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Brandywine Oak
Private Wealth**
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Families come to us to make a difference for them."

—Michael Henley,
Brandywine Oak Private Wealth

Strong as an Oak

Michael Henley of Brandywine Oak Private Wealth details his firm's holistic approach to providing wealthy families with peace of mind as they plan for the future.

When Michael Henley, CFP®, CPWA®, CRPC®, RMA®, was a young boy, he had two "obsessions": things that go fast, which he attributes to the first time he saw the Tom Cruise thriller *Top Gun*; and his father's work as a CPA. Naturally, when it came time to carve out his own career path, Michael gravitated toward the high-stakes, fast-paced world of wealth management.

Today, as the CEO of Brandywine Oak Private Wealth in Kennett Square, Michael leads a holistic team of financial professionals devoted to helping clients plan for a more secure future. While the job involves a command of the numbers, he sees the work his firm does as a simple matter of providing clients with peace of mind.

"This industry is my true passion," he

by **Bill Donahue**

says. "Families come to our firm because they want the family office experience. We want to handle everything for them that has a dollar sign attached to it, and they don't need \$100 million to get that here."

Prior to co-founding Brandywine Oak Private Wealth, Michael honed his skills in areas such as mortgage underwriting and financial planning while working for some of the biggest names in the financial services sphere. He ultimately came to realize that he could better serve clients by offering a more independent approach.

"If you are an advisor with a 'bulge bracket' Wall Street investment firm or a large commercial bank, you cannot give objective conflict-free advice because you are

strongly encouraged to use that firm's proprietary products and services," he explains. "That may be a great deal for the firm's shareholders, but not necessarily for the advisor's clients. Clients want objective third-party advice from an independent firm that can shop the street on the client's behalf to generate the best outcome.

"A lot of the big firms are focused on things that are outside all of our control, like the GDP of China or what the biotechnology sector is doing," he continues. "We focus on what *is* under our control. How much are our clients spending and saving? Are they overpaying in taxes? Are they optimizing their charitable giving? Are they invested in low-cost funds that will provide a consistent return? We believe in keeping it simple."

Michael also believes in being "a student

of the industry.” He often listens to podcasts to inspire new ways to help clients, even while he’s at home with his family in Chadds Ford—horseback riding with his daughter Savannah or tooling around on a tractor with his son Maverick. After all, he and other members of the team see it as their personal responsibility to continually improve. The firm devotes 10 percent of its revenue to professional development so team members can attend continuing-education courses, acquire more designations, and otherwise build their knowledge base.

BRANCHING OUT

Brandywine Oak Private Wealth has grown substantially since its founding in 2018. Not only has the team expanded in size, but the firm has also increased its level of sophistication in serving each client’s cash-flow and wealth-preservation needs: retirement planning, investment management, insurance planning, income tax planning and management, etc. Likewise, the firm’s assets under management have grown to more than \$1.5 billion.

Such steady growth helped the firm land a spot on *Forbes’* prestigious list of “America’s Top RIA Firms” for 2022. Michael credits his key members of his team, including Alison Brooks, CFP®, CRPC®, the firm’s Co-Founder and Co-CEO; Chris Smith, CPA, Director of Tax and Founding Tax Partner; and Peter Kim, CFA®, Director of Investments.

“I’m on the vision side, and Alison executes the vision,” Michael says. “Alison and I work side by side in all aspects of running the firm. Chris Smith runs the tax preparation side of the business, and Peter Kim oversees investment management. Our expertise has grown to help us solve pretty much any problem or issue that involves a dollar sign.”

For example, the firm often fields calls from clients seeking advice for funding a child’s college education or from those who are mulling a significant purchase in the near future. The firm even has a local law firm on retainer to help clients with needs that involve wills, trusts, and other aspects of estate planning.

“Any time there is something significant going on in the client’s life, we want to get the first phone call,” says Alison. “The client might be wondering, *Should I pay cash or finance this beach house?* or *Should I help my child buy a new car?* Being their planner allows you to give clients outcomes to what matters. We can help you answer the expensive questions such as, ‘Can I afford to retire?’”

Michael considers the firm’s ability to provide ongoing tax planning and tax man-



The Brandywine Oak Private Wealth team includes (left to right) Tracy McGuire, Founding Partner and Private Wealth Manager; Steve Maconi, Founding Partner, Chairman, and Private Wealth Manager; Alison Brooks, Co-Founder, Co-CEO, and Private Wealth Advisor; Michael Henley, Founder, CEO, and Private Wealth Advisor; Lisa Quadri, Partner and Private Wealth Advisor; Mark Jackson, Founding Partner and Private Wealth Advisor; and Chris Smith, Director of Tax and Founding Tax Partner.

agement as one of its greatest strengths. He says many other advisory firms tend to offer investment recommendations without understanding the tax ramifications; too few take the time to review a client’s tax returns annually, which Michael equates to “driving a car at night without headlights.”

“In our experience, taxes tend to be a wealthy family’s largest expense,” adds Chris, who specializes in uncovering opportunities to reduce a family’s tax burden or avoid costly tax mistakes. “One of the things I’m most passionate about is looking at prior-year tax returns and identifying opportunities where clients may have missed out on potential tax savings.”

Recently the firm brought on Lisa Quadri, CFP®, as a partner and private wealth manager based in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. Each of her clients subsequently underwent a thorough review of their most recent tax returns, and many realized significant “hard-dollar savings” as a result.

“It’s an eye-opening experience when you can show someone hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax savings,” Michael adds. “The beauty of it is that they took no risk to get that savings. As we like to say, there are two tax codes: one for the informed, and one for the uninformed.”

BUILT TO LAST

Brandywine Oak Private Wealth’s culture is built around “getting stuff done.” The firm also prioritizes taking the time to recharge. For example, last year the firm rented out a theater for a private screening of *Top Gun: Maverick*, the highly anticipated sequel to the film that changed Michael’s life. Also, in the near future 15 team members will pay a visit to the Porsche Experience Center in Atlanta for the thrill of getting behind the wheel

of the ultimate sportscar.

“We’re an intentionally young company,” Michael adds. “At the moment, 80 percent of the people here are under the age of 40. People should consider the longevity of the professionals in their lives before they make a decision; as a client, you don’t want an advisor who is going to expire before you do.”

“When we ask new families why they hire us, the No. 1 thing they say is, ‘You all are so normal,’” he continues. “If I go to the doctor’s office for a knee injury, I don’t want an anatomy lesson about the knee; I want them to fix the problem. The industry is loaded with jargon and a lot of unnecessary noise, which is why we avoid jargon at all costs. Our goal is to speak to people in plain English.”

Going forward, Michael suggests Brandywine Oak Private Wealth intends to add more planning-focused wealth advisors who put their clients’ needs first. The firm also expects to make a greater impact on the communities its advisors serve; the firm supports numerous locally based philanthropic causes, including United Way of Southern Chester County and the Chester County Food Bank.

“Families come to us to make a difference for them,” Michael says. “They want to make sure they have enough money to live happily ever after and to minimize their tax burden. That’s our No. 1 priority for everyone who comes through our door.” ■

→ Brandywine Oak Private Wealth

For more information about Brandywine Oak Private Wealth, visit brandywineoak.com or call (484) 785-0050.