

CENTRAL NEW YORK

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Local firm helps launch national group

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DeWITT - A local wealth-management firm is among the founding members of a new national alliance of investment advisors, the Bright Sky Group.

The firms are all connected by their use of a common back-office service provider, BAM Advisor Services in Missouri. Principals at the firms had regular contact through BAM's continuing-education courses, says Christopher Gardner, president of DeWitt-based FMF&E Wealth Management, LLC.

FMF&E is one of nine founding members of Bright Sky, which has 20 members total.



Gardner

The firms decided to join together mainly in an effort to communicate information and advice to current clients and the general public, Gardner says.

"We found over the years that literally two of us would write the same article," he says. "It became so redundant and such a poor use of time and energy."

The firms plan to use a central Web site, www.brightskygroup.com, to post content and share it with their client bases. Bright Sky launched Dec. 14.

Gardner says the firms involved have all been in business about the same length of time, have similar client bases, and share common investing philosophies. All are also offshoots of accounting firms.

Most have around \$100 million in assets under management, with the largest at \$700 million and the smallest at \$20 million. The firms manage a total of \$2.5 billion in assets.

FMF&E had \$105 million in assets under management as of September.

"This is a way to communicate ideas to clients more efficiently," Gardner says. "We all struggle with distributing content."

Although all the firms have their own Web sites, he says having a common place for all their content will give clients a stream of ideas that is regularly updated. Not every firm has the time to update their own sites as often as they'd like, Gardner says.

The group also plans to write some articles collectively and possibly promote them on a national level using the Bright Sky label, Gardner adds.

Those involved are also aiming to make their content easily accessible to general investors. Gardner says the firms in Bright Sky feel there is far too much technical jargon and complexity in investment writing.

"We're trying to keep this content in plain English," he says. "We want to



create this line of content that's understandable and applicable to the com-

mon investor."

The firms involved first began discussing the group more than three years ago. They decided in January to move forward with the effort, Gardner says.

FMF&E employs two people. Many of its clients are small-business owners, Gardner says. The firm also works with company 401(k) plans and participants in those plans, he adds.

Its territory stretches from Watertown to Binghamton and just outside Albany to just outside Rochester, Gardner says.

The principals of accounting firm Firley, Moran, Freer & Eassa, PC formed FMF&E in 2000. Firley, Moran, Freer & Eassa launched in 1980 and employs more than 60 people.

Other members of Bright Sky are located in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Delaware, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Oregon, and California. □

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