

suburban life

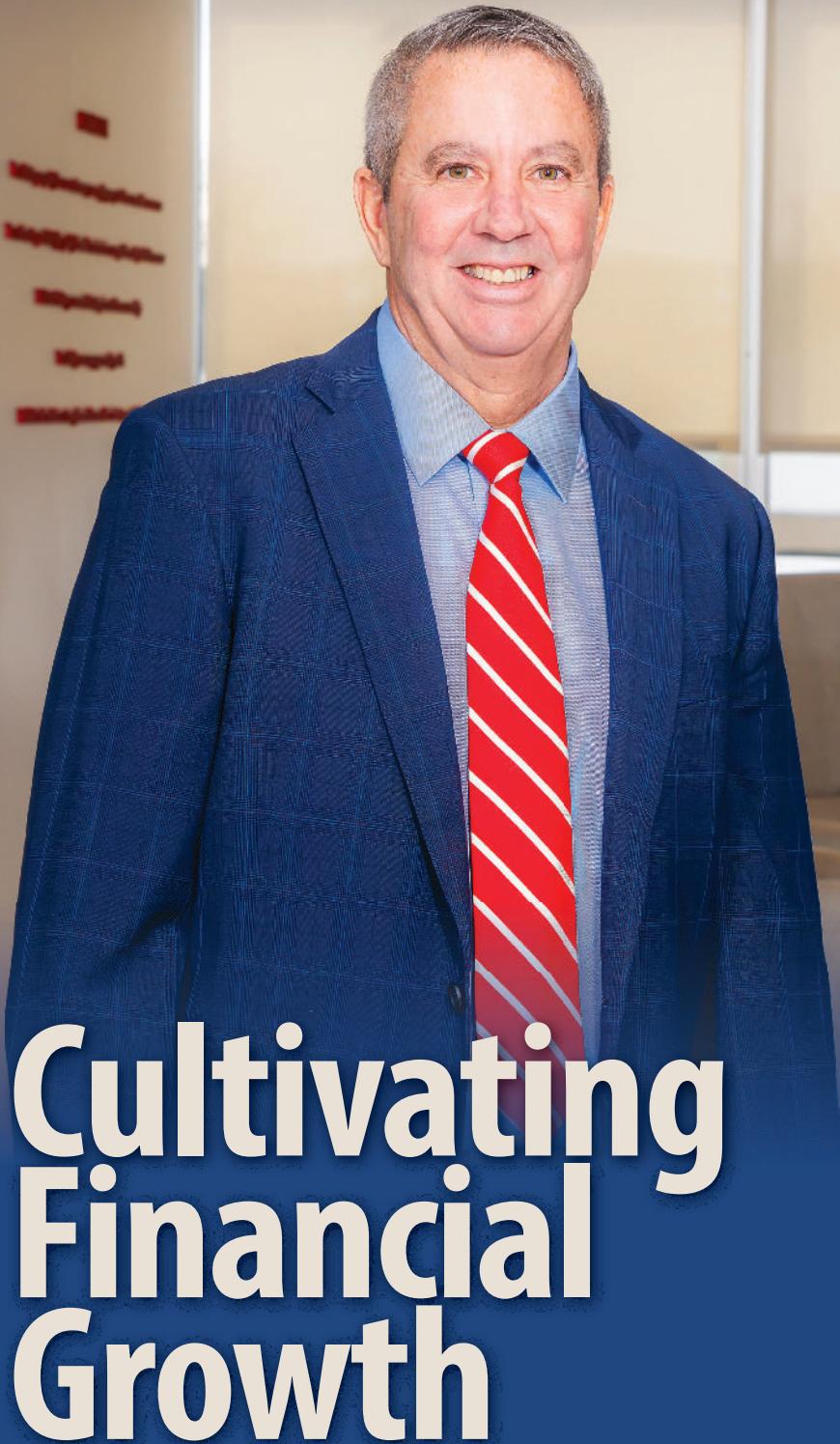
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William Manchester, founder of The **Manchester Group of Firsttrust Financial Resources**, took a remarkable path to helping clients plan and prepare for the future.

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Cultivating Financial Growth

by Bill Donahue | photos by Jody Robinson

William Manchester, founder of The Manchester Group of Firsttrust Financial Resources, took a remarkable path to helping clients plan and prepare for the future.

William Manchester has spent the past quarter of a century designing plans to help families preserve, build, and make the best use of their wealth. He loves the work; in fact, he cannot imagine doing anything else with his life, which is ironic, because his career path would have been much different if not for a man named Andrew L. Lewis Jr.

Manchester first met Lewis—the chairman and CEO of Union Pacific Corp., who also served the Reagan Administration as Secretary of Transportation—about 30 years ago. Lewis and his wife, Marilyn, owned a sprawling property in Schwenksville, where Manchester tended to the gardens and landscaping. One day, the chauffeur who was tasked with driving Lewis to a board meeting in New York City was unavailable. The responsibility then fell to Manchester.

“I started driving Drew regularly after that,” Manchester recalls. “He would tell me to wear a suit, and he brought me into these meetings, referring to me as his financial advisor. I met George Bush Sr., George Bush Jr., [Henry] Kissinger, [Donald] Rumsfeld—all these notable leaders and business leaders. They all respected Drew so much because of his knowledge and because of the person he was.”

They got to know each other well during their travels to and from New York. Manchester saw in Lewis a brilliant mind and a profound commitment to helping others. In Manchester, Lewis saw sincerity, a tireless work ethic, and the willingness to earn people’s trust, as well as a fledgling interest in the stock market. At some point, Manchester intended to ask Lewis to review his business plan, which involved opening a flower shop in Blue Bell.

“A lot of people wanted to be around Drew because of his money and power; I just wanted his knowledge,” he says. “One day, we were stopped at a light on Township Line Road—I’ll never forget it—and he asked me, ‘Why are you my gardener?’ So I turned around and handed him my business plan. He took it and said, ‘You can do that when you retire. You need to make money now.’ He told me I was fired as his gardener and to go back to school and become a financial advisor. He was right. And that’s when I decided to go into finance.”

Fast-forward to a recent Wednesday morning, 25 years after Manchester launched his career as a financial advisor. Manchester finds himself in the place where he starts most weekday mornings: behind the wheel of his car, en route to a meeting at a client’s home—this one in Ambler. He has a full day ahead of him, just like every other workday, and it will end in the same place it started: sitting across from a client, talking about the future.

“A lot of people get the ‘Sunday blues,’ thinking about the start of the workweek,”



Manchester leads a team that includes two fellow financial professionals, Gregory Mugnier and Cristian Surdykowski, and Executive Assistant Alison Watson.

he says. "I love Mondays because I love my job. I can't wait to get to work every day."

As the founder of The Manchester Group of Firstrust Financial Resources in Conshohocken, Manchester derives great joy from helping clients of all ages and backgrounds build financial and portfolio plans, solve problems, and otherwise build a more secure future. He leads a team that includes two fellow financial professionals, Gregory Mugnier and Cristian Surdykowski, and Executive Assistant Alison Watson. In order to accommodate demand, Manchester expects to bring on more new faces in the months and years ahead.

The lessons he learned from Lewis, who passed away in 2016, guide him to this day.

"Drew was in the office by 5 or 6 a.m., and I'm an early riser, too," he says. "The biggest things he taught me were the importance of work ethic and earning people's trust. Rarely have clients come into our office; I go to their home or their office. I also like to say that I'm open 24/7. They can call me anytime to ask questions and take the load off their shoulders, and they appreciate that. That's how I built my business."

Manchester has been associated with his firm, Firstrust Financial Resources in alliance with Equitable Advisors, since August 2021. He describes the organization as "the best I've ever worked with." Not only do the two share an office building, meaning Manchester has face-to-face interactions with members of the Firstrust team as often as possible, but they also share the same philosophy: "The client comes first, and everything else comes later."

While he enjoys the ones and zeroes, what Manchester loves most about his work are the personal connections. He cites a recent interaction with a longtime client.

"He's 98 years old and he's the greatest guy in the world," he adds. "He's been with me for 20 years. I met with him just recently, and he told me the things I've helped him accomplish have meant so much to him. He does these drawings at the nursing home where he lives now, and he gave me one of those drawings. That meant so much to me."

"I think back to the period between 2008 and 2010, which was the worst time for a lot of people," he continues. "Those bad times were tough for me, too, but that's when I built the most relationships because I was there for people. I'm really proud of that."

Looking back on his journey from a gardener to the founder of a well-established and growing financial services firm, Manchester has immense gratitude for the people who helped him along the way. Drew Lewis is an obvious one, though he also thinks of the high school Spanish teacher who once gave him the nickname, *fundo de fundo*, or "bottom of the bottom"—a nod to Manchester's potential, not yet realized.

"I barely got through high school because I had no interest in academics," he says. "Drew saw the potential in me, but I needed to get the education first; I had to have that background. No one could outwork me on the football field or in landscaping. I just had to answer the question: How do I apply that work ethic into a career in financial planning?

"I take my work very seriously, but I always joke with my team that I look at our

work as a game," he continues. "We have to be the best of the best and beat our competition, and we do that by doing everything we can to serve our clients."

As for his plans to one day run a flower shop of his own—perhaps in retirement, as his mentor Lewis once suggested—Manchester's plans have changed. He just derives too much pleasure from helping others plot out the future, financially speaking.

"My daughter's best friend recently got married, and I did all the flowers for the wedding," he says. "I still like the flower business, but as a hobby. I just love what I'm doing now so much more. I don't see myself stepping away from this anytime soon." ■

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