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OZAUKEE COUNTY'S NEWSPAPER SINCE 1883

BUSINESS

Page B5 / Tuesday, November 17, 2015

News Graphic

'We love it here'

Mequon a perfect fit for Spectrum Investment Advisors

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Seventeen years ago, Spectrum Investment Advisors encountered a unique problem with one of its clients, a northern Illinois manufacturing firm.

"They had 300 employees who spoke a combination of 14 different languages," said Spectrum President and Partner James Marshall. "We had to find a way to communicate investment information, for their 401(k) plan, in a way that everyone could understand."

The solution? They used colors to explain the different types of investments and strategies available to the employees, utilizing the tagline, Colors Simplify Investing. Spectrum filed for a patent on the color-coded system, and after seven years of trying, were awarded a patent in 2010.

"That company is still a customer of ours," said Marshall. "And we've continued to use the color-coded investment approach throughout our business."

That approach, along with sound management strategies, have helped Spectrum Investment Advisors to grow to \$1.3 billion in assets, servicing more than 110 401(k) plans. Approximately 7 percent of Spectrum's total assets are represented by individual wealth management customers. The color-coded investment approach has also helped Spectrum to be selected as one of nine finalists for PlanSponsor Magazine's 2015 Retirement Plan Adviser Team of the Year, and be named as the 2015 Business of the Year by the Mequon-Thiensville Chamber of Commerce.

"It's been quite a year for us," said Marshall.

But it's really a series of successful years that have brought Spectrum the accomplishments it is enjoying today. Three and a half years ago, the company built a new facility on Mequon Road, which has also helped integrate it into the Mequon community. Spectrum also leases a portion of the space to the Chamber of Commerce, which creates a natural synergy.

"We've hosted a number of community meetings in our conference room, such as annual meetings for Gathering on the Green and the Chamber of Commerce," he said. "But we also have a full-size coffee house in our office, which we use for seminars and which the business community also uses for events."

Having a coffee house inside an investment firm is unique, but Spectrum takes it a step further. Marshall said he specifically partnered with Fiddleheads to duplicate the equipment they have in their own locations. During seminars, Fiddleheads baristas prepare Fiddleheads coffee drinks for attendees.

"It makes so much more sense for Fiddleheads to come over here and help us than for us to try and do it ourselves," he said.

That also enables the Spectrum team to focus on what they do best: provide investment management to their clients.

"Education is very important to us," said Marshall. "We provide thousands of one-on-one meetings with our clients throughout the year. We want people to understand investing because in the long term, it makes them better investors."



Submitted photo

Spectrum Investment Advisors, headed by James Marshall, center, recently was honored as the Mequon-Thiensville Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year.

He cited the famous Benjamin Franklin quote: "Tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand."

A walk around the Spectrum offices also emphasizes this approach. The walls are not merely decorated – they're an education in themselves, with charts and investment information. The conference room includes a business timeline and outside of it is a series of maps showing Spectrum's reach, starting with the state and moving toward the globe. There's a room entirely devoted to educating investors about fracking. Throughout all of the charts, colors code the investments, making them much easier to understand for the average investor, even at a glance.

According to Marshall, one of the firm's biggest assets isn't financially based at all. It is the team that is in place. Spectrum employs 17 people, of which seven are partners in the firm. The makeup of the team is unique, with some employees having backgrounds in the industry and others coming from other careers, such as education, journalism and banking.

"What our team shares is passion for what we do, and a passion for helping people," he said. "When we're considering someone for our team, that's really what I like to look for. We're very well-rounded and cohesive, and that drives our company success."

What also drives the company's success is its location.

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"Our location is really important to us – I can't think of a better place for us to be," said Marshall. "Ozaukee County is the 30th wealthiest county in the country, and we're located on one of the busiest roads, in the largest community in the county. Spectrum is located on the intersection of Mequon Road and Industrial Drive, which leads right to the Mequon Industrial Park."

Like a solid investment strategy, the work that the Spectrum team has done in the 20 years since its inception has been proven by their average retention rate of 98 percent over the past 11 years.

"We are very blessed," said Marshall of where the company is now poised, as well as the recent accolades the company has received. "We love it here."