CFA®

That cliché has a point. What can we learn from what happened in the markets over the last 12 months?

Show Me the Money
U.S. stocks did well. Large companies here made 21%. Small companies here made 14%. But stocks overseas showed even better at 25%, perhaps signaling a change in the trend since our U.S. stocks have outperformed in recent years. That 25% return from overseas companies signaled a strong economic turnaround, since they rose only 1% the year before. Strong returns in stocks are important since we have significant amounts of your money invested in these assets, for most clients.

The Base
Where we didn't earn a strong return was on your bond investments, the low risk portion of your portfolio. The Barclay's U.S. Aggregate Bond Index rose 3.5% in 2017. In fact, bonds have averaged only 2% over the last three years. Interest rates on bonds have been in a long-term secular decline since 1981 – that's 36 years - and have bottomed in the last couple years. We have seen our Federal Reserve initiate five very small increases in rates since 2015, but the federal funds rate still sits at only 1.5% now. That's low. This part of the investment landscape is changing. In a world driven by drama in D.C., it's critical that we remain invested here – profitably – because these are the more stable, constant-returning investments in your accounts.

Values
Price-earnings ratios, one approach to assessing if stocks are over-valued, remain at elevated levels. Based on trailing 12 months' earnings, the S&P 500 P-E ratio is 22 now. A year ago it was 24. If you look at forward earnings, it's 18. The typical range is 12 to 22, with 16 considered average. This is a flashing yellow road sign, but P-Es can remain high for a long time. These high valuations have been supported by robust corporate earnings, which are expected to have grown about 10% in 2017. The environment has been favorable for businesses under a Republican regime and a lenient Federal Reserve Bank.

Some economic factors highlighted in 2017:

- We enjoyed coordinated economic growth on almost all fronts: here, overseas, and in emerging markets. That's seldom seen. Businesses in most countries are humming!
- Oil prices moved from the mid $40's per barrel up to the low $60's. Global demand for oil rose significantly. OPEC and alliances (think Russia) agreed to restrict supply. Shale fracking in the U.S., the marginal producer now, increased production but not enough to overcome these two factors. Result? Higher prices per barrel, which are sticking (at least until Saudi Arabia's ARAMCO has its IPO and goes public).
- The slow death of the retail store and shopping malls inexorably marched on, while online shopping increased its footprint. Overall sales during the holidays popped the most since 2005.

- Why? Partially due to the lowest unemployment rate we've seen since December 2000 – 4.1%. Almost everybody in the labor force is working!
- Inflation remained benign at 2%. With such a tight labor supply, you would think we would have seen more pressure, right? A couple of factors are allowing inflation to sleep, for now. One is the labor pool itself. Many folks retired early, as a result of 2008's Great Recession. Some of those workers are rejoining the labor pool as jobs open up. A second phenomenon is the retiring of the baby boomers and the hiring of the millennials. The salaries for younger millennials are less expensive than those of baby boomers. Wage inflation was 2.5% in 2017, still low.
- Although little reported in the media, much regulation has eased for businesses. For example, how many of you read that Obama's regulations on fracking, scheduled to be implemented last month, were rescinded? Another example, which got more media attention, is the approval of the controversial Keystone XL Pipeline.
- Technology busted through again, enjoying the best return of any business segment in the economy. The S&P technology sector returned 37% and no other S&P segment came close. We are enjoying the internet of things (appliances), talking to our phones to make calls and ask for directions, and using home assistants to order on Amazon, play music, and add events to our calendars. It was an exciting year for us, with more to come!

I have always doubted predictions of upturns or downturns because "we're due", or "a good January yields a good year 90% of the time", or "this time period looks exactly like the market pattern in the 1980's", etc. But knowing where we are in the business cycle matters, the level and direction of interest rates matters, and the growth rate of corporate earnings matters.

How Will the New Tax Bill Affect You? – Sandi Weaver, CPA, CFP®, CFA®

This was published in the Star http://www.kansascity.com/news/business/personal-finance/article195035624.html

Do you have less than $11,200,000? Good news! You won't have to pay estate taxes! But let's assume that wasn't worrying you before, when the cutoff was at $5 million.

What else is in that tax bill?

Grab your 2016 tax return, and let's walk through how things might look for 2018, if we assume your figures don't change that much year to year.

Your tax rate is likely going down – both the marginal and the average. On the other hand, you'll lose the deduction for personal exemptions which you see on page 1 of your Form 1040.

For example, let's say you're married filing joint, and your income was $100,000. That's between $75,900 and $153,100 and under the old law, you'd pay at a 25% marginal (top) tax rate. Under the new bill, you're paying a top 22%, since you're between $77,400 and $165,000. Or, let's say your income was $250,000. Under the old law you paid a top 33%. Under the new bill you pay a top 24%. In both examples you lose the $8,100 personal exemptions under the new bill. If you'd like a pdf of the tax bracket changes, please email LaDonna at LaDonna@PetrovicWeaverFinancial.com.

Towards the top of page 2 of your Form 1040, you'll see the total itemized/standard deductions you took. Most of our clients itemize deductions, so the amount shown is over the $12,700 standard deduction. Under the new bill, you can use the new $24,000 standard deduction, or itemize if that's greater.

You'll want to know now whether you'll be itemizing or not in 2018, so review your most recent Schedule A.
Let's start at the top section. "Medical and Dental Expenses" which exceed 7.5% of your AGI (adjusted gross income) are deductible. That deduction is uncommon, but you can do the math to see if you'll have something to deduct.

The “Taxes You Paid” section on Schedule A covers deductions for state and local taxes, from income tax, real estate tax, and personal property tax. If your Schedule A shows $8,000 in these taxes, count that. If it shows $12,000 in these taxes, you can only use $10,000.

“Interest You Paid” still gives you a deduction, but you cannot increase that over $750,000 in mortgage balances. Nor can you deduct interest on home equity loans anymore.

The next section on Schedule A handles “Gifts to Charity”. Those remain deductible. (The maximum cap increases from 50% to 60% but that impacts few people.)

“Casualty and Theft Losses” are next, affect few people, and have been restricted to federally-declared disasters.

The entire section for miscellaneous deductions (labelled Job Expenses and Certain Miscellaneous Deductions, and Other) is gone, so you cannot deduct costs for job hunting/education, tax preparation/advisor fees, or unreimbursed employee expenses.

Most people can add the “taxes you paid”, the “interest you paid”, and the “gifts to charity” to get potential deductions for 2018. If that exceeds $24,000 for joint filers or $12,000 for single filers, you can probably still itemize in 2018.

- If you have deductions on this page which you’ll no longer be deducting, then ask your CPA if you have other options in deducting those. For example, that safe deposit box rental might also be used for your rental house and be a validly deductible expense on your Schedule E. If you are taking minimum required distributions from your IRA, you can consider paying a portion of your financial advisory fees from that account rather than writing a check; it’s a tax-free distribution then. If you’re using a home equity loan, consider paying that off or using a second mortgage instead.
- Think about bunching deductions into alternate years. Let’s say you have $8,000 in taxes paid, $9,000 in interest, and $5,000 in charitable gifts. That’ll total $22,000. If you’re married filing jointly, you can take the standard deduction of $24,000, the higher amount for 2018. But consider shifting $2,000 of your taxes paid from late in 2018 to January 2019, and giving $10,000 in January 2019 to cover both 2018 and 2019 commitments. That’ll let you bunch itemized deductions in 2019 to $29,000, with $10,000 taxes paid ($2,000 shift plus $8,000 normal amount), $9,000 in interest, and $10,000 gifts ($5,000 shift plus $5,000 normal amount).

The Pease limitation is gone. Yeah! If you had income over $157,000, your itemized deductions were often “limited”. Check the very bottom section of your Schedule A. If the “Yes” box was checked, add up all numbers between line 4 at the top, and line 28 by “Other Miscellaneous Deductions”. That total was greater than the final deductible amount on the bottom line. You lost some of those deductions. That invisible haircut has now evaporated. If you can itemize, you can deduct every dollar.

- Consider using Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) up to the amount of your minimum required distribution from your IRA for charitable gifts. This makes sense particularly if you’re using the new standard deduction in every year, and not itemizing. If you’re itemizing, a QCD may still benefit you if less of your social security is taxed.

For those of you who have a number on line 45 Alternative Minimum Tax, you may be lucky. The exemption increased from $86,200 up to $109,400 for joint filers, and similarly for others.

Under the odds and ends category, 529 college savings plans will now allow a $10,000 withdrawal per year for students in K-12. The child tax credit moved from $1,000 to $2,000. After 2018, those paying maintenance/alimony no longer get a deduction for that while those receiving same no longer classify it as income.

For those getting income from a pass-through entity such as a partnership, S-Corp, or sole proprietorship, you can deduct 20% of business income before paying tax; it’s phased out for higher income earners. Your business can no longer deduct entertainment expenses, just meals.

In a nutshell, most folks will pay slightly lower taxes under the new bill. The IRS is not recommending any changes to W-4 withholdings right now due to the new bill. If you’re using safe harbor now to make estimated tax payments during the year to match the taxes due on the prior year, you'll want to continue that. Once we have all filed for 2018, in April 2019, we'll get a chance to see the final impact.

If you would like more information on this topic, we will be happy to send you summaries that we resourced. Please email LaDonna at LaDonna@PetrovicWeaverFinancial.com.

Meet the New Members of Our Team

Bryson Slater is a financial planning associate with Petrovic Weaver Financial Services. Bryson joined Petrovic Weaver Financial Services in 2017.

Bryson focuses on retirement projections and social security planning, employment benefits, estate planning, insurance, college planning, and tax strategies related to these areas.

Bryson attended the University of Missouri where he received a bachelor's degree in Finance with a minor in Economics. He then worked for a retirement plan record-keeper for five years before joining our team. Bryson is currently taking classes to earn his CFP designation.

Marilyn Brohm is the marketing manager for Petrovic Weaver Financial Services.

Marilyn focuses on managing the company website, preparing marketing materials, developing a digital social network presence and discovering ways to improve client satisfaction.

Marilyn has had a long career in marketing, advertising, product development, and public relations working primarily with manufacturing companies and most recently for the not-for-profit sector. She attended the University of Colorado.

What to Keep for Taxes – Sandi Weaver, CPA, CFP®, CFA®

Most brokerage houses, such as Raymond James, keep our past statements, trade confirmations, and 1099 tax forms for 10 years. (Raymond James keeps your statements as far back as 2001.) So you don't need to! We can always help you re-print a paper copy if you need one.

Normally, you'll want to keep records used in your tax return for 3 years, along with the return itself.

If you claimed a loss from bad debt or from a worthless security, keep that for 7 years.

If you failed to report income, failed to file at all, filed a fraudulent return, keep those records longer (6 years or indefinitely), after the IRS deals with you of course!

Inside & Outside of PWFS

Alex Petrovic III – In many ways, I was happy to put an end to 2017. Our family cannot believe it has almost been a year since my father died (February 18). We miss Papa Alex dearly. In late February, I plan on travelling to Colorado to visit a few clients and snowboard a few days at Breckenridge. My trip will be around the anniversary of my father's passing. He always loved the grand beauty of the Colorado Rockies, and I plan to share some of his remains with those majestic forests, so he can enjoy them once more.

Our son Benny turned 2 years old on December 8. At his party, he started to understand the concept of age and presents. Since Christmas came a few weeks later, the concept of 'my present' is officially solidified. We still haven't opened a couple of his presents; we need to keep the excitement of new things and thoroughly playing with the other toys, as long as possible.

He is still a happy, good kid though he now sleeps in a toddler bed that he can get out of. His nighttime routine now takes much longer as you might expect. He comes out of his room 1-5 times before he goes to bed depending on how tired he is. He usually has a guilty look on his face and says, "I need to stay in my room." He is so cute; it's hard to just shut the door and tell him not to come out.

Our Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays were enjoyable and low-key. We had family on my mother's side in town for each celebration. They enjoyed seeing us and the 4 boys – Benny and my brother's boys are Aiden, Jackson and Charlie… AKA "Char Char".

Dasha just started Rockhurst College's Masters in Business Administration (MBA) program in January. One of her lifelong ambitions has been to get a Masters Degree in Business from a U.S. University, and she has finally embarked on this path! Rockhurst has a fairly flexible program for working students, and so far Dasha has been enjoying the experience. I am proud of her!

Sandi Weaver –I visited Savannah, Georgia for a few days in December.

What a charming city, built on a meticulous grid pattern, smartly enhanced with 22 community squares for green space.

Jim Stoutenborough – The big news was that the new Star Wars movie came out – every Star Wars movie release is an official Stoutenborough family holiday where my son, daughter and I ask for the first day its out as a vacation day. So if anyone schedules a review meeting for the first day a new Star Wars movie is out – you won't see me.

I had always been a big sci fi fan (have seen every original Star Trek TV episode at least 10 times) but when I was in college that seemed something that was part of my youth. Had I known there were such things as trekkie conventions and comic con (in pre-internet days information didn't travel as fast to rural central Illinois as it does now), with similar thinking people, I might have jumped into those with both feet and full costumed regalia.

Bryson Slater - Since joining the Petrovic Weaver team last September, I have had some very months filled with numerous weddings, Royals and Chiefs games, as well as a couple trips visiting friends across the country.

My most memorable experience was visiting New York City for the first time in my life. From sightseeing, to indulging in delicious pizza, to checking out various iconic locations around the city, my trip to New York was an excellent experience. Although I do not know if I would want to move there permanently, I am already looking forward to another trip back to the Big Apple.

Marsy Gordon – As I write this, the holidays are over, and the cold weather is making its presence known – Brrrr!

As expected, the holidays were hectic and wonderful. From late November to the end of December we were able to spend time with all of our kids and grandkids, although not all at the same time. Now the holidays are over, and we can get back to whatever normal is.

On one of the nice weather weekend days we had early in January, I took down our outdoor Christmas decorations, so the neighbors can think we're really on top of things. I'll get to the indoor decorations in good time. Besides, looking at our Christmas tree reminds me of how much fun it was to decorate it with our two six-year-old granddaughters.

It was good to see many of you at our holiday party in December, and we missed the rest of you. We look forward to working with you in the coming months.

Ann Kloster – My family and I went to Loess Bluffs (formerly Squaw Creek) in late December to see the birds and other wildlife.

My dad has been an avid birder for years (he keeps a bird count notepad in his car), and always encourages my brother and me to not only identify birds, but learn about their different habits and habitats. It was a sunny, albeit very cold, late morning when we arrived with our binoculars and thermoses of hot cocoa. Although we were near the end of the birds' migration to Loess Bluff (and due to the frigid temperatures), we weren't that disappointed.
To have multitudes of birds surround you and then take to flight, hearing their calls to one another, is something to behold. We make the trip every year, and it is always a joy. I encourage anyone to do the same.

Marilyn Brohm - My family and I had a wonderful holiday. I hosted both our Christmas eve and Christmas day celebrations.

My brother and his wife stayed at my home for the holidays. They are from Florida and couldn't believe the very cold temperatures and snow. My sister-in-law grew up in South America and I really got tickled when we were in the drug store and she asked what the items in a large display were for; the display had snow shovels, ice scrapers and big snow brushes. I explained it all to her and have had many a chuckle since then.

LaDonna Parker – My sister Carol from Oklahoma City was here for Thanksgiving. Since she became a grandmother it is a rare treat to have her here for any holiday! We had a lovely dinner at Connie's home (our other sister).

None of us are Black Friday shoppers. However, we made an exception this year. We shopped for new furniture for me. We found a great little (very little) desk that I put in my kitchen. We also found a small cabinet that has many small drawers. I use it as a craft cabinet. It has plenty of drawers for all my colored pencils and my knitting project.

It was a special day for me to spend with both of my much-loved sisters And I got furniture that I have wanted for a long time.

Jeannine Shaffer – Our family welcomed a new generation in November with the birth of our first grandchild. We are proud of the new parents as they endured the cycles of sleep deprivation, endless diaper changes, and miles of floor walking during the first month. We have mastered the baby calming techniques of swaddling and shushing. It was a miracle the night we discovered the exhaust fan above the stove would quite her.

It's amazing how quickly she is growing and learning. This second month is so much fun seeing her smile in response to your voice and intently watch our facial expressions. As she listens, she is cooing and babbling like we are having a conversation. We are wondering and hoping she will have her own special names for us.

The country song "Don't Blink" keeps playing in my head, because I know this is all going to go by so quickly. What an emotional experience becoming a grandparent is!

Sandi Weaver

Alex Petrovic III, CFP®
President

Sandi Weaver, CPA, CFP®, CFA®
Senior Advisor