Maier & Associates Financial Group, Inc.

December 2017 Newsletter

Sudoku Puzzle

7		2					5	
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9				2		4		
4	9	5				3	7	
	3	1				2		
			9		4		6	
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	4							

(see back page for answers)

Just for Kids

Don't forget to check out our current programs and events with the Just for Kids Foundation at www.goodkids123.org

Wayne Maier
Founder & CEO

"Remember the only limitations in life are the ones we place on ourselves… Never limit your dream!"

Thanksgiving has come and gone but it's not too late to thank all of you for placing your trust in our firm. It is something that we are extremely grateful for and we continue to dedicate ourselves to doing all we can to help you reach your financial goals.

As we move closer to the end of the year, it appears that the markets are still performing well and the anticipation of tax reform continues to fuel the fire moving the markets forward. Our anticipation is that if tax reform actually happens, that may continue to propel the markets up to the mid-term elections (no promises).

There is not much to say about our portfolios other than we made a few changes in October that seem to be working. We will continue to monitor those changes to make certain they keep us on track and, if not, we have other portfolios waiting in the wings, and will not hesitate to make additional changes. As always, we will continue to keep you updated.

So what's the next big thing?

Christmas, of course!!!

What a fantastic time of the year! First Halloween, then Thanksgiving and now Christmas. So, besides the obvious, what makes it so special? Well, to me it is the best time to connect, or reconnect, with family and friends and to let them know how much they mean to you. It is also a great time to forgive someone who may have offended you and to ask for forgiveness from someone you may offended, which will just make this an even better time of the year.

In closing, from all of the families here at Maier & Associates, we want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and may God bless you richly in 2018.

Until next time… Remember the only limitations in life are the ones we place on ourselves… Never limit your dream!

Wayne C. Maier
CEO

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year.

As I do every year about this time, I try to update you regarding any new rules or changes with Social Security. It seems like there is something new to learn about Social Security every month.

In 2018, the maximum employment income subject to FICA is $128,700, which is an increase over 2017. The employment income limit retirees can earn is $17,040 per year prior to the year they reach full retirement age. Keep in mind there is a special rule amount ($1,420/ month) that applies in the first year calendar year (not 12 months), called the interim year, for those who begin receiving benefits before full retirement age. Self- employed persons have other rules to watch out for, so call me if this pertains to you.

Another interim year rule that you need to be aware of is that a worker can earn $3,780/month in the year in which the worker reaches full retirement age. Once you reach full retirement age there is no limit on earnings. An example is if a worker is full retirement age in October, a $3,780 per month income test is applied for each month prior to full retirement age, however, none for November and December.

There has been a cost of living adjustment of 2% per year for those receiving Social Security retirement benefits now.

Many of us have a Power of Attorney (POA) for someone and we make an assumption the Social Security office will accept that POA on behalf of a spouse, friend, or loved one. Social Security does not accept a POA because they have their own form and that form is called the SSA - 1696. We do NOT advise you to sign this form today because it actually assigns payment of benefits to your named advocate. I spoke to a representative of the Social Security Office who assured me that the form is signed at a point right before it is needed, or as it is needed. I asked how one would be able to do this if the person is incapacitated. The answer was again, it is important to wait. I want to emphasize that you should not sign this form today; I just want you to be aware of the potential issue. The time to act would be if you believe a loved one is becoming incapacitated.

Have a Great New Year!

Michael A. Wilcox, ChFC®, RICP®
Senior Vice President

"Social Security does not accept a POA because they have their own form and that form is called the SSA - 1696. We do NOT advise you to sign this form today because it actually assigns payment of benefits to your named advocate."

Gail Doane, E.A.
Tax Specialist

"There's still time for some last minute tax planning that may be worth looking into."

Merry Christmas! I probably say this every year but I can't believe it's already December! I certainly don't want to put a damper on this wonderful time of year but it seems like tax season just got over and here we are gearing up for another one!

With 2017 coming to a close, it's easy to think there's nothing more to do about your tax situation for this year. However, there's still time for some last minute tax planning that may be worth looking into. Of course not all strategies will work out for everyone so you may want to talk to your tax advisor to see if the following strategies will work in your situation before you do anything different.

Here's a short synopsis of a couple simple strategies - if you'd like more detailed information please don't hesitate to give me a call.

- When I go over tax returns with clients I often advise them to start "bunching" their deductions. For those of you who have discussed this strategy with your tax advisor, remember your plan as your winter property tax bills come out this month. Should you be paying them before the year end or wait until after the first of the year? The same strategy will hold true if you have to make a fourth quarter estimated state/city tax payment or if you'll be making any out of the ordinary charitable donations. Paying these things all in the same tax year will maximize your itemized deductions for that year, possibly allowing you to itemize deductions every other year.
- Along the same (but different) lines of "bunching" deductions, if you think a GOP tax plan will be enacted in 2018, you may want to consider paying as many currently deductible items as possible in 2017. Under most of the GOP plans presently being discussed, itemized deductions as we now know them will be changing for an increased standard deduction. I have to advise caution and thinking this through, however. It's a gamble and it might not make sense to take tax deductions this year if you're expecting higher income in 2018 - it could put you into a higher tax bracket next year.

Looking forward to 2018! What can you do to feel accomplished right at the beginning of the year? Some things to consider to get 2018 off to a great start:

- Do you need to adjust federal or state withholding? Sometimes to avoid underpayment penalties taxpayers increase withholding for one or more pay periods before the end of the year and some decrease

withholding for various reasons. If this was done, don't forget to change withholding back to normal starting as soon as possible so it will be reflected over the entire year.

- Have you been thinking that you really need to open up that college plan for a child or grandchild? What better time than the beginning of the year when you can cross it off the "New Year's Resolution" list!

Finally, I've included an income tax checklist in this newsletter to help in getting your tax information together. If Maier & Associates completed your tax return last year and you'd like a multi-page tax organizer sent to you, please give the office a call or drop me an email.

Have a great Christmas and wonderful holiday season!

Gail Doane, EA
Tax Specialist

INCOME TAX CHECKLIST

This form is to assist you in gathering your income tax information. It is not all encompassing – if you're not sure about an item, it is better to include it or jot down questions about it than to lose a possible deduction.

General Information:

□ First, middle initial, and last names of taxpayers and dependents as written on the Social Security cards, and dates of birth for taxpayers and all dependents, ***especially*** new dependents.

□ Address (city, state, zip), telephone number, and e-mail address.

□ Marital Status: Single ___ Married ___ Head of Household ___ Separated ___

□ Number of Dependents: ___ Did any dependents have any income? Yes ___ No ___

□ Do all dependents live with you? Yes ___ No ___

Types of Income & Reporting Forms:

□ Wages: All W-2's
□ Pensions/Retirements: 1099-R
□ Social Security: SSA-1099
□ Bank Interest: 1099-INT
□ Dividends: 1099-DIV
□ Commissions: 1099-MISC
□ Tips and Gratuities
□ Sales of Stock, Mutual Funds: 1099-B
□ Income from Rentals: All 1099-MISC
□ Business Income: All 1099-MISC & 1099-K
□ Farm Income
□ Alimony Received: Total amount
□ Unemployment: 1099-G
□ State Tax Refund: 1099-G
□ Supplemental Income: Schedule K-1
□ Miscellaneous: Jury Duty, Gambling, Other

Business Income & Expense Items:

Total gross income	Advertising	Auto: Parking & Tolls	Business phone
Cell phone expense	Subcontractors	Commissions	Insurance
Interest paid	Office Expense	Rent/lease fees	Repairs
Legal & professional fees	Supplies	Cleaning & maintenance	Dues & publications
Small Tools	License fees	Taxes	Employee benefits
Education expenses	Association dues	Bank/credit card fees	Postage
Meals & entertainment	Hotel & travel	Asset purchases	Business mileage

Additional Items for Rental Properties:

Keys	Condo/PUD fees	Management fees	Mortgage statements
Lawn care/Snow removal	Pest control	Trash removal	Other

Deductions & Credits:

Student loan interest | IRAs /Keogh/SEPs | HSA acct. information | Teacher expenses

Self-employed health ins. | Adoption expenses | Moving expenses

Early withdrawal of savings penalty

College education expenses & information for taxpayer and/or dependents, Form 1098-T

Alimony paid - must have name and Social Security number of recipient and amount paid

Child & dependent care - must have name, address, Social Security number or EIN of provider and amount paid per child or adult dependent

Itemized Deductions:

Medical/Dental

Medical & dental bills | Prescriptions | Glasses/contact lenses & supplies

Out-of-pocket expenses | Lab fees | Medical miles | Hearing aids

Medical & dental insurance | Long term care insurance

Taxes

Prior year state tax paid | City/local tax | Sales tax | Real estate tax

Personal property tax (license plates) | Other

Charitable Contributions

Church | Boy/Girl Scouts | United Way/CFC

March of Dimes | American Heart | Easter Seals

Red Cross | MDA/MS | YWCA/YMCA

Salvation Army | Food bank | Payroll deductions

Out-of-pocket volunteer expenses | Charitable miles | Other

Donations - date of donation, item descriptions, and fair market value for ***each*** donation of household goods and clothing items donated to qualified charitable organizations.

Miscellaneous

Casualty or theft losses & insurance reimbursements | Investment expenses

Employment related out-of-pocket expense | Gambling losses

Estimated Tax Payments:

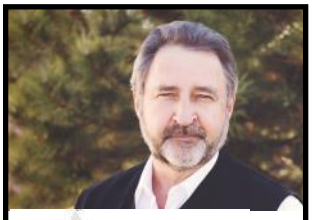
Dates of payment and amounts paid for ***each*** federal and state quarterly tax payment

Questions for your preparer:

_____

_____

_____



Stanley Dombrowski
Managing Partner

Refrain From Tapping Into Your Retirement Funds

Resist the temptation. Your future self will thank you.

I recently reviewed a number of cases where folks have borrowed from their retirement savings plan and apparently acted on a belief that "borrowing from yourself and paying yourself interest is better than the alternatives." I share with you all some alternative perspective.

Retirement accounts are not bank accounts. Nor should they be treated as such. When retirement funds are drawn down, they impede the progress of retirement planning, even if the money is later restored.

In a financial crunch, a retirement account may seem like a great source of funds. It is often much larger than a savings account; it is technically not a liquid asset, but it can easily be mistaken for one.

"Resist the temptation. Your future self will thank you."

The central problem is this: when you take a loan or an early distribution from an IRA or a workplace retirement plan, you are borrowing from your future self. In fact, you may effectively be borrowing more money from your future than you think. Even if you put every dollar you take out back into the account, you are robbing those dollars you removed of the tax-deferred growth and compounding they could have realized while invested.

An early withdrawal will commonly come with a 10% penalty. The Internal Revenue Service does not want you to cash out your retirement account prior to age 59½, so it puts an additional tax on withdrawals from traditional IRAs and employer-sponsored retirement plans that occur before then. This applies even to withdrawals defined as "hardship distributions," where the account holder has demonstrated a severe financial dilemma and a lack of other financial sources to address the problem.[1,2]

The money exiting the plan is considered a distribution of ordinary, taxable income. So, you will pay regular income tax on the money you take out, plus a penalty equal to 10% of the amount withdrawn.[1,3]

In the case of a workplace retirement plan, you will not even receive 100% of what you take out. The plan must withhold 20% of the withdrawn funds from you to cover income taxes.[2]

There is one asterisk worth noting here. The IRS will let you withdraw your contributions to a Roth IRA at any point during your life, tax free and penalty free. Roth IRA earnings, however, are a different story – if you begin to withdraw those earnings before you reach age 59½ or if you have not owned the Roth IRA for at least five years, then regular income taxes and the 10% penalty apply to the distribution.[1]

Loans come with their own set of issues. Most employer-sponsored retirement plans allow loans once you are vested. You can usually withdraw up to $50,000 or 50% of your account balance, whichever is less. The term of repayment is typically five years.[1,3]

All that may appear very convenient, but you are still borrowing money that could be growing and compounding in the account – with taxes deferred, no less. Moreover, the loan comes with interest and cuts into your take-home pay.[3]

In some cases, you may feel like you have no choice but to borrow from your employee retirement plan: your back is against the wall financially due to hospital bills, high-interest debts, or other pressures; you lack other financial means to address these pressures; and you certainly do not want to turn to a predatory lender.

If you do take a loan from your workplace retirement plan account, remember two things. One, the loan should not be so large that your monthly household debt approaches 35-40% of your gross income. Two, you should avoid taking a loan if it appears you may leave the company in the coming months. If you quit or are fired, you may need to repay the whole loan balance in as little as 60 days. Any money you fail to repay will be considered a distribution of taxable income to you otherwise.[3]

All this underscores the need to build an emergency fund. If you have adequate cash on hand for sudden financial crises, you can refrain from taking what should be thought of as a withdrawal or loan of last resort.

Stanley Dombrowski (may be reached at (989)684-8500 or stand@maierandassociates.com)
Managing Partner

Citations.

1 - tinyurl.com/ya42no9v [9/13/17]
2 - forbes.com/sites/financialfinesse/2017/03/16/the-401k-distribution-opportunity-you-need-to-think-twice-about/ [3/16/17]
3 - cnbc.com/2017/04/13/never-pull-money-from-your-401k--except-in-these-3-cases.html [4/13/17]

Gregory Dahlberg
Senior Vice President

"It's our belief that "time in" and not "timing" the market offers the best opportunity for long-term financial success."

Emotional Investment Decisions and Year-End Considerations

One of the biggest detriments to long-term investment success for many investors is fear and greed. Successful investing, in theory, seems quite simple. You begin with determining your long-term financial goals and objectives, then develop an asset allocation model that clearly reflects your financial goals and objectives. Next, create a time table to accomplish your objects and identify your personal tolerance to risk. Select suitable investments to construct a well-diversified portfolio and then monitor your portfolio and rebalance it periodically to be sure your portfolio doesn't become more aggressive or conservative based on fluctuations in the market. Sounds pretty simple and if we, as investors, are able to adhere to these principals of investing for the long-term, I believe it will lend itself to a better probability of long-term investment success, rather than attempting to pick market tops and bottoms. It's our belief that "time in" and not "timing" the market offers the best opportunity for long-term financial success.

With that being said, where lies the challenge? For many of us, fear, greed and our emotions are the challenge. We can't control how markets perform and react, however, we can control how we act or react during market swings and volatile periods. We have experienced tremendous volatility and market swings over the last ten plus years. It wasn't that long ago that many investors believed the sky was falling and it was time to go back to hunting and gathering (2007/2008). Since that time, markets have fully recovered and we are experiencing new highs in the market which, for many, has begun to create stock market exuberance. In many cases, it may be human nature to want to sell when the markets are in decline and to buy when markets are on the rise (sell in up markets) with the thought that markets can't or won't go any higher. This in itself can become a recipe for investment failure and disaster. Both new and old clients have recently asked questions about current market conditions. Some are asking if they should get out now while markets are at their highs, while others want to become more aggressive due to the fact that markets are doing so well. This can be where investors begin to deviate from their plans, risk tolerance and financial objectives. This is where fear and greed begin to drive investment decisions and emotions begin to take over. This is a crucial point and a good time to recognize and reflect on how you are feeling before you react. This is the time to refer back to your plan and what the intended purpose and time frame of your investment was. Assuming you have a long-term time horizon, if you move out of the markets now, at what point should you return to the market, and will it be at potentially

higher or lower levels? This is the million dollar question that nobody can answer. This is a good time to review your personal tolerance to risk to be sure you aren't deviating from your original investment strategy before you react. This is the time to revert back to your original plan to be sure any decisions or changes that are being contemplated are aligned with your original goals. Doing so will help keep your emotions in check and may prevent you from making costly mistakes in the long run.

The stock market in general has performed very well thus far in 2017. How the markets will perform in 2018 remains to be seen. As the year comes to a close, and prior to making your New Year's resolutions, it's a good time to review your financial health and make sure you have a financial plan that you are sticking to. It's a great time to review portfolios to be sure your investments are properly aligned with your long-term goals. Let's not allow our emotions, fear or greed impact or influence our investment decisions going forward.

As the year closes, it's also a great time to consider:

*Reviewing your investments and rebalance your portfolios, if necessary.

*Reviewing your insurance policies (property and casualty, life etc.) to be sure coverage and limits are sufficient.

*Making sure your estate planning documents are current and if you don't have an estate plan, get one.

*Charitable giving prior to year-end.

*Reviewing your retirement plan contribution amounts and increasing them if possible.

*Starting a college savings plan if you have college bound children.

*Verifying that beneficiary designations are current on all savings and investments, life insurance policies and any other assets where beneficiaries can be named.

*Contributing to a Health Savings Account or HSA if eligible to do so.

Until next time…..

Gregory Dahlberg
Senior Vice President

Chad Adams, CPA

"Only donations to qualified organizations are tax-deductible."

As the end of the year approaches, many people take the time to make their charitable contributions. I have included an excerpt from the IRS below for you to consider the tax implications of these donations and the required documentation needed if you deduct these gifts.

Eligible donees. Only donations to qualified organizations are tax-deductible. IRS's "Select Check" tool is a searchable online database that lists most eligible charitable organizations; it can be found at **irs.gov/charities-non-profits/exempt-organizations-select-check**. Churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and government agencies are also eligible to receive deductible donations, even if they are not listed in this database.

Itemize to claim charitable donations. Only taxpayers who itemize their deductions on Form 1040 Schedule A can claim deductions for charitable contributions. Thus, individuals who choose the standard deduction, including those who file a short form (i.e., Form 1040A or 1040EZ), are ineligible to claim the deduction. A taxpayer should itemize only if the total itemized deductions (mortgage interest, charitable contributions, state and local taxes, etc.) exceed the standard deduction.

Monetary donations. To deduct any charitable donation of money, regardless of amount, a taxpayer must have a bank record or a written communication from the charity showing the name of the charity and the date and amount of the contribution. Money donations can include various forms apart from cash such as a check, electronic funds transfer, credit card and payroll deduction. Taxpayers using payroll deductions should retain a pay stub, a Form W-2 (Wage and Tax Statement) or other proof showing the total amount withheld for charity, along with the pledge card showing the name of the charity. Bank records include canceled checks, bank or credit union statements, and credit card statements. Bank or credit union statements should show the name of the charity, the date, and the amount paid. Credit card statements should show the name of the charity, the date, and the transaction posting date.

Donation of clothing and household items. To be deductible, clothing and household items donated to charity must be in good used condition or better. A clothing or household item (e.g., furniture, furnishings, electronics, appliances, and linens) for which a taxpayer claims a deduction of over $500 does not have to meet this standard if the taxpayer includes a qualified appraisal of the item with the return. Donors must get a written acknowledgment from the charity for all gifts worth $250 or more that includes, among other things, a description of the items contributed.

Benefits received by donor. Donors who get something in return for their donation (also called quid pro quo) may have to reduce their deduction. Benefits can include merchandise, meals, tickets to an event, or other goods and services. A donation acknowledgment must state whether the organization provided any goods or services in exchange for the gift along with a description and estimated value of those goods or services.

Older IRA owners. IRA owners age 70½ or older can transfer up to $100,000 per year to eligible charities tax-free. The transfer can count as their Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) for the year. Funds must be transferred directly by the IRA trustee to the eligible charity.

Required records. As noted above, the type of records a taxpayer needs to keep depends on the amount and type of the donation. An additional reporting form is required for many property donations, and an appraisal is often required for larger donations of property.

Chad A. Adams
CPA

Joseph Maier
Vice President

"This is nothing that our firm is recommending and as of right now, have no plans to take on the risks associated with this investment/ currency."

What are Bitcoin?

The news has been publicizing Bitcoin a lot lately and we have been fielding a few questions on this topic over the past few months so I thought we should look at these in a little more detail.

In the simplest definition, Bitcoin is digital currency. It is a currency that could be accepted worldwide for goods and services or just the general transfer of funds from one user to the other. The idea is that they could be used similar to cash where transactions are anonymous and no credit card company or fees would be required to make purchases or to transfer money to other users. You would be identified with a digital wallet number and no one would know who that number belongs to.

As I am writing this I am laughing at the idea of a currency that will be accepted by everyone, that has no intrinsic value or any tangible asset backing, just a digital dollar held in my digital wallet stored in a virtual bank account in the cloud with no FDIC insurance or similar insurance coverage, somewhere in the technology sky! But it is real.

Bitcoin are basically unregulated and currently no rules in place to track where the money is coming from or where it is going. And because it is truly a worldwide currency, it would take a worldwide effort to inforce regulation of disclosure, taxation and anything else that the participating public or governments feel would be relevant in the buying, selling or exchanging of Bitcoin.

Because of its unknown future both its relevance and the length of time that it could take for this currency to be used on a day to day basis, the Bitcoin is being used primarily today as a highly speculative currency investment. This is nothing that our firm is recommending and as of right now, have no plans to take on the risks associated with this investment/ currency.

If you have any questions please forward them to my digital assistant!

Joseph Maier
Vice President

Holiday RECIPES

Gingerbread Cookies

Ingredients:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/2 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup (2 sticks) Country Crock® Buttery Sticks
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp. water

Directions:

1. Combine flour, spices and baking soda in medium bowl; set aside.
2. Beat Country Crock® Buttery Sticks, molasses, brown sugar and water in large bowl with electric mixer until combined. Gradually add flour mixture, with mixer on low speed, just until combined, scraping down sides of bowl occasionally. Divide dough into quarters. Wrap each piece in plastic wrap, then flatten into rectangle. Refrigerate 2 hours or until firm enough to roll.
3. Preheat oven to 350°. Roll each dough quarter to 1/4-in. thickness on well floured surface with well floured rolling pin. Cut into shapes using 3-1/2-in. cookie cutter. Arrange 1-in. apart on cookie sheets.
4. Bake 9 minutes or until set. Cool 2 minutes on wire rack. Remove from baking sheets and cool completely. Decorate, if desired, with Decorating Icing*.

*Decorating Icing: Beat 1 box (16 oz.) confectioners sugar, 2 Tbsp. dried egg white powder and 6 Tbsp. water in medium bowl with electric mixer until smooth, about 3 minutes. Store in container in refrigerator up to 2 days.

Pull-Apart Christmas Tree

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. refrigerated pizza dough
- Egg wash (1 egg whisked with 1 tbsp water)
- 7 mozzarella sticks
- 1/4 c. melted butter
- 1/2 c. finely grated Parmesan
- 1 tbsp. Thinly sliced basil
- 1 tbsp. chopped parsley
- 1 tbsp. chopped rosemary
- Marinara, warmed (for serving)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Cut mozzarella sticks into 1” pieces. On a floured surface, divide pizza dough into two pieces. Stretch and roll each piece of dough into a long rectangle, then cut dough into 2” squares (you’ll need 33 total). Wrap a dough square around each pieces of mozzarella, forming a tightly sealed ball. Place balls seam-side down on the baking sheet in the shape of a Christmas tree (they should be touching). Brush egg wash on dough balls and bake until golden 15-20 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, whisk together melted butter, Parmesan and herbs. Brush on baked pizza dough balls. Serve warm with marinara for dipping.

"Asked and Answered"

Q. Should metals be bought as part of 401(k)/IRA holdings? If so, how much or what percent should be allocated to the purchase of metals?

Should investors be buying gold and silver, given current economic and political times? If so, how much or what percentage of your investable assets?

- Anonymous

A. Precious metals are generally an investment that offers negative correlation to equities. It is often used in an attempt to protect your portfolio from down side equity and bond activity. Because precious metals do not experience inflation or credit risks, they can be a solid piece to one's portfolio. However, gold is going to have volatile price fluctuations based on the strength of the economy, which is something that is difficult to gauge over the long term. Trading gold over the short term could be a costly endeavor if you are not properly schooled on the economic indicators that will cause the price of gold to move. Also, you may spend a substantial amount of your time researching a metal like silver because it generally exhibits more volatility due to the multiple uses of silver in the industrial sector. In short, there are both benefits and pitfalls to using precious metals in a portfolio; it is just our firm's preference to find alpha (growth in excess of a benchmark performance) elsewhere.

- *Joe*

Q. What or how does Maier & Associates feel about BitCoin?

- Anonymous

A. Bitcoin is something that we are certainly aware of but its popularity is not putting it on the radar yet. The infrastructure is not there yet to support the use on a day-to-day basis and until companies start to make large technology changes to accommodate the use of consumers using bitcoin as currency, it will probably stay on our back burner.

- *Joe*

"Asked and Answered"

Q. I use a credit card to pay for all of my expenses to collect points towards cash-back bonuses. I have been told I should use debit cards instead. Which is correct?

- Anonymous

A. My suggestion is to continue to use the credit card to get the bonus points, assuming you pay off the credit card before any interest is charged. From a fraud/identity theft standpoint, the credit card company provides protection. The important piece of information is that you are using the credit card company's money, not yours. From a debit card standpoint, it is likely you will have protection from the issuing bank or credit union, however, it is your money now, not the bank's that has been used.

- *Mike*

Q. As China and other countries move to replace the dollar as the world currency, how or what should be done today to ensure we are protecting ourselves?

- Anonymous

A. Currently the U.S. dollar is still the world currency. The U.S. 10-year treasury is currently at 2.4%, while other developed countries are still lower. Since other countries have not experienced the reduction in their equivalent to federal funds rate that we have, the U.S. 10-year treasury will likely become more attractive to overseas investors over the next few years. China is still considered an Emerging Market country and, in my opinion, is going to struggle to be considered the world's currency with its constant economic and market manipulation. If you are looking to invest overseas using vehicles like Exchanged Traded Funds (ETF) or mutual funds, they both offer hedged and un-hedged versions against the U.S. dollar. So if you think that the U.S. dollar is weakening or strengthening, you could make your play investing overseas and picking the version that matches your opinion of future changes.

- *Joe*

To participate, visit www.slido.com and type in #maier for the event code. There you will be able to enter your questions anonymously and "like" questions others have asked that you would like to see answered.

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At Maier & Associates Financial Group, we work hard to set up a personalized long-term investment strategy for our clients that will give them the best chance at achieving their financial goals. We do not believe in a "set it and forget it" policy. Instead our investment philosophy is to create an open dialogue of shared ideas and a mutual understanding of our clients' goals and objectives.

Additionally, we also like to help our clients rebalance during turbulent markets – we believe it is our mission to attempt to keep investors from making irrational decisions during times of fear and greed. We do this by using a complex tracking system that watches market trends, and using the indicators to keep our clients from making regrettable decisions as to when and where money is invested.

Another critical part of the M & A Group Investment Philosophy is taking the time to get to know our clients' personalities and needs – communication is our most important tool! By clearly understanding and constantly reevaluating our clients' comfort levels with investment risk vs. portfolio performance expectations, we can develop a strategic and personalized investing plan.

By doing this, we not only build strong portfolios, we also create strong client/advisor relationships. While there is no foolproof investment strategy that can guarantee against loss, we promise to work hard to create a strategy that is strong and tailored to your financial goals/needs.

Puzzle Answer

Sudoku:

7	1	2	4	9	6	8	5	3
3	8	4	5	7	1	6	9	2
9	5	6	8	2	3	4	1	7
4	9	5	6	1	2	3	7	8
6	3	1	7	8	5	2	4	9
8	2	7	9	3	4	1	6	5
1	7	3	2	4	9	5	8	6
2	6	9	1	5	8	7	3	4
5	4	8	3	6	7	9	2	1