Your Park Square Financial Team

Your Finances

A RESOURCE FOR HELPING GROW, PROTECT, AND PRESERVE YOUR ASSETS

MAY 2017

Welcome to Your Finances! You are receiving this newsletter either by email or direct mail because you are a Park Square Financial Group client, an attendee at one of our seminars, or were referred to us by one of our clients as one who would appreciate objective, educational information. If we have erred on any one of those accounts, please contact us by email (bcoffeen@parksquarefg.com) or phone (770 641-1401) and we will be glad to remove your name from our list.

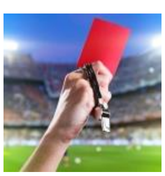
Food for Thought

- The nicest thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise, rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression. --- Sir John Henry James
- I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past --- Patrick Henry, 1736-1799

Financial Factoids

- ***RISING BUT NOT ROARING*** – The US economy **grew by +1.6%** in 2016, the **11th consecutive year** that our domestic economy has failed to grow **by at least +3%.** In data tracked **since 1930**, the previous longest stretch of "sub +3% annual growth was just 4 years (source: Commerce Department).
- ***LONG TIME*** –The USA has kept records on **economic expansions and contractions** since 1854. The current expansion, which began in July 2009, is in its **94th month**. It is the **3rd longest expansion** in history, trailing only expansions that ran from 1991-2001 and from 1961-69 (source: National Bureau of Economic Research).
- ***A FIVE DECADE LOW*** – The US **homeownership percentage** (i.e. "owner" households as a percentage of total households) was 63.4% in 2016, **the lowest percentage nationwide** since 1965 or **51 years earlier** when the rate was 63.0% (source: Census Bureau).

401(k) Withdrawals: Beware the Penalty Tax



You've probably heard that if you withdraw taxable amounts from your 401(k) or 403(b) plan before age 59½, you may be socked with a 10% early distribution penalty tax on top of the federal income taxes you'll be required to pay. But did you know that the Internal Revenue Code contains quite a few exceptions that allow you to take penalty-free withdrawals before age 59½?

Sometimes age 59½ is really age 55...or age 50

If you've reached age 55, you can take penalty-free withdrawals from your 401(k) plan after leaving your job if your employment ends during or after the year you reach age 55. This is one of the most important exceptions to the penalty tax.

And if you're a qualified public safety employee, this exception applies after you've reached age 50. You're a qualified public safety employee if you provided police protection, firefighting services, or emergency medical services for a state or municipality, and you separated from service in or after the year you attained age 50.

Be careful though. This exception applies only after you leave employment with the employer that sponsored the plan making the distribution. For example, if you worked for Employer A and quit at age 45, then took a job with Employer B and quit at age 55, only distributions from Employer B's plan would be eligible for this exception. You'll have to wait until age 59½ to take penalty-free withdrawals from Employer A's plan, unless another exception applies.

Think periodic, not lump sums

Another important exception to the penalty tax applies to "substantially equal periodic payments," or SEPPs. This exception also applies only after you've stopped working for the employer that sponsored the plan. To take advantage of this exception, you must withdraw funds from your plan at least annually based on one of three rather complicated IRS-approved distribution methods.

Regardless of which method you choose, you generally can't change or alter the payments for five years or until you reach age 59½, whichever occurs later. If you do modify the payments (for example, by taking amounts smaller or larger than required distributions or none at all), you'll again wind up having to pay the 10% penalty tax on the taxable portion of all your pre-age 59½ SEPP distributions (unless another exception applies).

And more exceptions...

Distributions described below generally won't be subject to the penalty tax even if you're under age 59½ at the time of the payment.

- Distributions from your plan up to the amount of your unreimbursed medical expenses for the year that exceed 10% of your adjusted gross income for that year (You don't have to itemize deductions to use this exception, and the distributions don't have to actually be used to pay those medical expenses.)
- Distributions made as a result of your qualifying disability (This means you must be unable to engage in any "substantial gainful activity" by reason of a "medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or to be of long-continued and indefinite duration.")
- Certain distributions to qualified military reservists called to active duty
- Distributions made pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order (QDRO)
- Distributions made to your beneficiary after your death, regardless of your beneficiary's age

Keep in mind that the penalty tax applies only to taxable distributions, so tax-free rollovers of retirement assets are not subject to the penalty. Also note that the exceptions applicable to IRAs are similar to, but not identical to, the rules that apply to employer plans.

Spring Cleaning Your Finances

The arrival of spring often signifies a time of renewal, a reminder to dust off the cobwebs and get rid of the dirt and grime that have built up throughout the winter season. And while most spring cleaning projects are likely focused on your home, you could take this time to evaluate and clean up your personal finances as well.

Examine your budget… and stick with it

A budget is the centerpiece of any good personal financial plan. Start by identifying your income and expenses. Next, add them up and compare the two totals to make sure you are spending less than you earn. If you find that your expenses outweigh your income, you'll need to make some adjustments to your budget (e.g., reduce discretionary spending).

Keep in mind that in order for your budget to work, you'll need to stick with it. And while straying from your budget from time to time is to be expected, there are some ways to help make working within your budget a bit easier:

- Make budgeting a part of your daily routine
- Build occasional rewards into your budget
- Evaluate your budget regularly and make changes if necessary
- Use budgeting software/smartphone applications

Evaluate your financial goals

Spring is also a good time to evaluate your financial goals. Take a look at the financial goals you've previously set for yourself — both short and long term. Perhaps you wanted to increase your cash reserve or invest more money toward your retirement. Did you accomplish any of your goals? If so, do you have any new goals you now want to pursue? Finally, have your personal or financial circumstances changed recently (e.g., marriage, a child, a job promotion)? If so, would any of these events warrant a reprioritization of some of your existing financial goals?

Review your investments

Now may be a good time to review your investment portfolio to ensure that it is still on target to help you achieve your financial goals. To determine whether your investments are still suitable, you might ask yourself the following questions:

- Has my investment time horizon recently changed?
- Has my tolerance for risk changed?
- Do I have an increased need for liquidity in my investments?
- Does any investment now represent too large (or too small) a part of my portfolio?

All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there can be no assurance that any investment strategy will be successful.

Try to pay off any accumulated debt

When it comes to personal finances, reducing debt should always be a priority. Whether you have debt from student loans, a mortgage, or credit cards, have a plan in place to pay down your debt load as quickly as possible. The following tips could help you manage your debt:

- Keep track of your credit card balances and be aware of interest rates and hidden fees
- Manage your payments so that you avoid late fees
- Optimize your repayments by paying off high-interest debt first
- Avoid charging more than you can pay off at the end of each billing cycle

Take a look at your credit history

Having good credit is an important part of any sound financial plan, and now is a good time to check your credit history. Review your credit report and check for any inaccuracies. You'll also want to find out whether you need to take steps to improve your credit history. To establish a good track record with creditors, make sure that you always make your monthly bill payments on time. In addition, you should try to avoid having too many credit inquiries on your report (these are made every time you apply for new credit). You're entitled to a free copy of your credit report once a year from each of the three major credit reporting agencies. Visit annualcreditreport.com for more information.

Assess tax planning opportunities

The return of the spring season also means that we are approaching the end of tax season. Now is also a good time to assess any tax planning opportunities for the coming year. You can use last year's tax return as a basis, then make any anticipated adjustments to your income and deductions for the coming year.

Be sure to check your withholding — especially if you owed taxes when you filed your most recent tax return or you were due a large refund. If necessary, adjust the amount of federal or state income tax withheld from your paycheck by filing a new Form W-4 with your employer.

What are Some Tips for Creating a Home Inventory

Imagine having to remember and describe every item in your home, especially after you've been the victim of a fire, theft, or natural disaster. Rather than relying on your memory, you may want to prepare a home inventory — a detailed record of all your personal property. This record can help substantiate an insurance claim, support a police report when items are stolen, or prove a loss to the IRS. Here are some tips to get started.

Tour your property. A simple way to complete your inventory is to make a visual record of your belongings. Take a video of the contents of each room in your home and spaces where you have items stored, such as a basement, cellar, garage, or shed. Be sure to open cabinets, closets, and drawers, and pay special attention to valuable and hard-to-replace items. You can also use the tried-and-true low-tech method of writing everything down in a notebook, or use a combination approach. Mobile inventory apps and software programs are available to guide you through the process.

Be thorough. Your home inventory should provide as many details as possible. For example, include purchase dates, estimated values, and serial and model numbers. If possible, locate receipts to support the cost of big-ticket items and attach copies of appraisals for valuables such as antiques, collectibles, and jewelry.

Keep it safe. In addition to keeping a copy of your inventory in your home where you can easily access it, store a copy elsewhere to protect it in the event that your home is damaged by a flood, fire, or other disaster. This might mean putting it in a safe deposit box, giving it to a trusted friend or family member for safekeeping, or storing it on an external storage device that you can take with you or on a cloud-based service that provides easy and secure access.

Update it periodically. When you obtain a valuable or important item, add it to your inventory as soon as possible. Review your home inventory at least once a year for accuracy. You can also share it annually with your insurance agent or representative to help determine whether your policy coverages and limits are still adequate.

Are you ready to retire?

Here are some questions to ask yourself when deciding whether or not you are ready to retire.

Is your nest egg adequate?

It may be obvious, but the earlier you retire, the less time you'll have to save, and the more years you'll be living off your retirement savings. The average American can expect to live past age 78.* With future medical advances likely, it's not unreasonable to assume that life expectancy will continue to increase. Is your nest egg large enough to fund 20 or more years of retirement?

When will you begin receiving Social Security benefits?

You can receive Social Security retirement benefits as early as age 62. However, your benefit may be 25% to 30% less than if you waited until full retirement age (66 to 67, depending on the year you were born).

How will retirement affect your IRAs and employer retirement plans?

The longer you delay retirement, the longer you can build up tax-deferred funds in traditional IRAs and potentially tax-free funds in Roth IRAs. Remember that you need taxable compensation to contribute to an IRA.

You'll also have a longer period of time to contribute to employer-sponsored plans like 401(k)s — and to receive any employer match or other contributions. (If you retire early, you may forfeit any employer contributions in which you're not fully vested.)

Will you need health insurance?

Keep in mind that Medicare generally doesn't start until you're 65. Does your employer provide post-retirement medical benefits? Are you eligible for the coverage if you retire early? If not, you may have to look into COBRA or an individual policy from a private insurer or the health insurance marketplace — which could be an expensive proposition.

Is phasing into retirement right for you?

Retirement need not be an all-or-nothing affair. If you're not quite ready, financially or psychologically, for full retirement, consider downshifting from full-time to part-time employment. This will allow you to retain a source of income and remain active and productive.

*NCHS Data Brief, Number 267, December 2016

As your financial advisors we're always at your service when it comes to reviewing your plans and goals as well as explaining or implementing ideas and concepts highlighted in this newsletter or on our website, www.parksquarefg.com

Remember... If what you thought to be true, turned out not to be true, when would you want to know? Financially speaking...maybe we can be of help. Thanks for the opportunity to serve your needs! Save well and take care!

Your "Park Square Financial" Team