Item 1: Cover Page
Part 2A of Form ADV: Firm Brochure
October 5, 2026

Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC
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Firm Contact:
Joseph Darpel III
Chief Compliance Officer

This brochure provides information about the qualifications and business practices of Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC. If clients have any questions about the contents of this brochure, please contact us at 314-970-2377. The information in this brochure has not been approved or verified by the United States Securities and Exchange Commission or by any State Securities Authority. Additional information about our firm is also available on the SEC's website at www.adviserinfo.sec.gov by searching CRD #330411.

Please note that the use of the term "registered investment adviser" and description of our firm and/or our associates as "registered" does not imply a certain level of skill or training. Clients are encouraged to review this Brochure and Brochure Supplements for our firm's associates who advise clients for more information on the qualifications of our firm and our employees.

Item 2: Material Changes

Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC is required to notify clients of any information that has changed since the last annual update of the Firm Brochure ("Brochure") that may be important to them. Clients can request a full copy of our Brochure or contact us with any questions that they may have about the changes.

The material changes that have taken place since the March 5, 2026, amendment of this document are:

- Item 9 below has been updated.
- Fees updated in Item 5: Fees and Compensation.
- Ownership of Smart Steps Wealth Management is Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC.

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Item 4: Advisory Business

Our firm is dedicated to providing individuals and other types of clients with a wide array of investment advisory services. Our firm is a limited liability company formed under the laws of the State of Delaware in 2024 and has been in business as an investment adviser since registration in July 2025. Our firm is wholly owned by Joseph Darpel.

The purpose of this Brochure is to disclose the conflicts of interest associated with the investment transactions, compensation and any other matters related to investment decisions made by our firm or its representatives. As a fiduciary, it is our duty to always act in the client's best interest. This is accomplished in part by knowing our client. Our firm has established a service-oriented advisory practice with open lines of communication for many different types of clients to help meet their financial goals while remaining sensitive to risk tolerance and time horizons. Working with clients to understand their investment objectives while educating them about our process, facilitates the kind of working relationship we value.

Types of Advisory Services Offered

Asset Management:

As part of our Asset Management service, a portfolio is created, consisting of individual stocks, bonds, exchange traded funds ("ETFs"), options, mutual funds and other public and private securities or investments. The client's individual investment strategy is tailored to their specific needs and may include some or all of the previously mentioned securities. Portfolios will be designed to meet a particular investment goal, determined to be suitable to the client's circumstances. Once the appropriate portfolio has been determined, portfolios are continuously and regularly monitored, and if necessary, rebalanced based upon the client's individual needs, stated goals and objectives.

Comprehensive Portfolio Management:

As part of our Comprehensive Portfolio Management service clients will be provided asset management and financial planning or consulting services. This service is designed to assist clients in meeting their financial goals through the use of a financial plan or consultation. Our firm conducts client meetings to understand their current financial situation, existing resources, financial goals, and tolerance for risk. Based on what is learned, an investment approach is presented to the client, consisting of individual stocks, bonds, ETFs, options, mutual funds and other public and private securities or investments. Once the appropriate portfolio has been determined, portfolios are continuously and regularly monitored, and if necessary, rebalanced based upon the client's individual needs, stated goals and objectives. Upon client request, our firm provides a summary of observations and recommendations for the planning or consulting aspects of this service.

Financial Planning & Consulting:

Our firm provides a variety of standalone financial planning and consulting services to clients for the management of financial resources based upon an analysis of current situation, goals, and objectives. Financial planning services will typically involve preparing a financial plan or rendering a financial consultation for clients based on the client's financial goals and objectives. This planning or

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consulting may encompass Investment Planning, Retirement Planning, Estate Planning, Charitable Planning, Education Planning, Corporate and Personal Tax Planning, Cost Segregation Study, Corporate Structure, Real Estate Analysis, Mortgage/Debt Analysis, Insurance Analysis, Lines of Credit Evaluation, or Business and Personal Financial Planning.

Written financial plans or financial consultations rendered to clients usually include general recommendations for a course of activity or specific actions to be taken by the clients. Implementation of the recommendations will be at the discretion of the client. Our firm provides clients with a summary of their financial situation, and observations for financial planning engagements. Financial consultations are not typically accompanied by a written summary of observations and recommendations, as the process is less formal than the planning service. Assuming that all the information and documents requested from the client are provided promptly, plans or consultations are typically completed within 6 months of the client signing a contract with our firm.

Retirement Plan Consulting:

Our firm provides retirement plan consulting services to employer plan sponsors on an ongoing basis. Generally, such consulting services consist of assisting employer plan sponsors in establishing, monitoring and reviewing their company's participant-directed retirement plan. As the needs of the plan sponsor dictate, areas of advising may include:

- Establishing an Investment Policy Statement – Our firm will assist in the development of a statement that summarizes the investment goals and objectives along with the broad strategies to be employed to meet the objectives.
- Investment Options – Our firm will work with the Plan Sponsor to evaluate existing investment options and make recommendations for appropriate changes.
- Asset Allocation and Portfolio Construction – Our firm will develop strategic asset allocation models to aid Participants in developing strategies to meet their investment objectives, time horizon, financial situation and tolerance for risk.
- Investment Monitoring – Our firm will monitor the performance of the investments and notify the client in the event of over/underperformance and in times of market volatility.
- Participant Education – Our firm will provide opportunities to educate plan participants about their retirement plan offerings, different investment options, and general guidance on allocation strategies.

In providing services for retirement plan consulting, our firm does not provide any advisory services with respect to the following types of assets: employer securities, real estate (excluding real estate funds and publicly traded REITS), participant loans, non-publicly traded securities or assets, other illiquid investments, or brokerage window programs (collectively, "Excluded Assets"). All retirement plan consulting services shall be in compliance with the applicable state laws regulating retirement consulting services. This applies to client accounts that are retirement or other employee benefit plans ("Plan") governed by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, as amended ("ERISA"). If the client accounts are part of a Plan, and our firm accepts appointment to provide services to such accounts, our firm acknowledges its fiduciary standard within the meaning of Section 3(21) or 3(38) of ERISA as designated by the Retirement Plan Consulting Agreement with respect to the provision of services described therein.

Tailoring of Advisory Services

Our firm offers individualized investment advice to our Asset Management and Comprehensive Portfolio Management clients. General investment advice will be offered to our Financial Planning & Consulting and Retirement Plan Consulting clients.

Our firm does not usually allow Asset Management or Comprehensive Portfolio Management clients to impose restrictions on investing in certain securities or types of securities due to the level of difficulty this would entail in managing their account. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Participation in Wrap Fee Programs

Our firm does not offer or sponsor a wrap fee program.

Regulatory Assets Under Management

Our firm has $81,542,871 in assets under management in discretionary accounts, and $0 in assets under management in non-discretionary accounts, as of 2/23/2026.

Item 5: Fees & Compensation

Compensation for Our Advisory Services

Asset Management:

The maximum annual fee charged for this service will not exceed 2.00%. Fees to be assessed will be outlined in the advisory agreement to be signed by the Client. Fees are based primarily on asset size and the level of complexity of the services provided. Our firm bills on cash unless indicated otherwise in writing. Annualized fees are billed on a pro-rata basis quarterly in advance based on the value of the account(s) on the last day of the previous quarter. Fees are negotiable and will be deducted from client account(s). Fees are not based on the share of capital gains or capital appreciation of the funds or any portion of the funds. Comparable services for lower fees could be available from other sources. Our firm does not offer direct invoicing. As part of this process, Clients understand the following:

a) The client's independent custodian sends statements at least quarterly showing the market values for each security included in the Assets and all account disbursements, including the amount of the advisory fees paid to our firm;
b) Clients will provide authorization permitting our firm to be directly paid by these terms. Our firm will send an invoice directly to the custodian; and
c) If our firm sends a copy of our invoice to the client, a legend urging the comparison of information provided in our statement with those from the qualified custodian will be included.

Comprehensive Portfolio Management:

The maximum annual fee charged for this service will not exceed 2.00%. Fees to be assessed will be outlined in the advisory agreement to be signed by the Client. Fees are based primarily on asset size

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and the level of complexity of the services provided. Our firm bills on cash unless indicated otherwise in writing. Annualized fees are billed on a pro-rata basis quarterly in advance based on the value of the account(s) on the last day of the previous quarter. Fees are negotiable and will be deducted from client account(s). Fees are not based on the share of capital gains or capital appreciation of the funds or any portion of the funds. Comparable services for lower fees could be available from other sources. Our firm does not offer direct invoicing. As part of this process, Clients understand the following:

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c) If our firm sends a copy of our invoice to the client, a legend urging the comparison of information provided in our statement with those from the qualified custodian will be included.

Financial Planning & Consulting:

Our firm charges on a flat fee basis for financial planning and consulting services. The total estimated fee, as well as the ultimate fee charged, is based on the scope and complexity of our engagement with the client. Flat fees range from $2,500 to $10,000. The fee-paying arrangements will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will be detailed in the signed consulting agreement. Our firm will not require a retainer exceeding $500 when services cannot be rendered within 6 months.

Retirement Plan Consulting:

Our Retirement Plan Consulting services are billed on a fee based on the percentage of Plan assets under management. The total estimated fee, as well as the ultimate fee charged, is based on the scope and complexity of our engagement with the client. Fees based on a percentage of managed Plan assets will not exceed 1.05%. The fee-paying arrangements will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will be detailed in the signed consulting agreement.

Other Types of Fees & Expenses

Clients will incur transaction fees for trades executed by their chosen custodian, either based on a percentage of the dollar amount of assets in the account(s) or via individual transaction charges. These transaction fees are separate from our firm's advisory fees and will be disclosed by the chosen custodian.

Clients may also pay holdings charges imposed by the chosen custodian for certain investments, charges imposed directly by a mutual fund, index fund, or exchange traded fund, which shall be disclosed in the fund's prospectus (e.g., fund management fees and other fund expenses), distribution fees, surrender charges, variable annuity fees, IRA and qualified retirement plan fees, mark-ups and mark-downs, spreads paid to market makers, fees for trades executed away from custodian, wire transfer fees and other fees and taxes on brokerage accounts and securities transactions. Our firm does not receive a portion of these fees.

Please refer to Item 12 "Brokerage Practices" of this brochure for additional information.

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Termination & Refunds

Either party may terminate the advisory agreement signed with our firm for Asset Management and Comprehensive Portfolio Management services in writing at any time. Upon notice of termination our firm will process a pro-rata refund of the unearned portion of the advisory fees charged in advance.

Financial Planning & Consulting clients may terminate their agreement at any time before the delivery of a financial plan by providing written notice. For purposes of calculating refunds, all work performed by us up to the point of termination shall be calculated at the hourly fee currently in effect. Clients will receive a pro-rata refund of unearned fees based on the time and effort expended by our firm.

Either party to a Retirement Plan Consulting Agreement may terminate at any time by providing written notice to the other party. Full refunds will only be made in cases where cancellation occurs within 5 business days of signing an agreement. After 5 business days from initial signing, either party must provide the other party 30 days written notice to terminate billing. Billing will terminate 30 days after receipt of termination notice. Clients will be charged on a pro-rata basis, which takes into account work completed by our firm on behalf of the client. Clients will incur charges for bona fide advisory services rendered up to the point of termination (determined as 30 days from receipt of said written notice) and such fees will be due and payable.

Commissionable Securities Sales

Our firm and representatives do not sell securities for a commission in advisory accounts.

Item 6: Performance-Based Fees & Side-By-Side Management

Our firm does not charge performance-based fees.

Item 7: Types of Clients & Account Requirements

Our firm has the following types of clients:

- Individuals and High Net Worth Individuals;
- Trusts, Estates or Charitable Organizations;
- Pension and Profit Sharing Plans;
- Corporations, Limited Liability Companies and/or Other Business Types

Our firm does not impose requirements for opening and maintaining accounts or otherwise engaging us.

Item 8: Methods of Analysis, Investment Strategies & Risk of Loss

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Methods of Analysis

We use the following methods of analysis in formulating our investment advice and/or managing client assets:

Charting: In this type of technical analysis, our firm reviews charts of market and security activity in an attempt to identify when the market is moving up or down and to predict how long the trend may last and when that trend might reverse. Since charting relies on historical information, there is a risk that historical patterns may be incorrect or have no ability to predict future asset prices.

Cyclical Analysis: Statistical analysis of specific events occurring at a sufficient number of relatively predictable intervals that they can be forecasted into the future. Cyclical analysis asserts that cyclical forces drive price movements in the financial markets. Risks include that cycles may invert or disappear and there is no expectation that this type of analysis will pinpoint turning points, instead be used in conjunction with other methods of analysis.

Duration Constraints: Our firm adhere to a discipline of generally maintaining duration within a narrow band around benchmark duration in order to limit exposure to market risk. Our portfolio management team rebalances client portfolios to their current duration targets on a periodic basis. The risk of constraining duration is that the client may not participate fully in a large rally in bond prices.

Fundamental Analysis: The analysis of a business's financial statements (usually to analyze the business's assets, liabilities, and earnings), health, and its competitors and markets. When analyzing a stock, futures contract, or currency using fundamental analysis there are two basic approaches one can use: bottom up analysis and top down analysis. The terms are used to distinguish such analysis from other types of investment analysis, such as quantitative and technical. Fundamental analysis is performed on historical and present data, but with the goal of making financial forecasts. There are several possible objectives: (a) to conduct a company stock valuation and predict its probable price evolution; (b) to make a projection on its business performance; (c) to evaluate its management and make internal business decisions; (d) and/or to calculate its credit risk.; and (e) to find out the intrinsic value of the share.

When the objective of the analysis is to determine what stock to buy and at what price, there are two basic methodologies investors rely upon: (a) Fundamental analysis maintains that markets may misprice a security in the short run but that the "correct" price will eventually be reached. Profits can be made by purchasing the mispriced security and then waiting for the market to recognize its "mistake" and reprice the security.; and (b) Technical analysis maintains that all information is reflected already in the price of a security. Technical analysts analyze trends and believe that sentiment changes predate and predict trend changes. Investors' emotional responses to price movements lead to recognizable price chart patterns. Technical analysts also analyze historical trends to predict future price movement. Investors can use one or both of these different but complementary methods for stock picking. This presents a potential risk, as the price of a security can move up or down along with the overall market regardless of the economic and financial factors considered in evaluating the stock.

Qualitative Analysis: A securities analysis that uses subjective judgment based on unquantifiable information, such as management expertise, industry cycles, strength of research and development, and labor relations. Qualitative analysis contrasts with quantitative analysis, which focuses on numbers that can be found on reports such as balance sheets. The two techniques, however, will often be used together in order to examine a company's operations and evaluate its potential as an

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investment opportunity. Qualitative analysis deals with intangible, inexact concerns that belong to the social and experiential realm rather than the mathematical one. This approach depends on the kind of intelligence that machines (currently) lack, since things like positive associations with a brand, management trustworthiness, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and cultural shifts are difficult, arguably impossible, to capture with numerical inputs. A risk in using qualitative analysis is that subjective judgment may prove incorrect.

Quantitative Analysis: The use of models, or algorithms, to evaluate assets for investment. The process usually consists of searching vast databases for patterns, such as correlations among liquid assets or price-movement patterns (trend following or mean reversion). The resulting strategies may involve high-frequency trading. The results of the analysis are taken into consideration in the decision to buy or sell securities and in the management of portfolio characteristics. A risk in using quantitative analysis is that the methods or models used may be based on assumptions that prove to be incorrect.

Sector Analysis: Sector analysis involves identification and analysis of various industries or economic sectors that are likely to exhibit superior performance. Academic studies indicate that the health of a stock's sector is as important as the performance of the individual stock itself. In other words, even the best stock located in a weak sector will often perform poorly because that sector is out of favor. Each industry has differences in terms of its customer base, market share among firms, industry growth, competition, regulation and business cycles. Learning how the industry operates provides a deeper understanding of a company's financial health. One method of analyzing a company's growth potential is examining whether the amount of customers in the overall market is expected to grow. In some markets, there is zero or negative growth, a factor demanding careful consideration. Additionally, market analysts recommend that investors should monitor sectors that are nearing the bottom of performance rankings for possible signs of an impending turnaround. A risk in sector rotation is buying into a sector just as the trend reverses, leading to immediate losses. This can be a result of economic data that is used for analysis being outdated, so by the time a sector is recognized as top-performing, the market may have already moved on.

Technical Analysis: A security analysis methodology for forecasting the direction of prices through the study of past market data, primarily price and volume. A fundamental principle of technical analysis is that a market's price reflects all relevant information, so their analysis looks at the history of a security's trading pattern rather than external drivers such as economic, fundamental and news events. Therefore, price action tends to repeat itself due to investors collectively tending toward patterned behavior – hence technical analysis focuses on identifiable trends and conditions. Technical analysts also widely use market indicators of many sorts, some of which are mathematical transformations of price, often including up and down volume, advance/decline data and other inputs. These indicators are used to help assess whether an asset is trending, and if it is, the probability of its direction and of continuation. Technicians also look for relationships between price/volume indices and market indicators. Technical analysis employs models and trading rules based on price and volume transformations, such as the relative strength index, moving averages, regressions, inter-market and intra-market price correlations, business cycles, stock market cycles or, classically, through recognition of chart patterns. Technical analysis is widely used among traders and financial professionals and is very often used by active day traders, market makers and pit traders. The risk associated with this type of analysis is that analysts use subjective judgment to decide which pattern(s) a particular instrument reflects at a given time and what the interpretation of that pattern should be. While this form of analysis can provide insight to the current status of the area of discussion, it is subject to risk when a company reports incorrect data and the uncertainty of relying on past performance.

Investment Strategies We Use

We use the following strategies in managing client accounts, provided that such strategies are appropriate to the needs of the client and consistent with the client's investment objectives, risk tolerance, and time horizons, among other considerations:

Asset Allocation: The implementation of an investment strategy that attempts to balance risk versus reward by adjusting the percentage of each asset in an investment portfolio according to the investor's risk tolerance, goals and investment time frame. Asset allocation is based on the principle that different assets perform differently in different market and economic conditions. A fundamental justification for asset allocation is the notion that different asset classes offer returns that are not perfectly correlated, hence diversification reduces the overall risk in terms of the variability of returns for a given level of expected return. Although risk is reduced as long as correlations are not perfect, it is typically forecast (wholly or in part) based on statistical relationships (like correlation and variance) that existed over some past period. Expectations for return are often derived in the same way. A risk of an asset allocation strategy is that the ratio of securities, fixed income, and cash will change over time and, if not corrected, will no longer be appropriate for the client's goals.

An asset class is a group of economic resources sharing similar characteristics, such as riskiness and return. There are many types of assets that may or may not be included in an asset allocation strategy. The "traditional" asset classes are stocks (value, dividend, growth, or sector-specific [or a "blend" of any two or more of the preceding]; large-cap versus mid-cap, small-cap or micro-cap; domestic, foreign [developed], emerging or frontier markets), bonds (fixed income securities more generally: investment-grade or junk [high-yield]; government or corporate; short-term, intermediate, long-term; domestic, foreign, emerging markets), and cash or cash equivalents. Allocation among these three provides a starting point. Usually included are hybrid instruments such as convertible bonds and preferred stocks, counting as a mixture of bonds and stocks. Other alternative assets that may be considered include: commodities: precious metals, nonferrous metals, agriculture, energy, others.; Commercial or residential real estate (also REITs); Collectibles such as art, coins, or stamps; insurance products (annuity, life settlements, catastrophe bonds, personal life insurance products, etc.); derivatives such as long-short or market neutral strategies, options, collateralized debt, and futures; foreign currency; venture capital; private equity; and/or distressed securities.

There are several types of asset allocation strategies based on investment goals, risk tolerance, time frames and diversification. The most common forms of asset allocation are: strategic, dynamic, tactical, and core-satellite.

- Strategic Asset Allocation: The primary goal of a strategic asset allocation is to create an asset mix that seeks to provide the optimal balance between expected risk and return for a long-term investment horizon. Generally speaking, strategic asset allocation strategies are agnostic to economic environments, i.e., they do not change their allocation postures relative to changing market or economic conditions.
- Dynamic Asset Allocation: Dynamic asset allocation is similar to strategic asset allocation in that portfolios are built by allocating to an asset mix that seeks to provide the optimal balance between expected risk and return for a long-term investment horizon. Like strategic allocation strategies, dynamic strategies largely retain exposure to their original asset classes; however, unlike strategic strategies, dynamic asset allocation portfolios will adjust their postures over time relative to changes in the economic environment.
- Tactical Asset Allocation: Tactical asset allocation is a strategy in which an investor takes a more active approach that tries to position a portfolio into those assets, sectors, or individual stocks that show the most potential for perceived gains. While an original asset mix is formulated much like strategic and dynamic portfolio, tactical strategies are often traded

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more actively and are free to move entirely in and out of their core asset classes

- Core-Satellite Asset Allocation: Core-Satellite allocation strategies generally contain a 'core' strategic element making up the most significant portion of the portfolio, while applying a dynamic or tactical 'satellite' strategy that makes up a smaller part of the portfolio. In this way, core-satellite allocation strategies are a hybrid of the strategic and dynamic/tactical allocation strategies mentioned above.

Fixed Income: Fixed income is a type of investing or budgeting style for which real return rates or periodic income is received at regular intervals and at reasonably predictable levels. Fixed-income investors are typically retired individuals who rely on their investments to provide a regular, stable income stream. This demographic tends to invest heavily in fixed-income investments because of the reliable returns they offer. Fixed-income investors who live on set amounts of periodically paid income face the risk of inflation eroding their spending power.

Some examples of fixed-income investments include treasuries, money market instruments, corporate bonds, asset-backed securities, municipal bonds and international bonds. The primary risk associated with fixed-income investments is the borrower defaulting on his payment. Other considerations include exchange rate risk for international bonds and interest rate risk for longer-dated securities. The most common type of fixed-income security is a bond. Bonds are issued by federal governments, local municipalities and major corporations. Fixed-income securities are recommended for investors seeking a diverse portfolio; however, the percentage of the portfolio dedicated to fixed income depends on your own personal investment style. There is also an opportunity to diversify the fixed-income component of a portfolio. Riskier fixed-income products, such as junk bonds and longer-dated products, should comprise a lower percentage of your overall portfolio.

The interest payment on fixed-income securities is considered regular income and is determined based on the creditworthiness of the borrower and current market rates. In general, bonds and fixed-income securities with longer-dated maturities pay a higher rate, also referred to as the coupon rate, because they are considered riskier. The longer the security is on the market, the more time it has to lose its value and/or default. At the end of the bond term, or at bond maturity, the borrower returns the amount borrowed, also referred to as the principal or par value.

Long-Term Purchases: Our firm may buy securities for your account and hold them for a relatively long time (more than a year) in anticipation that the security's value will appreciate over a long horizon. The risk of this strategy is that our firm could miss out on potential short-term gains that could have been profitable to your account, or it's possible that the security's value may decline sharply before our firm makes a decision to sell.

Margin Transactions: Our firm may purchase securities for your portfolio with money borrowed from your brokerage account. This allows you to purchase more stock than you would be able to with your available cash and allows us to purchase securities without selling other holdings. Margin accounts and transactions are risky and not necessarily appropriate for every client. It should be noted that our firm bills advisory fees on securities purchased on margin which creates a financial incentive for us to utilize margin in client accounts.

The potential risks associated with these transactions are (1) You can lose more funds than are deposited into the margin account; (2) the forced sale of securities or other assets in your account; (3) the sale of securities or other assets without contacting you; (4) you may not be entitled to choose which securities or other assets in your account(s) are liquidated or sold to meet a margin call; and (5) custodians charge interest on margin balances which will reduce your returns over time.

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Options: An option is a financial derivative that represents a contract sold by one party (the option writer) to another party (the option holder, or option buyer). The contract offers the buyer the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell a security or other financial asset at an agreed-upon price (the strike price) during a certain period of time or on a specific date (exercise date). Options are extremely versatile securities. Traders use options to speculate, which is a relatively risky practice, while hedgers use options to reduce the risk of holding an asset. In terms of speculation, option buyers and writers have conflicting views regarding the outlook on the performance of a:

- *Call Option*: Call options give the option to buy at certain price, so the buyer would want the stock to go up. Conversely, the option writer needs to provide the underlying shares in the event that the stock's market price exceeds the strike due to the contractual obligation. An option writer who sells a call option believes that the underlying stock's price will drop relative to the option's strike price during the life of the option, as that is how he will reap maximum profit. This is exactly the opposite outlook of the option buyer. The buyer believes that the underlying stock will rise; if this happens, the buyer will be able to acquire the stock for a lower price and then sell it for a profit. However, if the underlying stock does not close above the strike price on the expiration date, the option buyer would lose the premium paid for the call option.

- *Put Option*: Put options give the option to sell at a certain price, so the buyer would want the stock to go down. The opposite is true for put option writers. For example, a put option buyer is bearish on the underlying stock and believes its market price will fall below the specified strike price on or before a specified date. On the other hand, an option writer who sells a put option believes the underlying stock's price will increase about a specified price on or before the expiration date. If the underlying stock's price closes above the specified strike price on the expiration date, the put option writer's maximum profit is achieved. Conversely, a put option holder would only benefit from a fall in the underlying stock's price below the strike price. If the underlying stock's price falls below the strike price, the put option writer is obligated to purchase shares of the underlying stock at the strike price.

The potential risks associated with these transactions are that (1) all options expire. The closer the option gets to expiration, the quicker the premium in the option deteriorates; and (2) Prices can move very quickly. Depending on factors such as time until expiration and the relationship of the stock price to the option's strike price, small movements in a stock can translate into big movements in the underlying options.

Short Sales: A short sale is a transaction in which an investor sells borrowed securities in anticipation of a price decline and is required to return an equal number of shares at some point in the future. These transactions have a number of risks that make it highly unsuitable for the novice investor. This strategy has a slanted payoff ratio in that the maximum gain is limited, but the maximum loss is theoretically infinite. The following risks should be considered: (1) In addition to trading commissions, other costs with short selling include that of borrowing the security to short it, as well as interest payable on the margin account that holds the shorted security. (2) The short seller is responsible for making dividend payments on the shorted stock to the entity from whom the stock has been borrowed. (3) Stocks with very high short interest may occasionally surge in price. This usually happens when there is a positive development in the stock, which forces short sellers to buy the shares back to close their short positions. Heavily shorted stocks are also susceptible to "buy-ins," which occur when a broker closes out short positions in a difficult-to-borrow stock whose lenders are demanding it back. (4) Regulators may impose bans on short sales in a specific sector or even in the broad market to avoid panic and unwarranted selling pressure. Such actions can cause a spike in

stock prices, forcing the short seller to cover short positions at huge losses.

Short-Term Purchases: When utilizing this strategy, our firm may also purchase securities with the idea of selling them within a relatively short time (typically a year or less). Our firm does this in an attempt to take advantage of conditions that our firm believes will soon result in a price swing in the securities our firm purchase. The risk of short-term purchases is that the client may not participate fully in a large increase in securities prices over a longer period of time.

Risk of Loss

Investing in securities involves risk of loss that clients should be prepared to bear. While the stock market may increase and the account(s) could enjoy a gain, it is also possible that the stock market may decrease and the account(s) could suffer a loss. It is important that clients understand the risks associated with investing in the stock market, and that their assets are appropriately diversified in investments. Clients are encouraged to ask our firm any questions regarding their risk tolerance.

Capital Risk: Capital risk is one of the most basic, fundamental risks of investing; it is the risk that you may lose 100% of your money. All investments carry some form of risk and the loss of capital is generally a risk for any investment instrument.

Company Risk: When investing in stock positions, there is always a certain level of company or industry specific risk that is inherent in each investment. This is also referred to as unsystematic risk and can be reduced through appropriate diversification. There is the risk that the company will perform poorly or have its value reduced based on factors specific to the company or its industry. For example, if a company's employees go on strike or the company receives unfavorable media attention for its actions, the value of the company may be reduced.

Credit Risk: Credit risk can be a factor in situations where an investment's performance relies on a borrower's repayment of borrowed funds. With credit risk, an investor can experience a loss or unfavorable performance if a borrower does not repay the borrowed funds as expected or required. Investment holdings that involve forms of indebtedness (i.e. borrowed funds) are subject to credit risk.

Defensive Strategy Risk: Defensive strategies are primarily used in periods of high volatility or economic uncertainty and aimed at reducing exposure to the equity market. Our goal is simply to help our clients achieve their financial goals, regardless of market conditions. If our firm forecasts a prolonged and substantial downturn for the equity markets, it may adopt a defensive strategy for clients' growth allocation by investing substantially in money market securities and/or short term fixed income securities. There can be no guarantee that our firm will accurately forecast any prolonged and substantial downturn in the equity markets, or that the use defensive techniques would be successful in avoiding losses. The use of defensive strategies could result in a negative outcome for a client. A few negative consequences could be high turnover, re-entry in the same security at a higher price, loss of growth if the equity markets move up, high tax liability within taxable accounts and higher trading cost.

Equity (Stock) Market Risk: Common stocks are susceptible to general stock market fluctuations and, volatile increases and decreases in value as market confidence in and perceptions of their issuers change. If you held common stock, or common stock equivalents, of any given issuer, you would generally be exposed to greater risk than if you held preferred stocks and debt obligations of the issuer.

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ETF & Mutual Fund Risk: When investing in an ETF or mutual fund, you will bear additional expenses based on your pro rata share of the ETF's or mutual fund's operating expenses, including the potential duplication of management fees. The risk of owning an ETF or mutual fund generally reflects the risks of owning the underlying securities, the ETF, or mutual fund holds. Clients will also incur brokerage costs when purchasing ETFs.

Inflation Risk: Inflation risk involves the concern that in the future, your investment or proceeds from your investment will not be worth what they are today. Throughout time, the prices of resources and end-user products generally increase and thus, the same general goods and products today will likely be more expensive in the future. The longer an investment is held, the greater the chance that the proceeds from that investment will be worth less in the future than what they are today. Said another way, a dollar tomorrow will likely get you less than what it can today.

Interest Rate Risk: Certain investments involve the payment of a fixed or variable rate of interest to the investment holder. Once an investor has acquired or has acquired the rights to an investment that pays a particular rate (fixed or variable) of interest, changes in overall interest rates in the market will affect the value of the interest-paying investment(s) they hold. In general, changes in prevailing interest rates in the market will have an inverse relationship to the value of existing, interest paying investments. In other words, as interest rates move up, the value of an instrument paying a particular rate (fixed or variable) of interest will go down. The reverse is generally true as well.

Market Risk: The value of your portfolio may decrease if the value of an individual company or multiple companies in the portfolio decreases or if our belief about a company's intrinsic worth is incorrect. Further, regardless of how well individual companies perform, the value of your portfolio could also decrease if there are deteriorating economic or market conditions. It is important to understand that the value of your investment may fall, sometimes sharply, in response to changes in the market, and you could lose money. Investment risks include price risk as may be observed by a drop in a security's price due to company specific events (e.g. earnings disappointment or downgrade in the rating of a bond) or general market risk (e.g. such as a "bear" market when stock values fall in general). For fixed-income securities, a period of rising interest rates could erode the value of a bond since bond values generally fall as bond yields go up. Past performance is not a guarantee of future returns.

Past Performance: Charting and technical analysis are often used interchangeably. Technical analysis generally attempts to forecast an investment's future potential by analyzing its past performance and other related statistics. In particular, technical analysis often times involves an evaluation of historical pricing and volume of a particular security for the purpose of forecasting where future price and volume figures may go. As with any investment analysis method, technical analysis runs the risk of not knowing the future and thus, investors should realize that even the most diligent and thorough technical analysis cannot predict or guarantee the future performance of any particular investment instrument or issuer thereof.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Risk. Certain service providers utilized by the Firm to service client accounts have artificial intelligence components. The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning includes increased risk of data inaccuracies and security vulnerabilities. Due to the rapid advancement of machine learning technologies, future risks related to artificial intelligence are unpredictable. As a measure to mitigate these risks to our clients, the Firm performs periodic due diligence of our service providers for assurance that the service providers have appropriate controls in place to protect our clients' information and to limit data inaccuracies when artificial intelligence is used by the service provider.

Description of Material, Significant or Unusual Risks

Our firm generally invests client cash balances in money market funds, FDIC Insured Certificates of Deposit, high-grade commercial paper and/or government backed debt instruments. Ultimately, our firm tries to achieve the highest return on client cash balances through relatively low-risk conservative investments. In most cases, at least a partial cash balance will be maintained in a money market account so that our firm may debit advisory fees for our services related to our Asset Management and Comprehensive Portfolio Management services, as applicable.

Item 9: Disciplinary Information

Mr. Darpel, owner, has a disciplinary event to report. In case number 138517-SR, The State of Florida's Office of Financial Regulation ("The Office") found that Mr. Darpel violated Section 517.12(3), Florida Statutes (2025), by rendering investment advice, from a location within Forida, without being registered with The Office as an associated person of Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC. Mr. Darpel paid a fine of $6,000 and was subsequently registered with The Office.

Item 10: Other Financial Industry Activities & Affiliations

Our firm has no other financial industry activities and affiliations to disclose.

Item 11: Code of Ethics, Participation or Interest in Client Transactions & Personal Trading

As a fiduciary, it is an investment adviser's responsibility to provide fair and full disclosure of all material facts and to act solely in the best interest of each of our clients at all times. Our fiduciary duty is the underlying principle for our firm's Code of Ethics, which includes procedures for personal securities transaction and insider trading. Our firm requires all representatives to conduct business with the highest level of ethical standards and to comply with all federal and state securities laws at all times. Upon employment with our firm, and at least annually thereafter, all representatives of our firm will acknowledge receipt, understanding and compliance with our firm's Code of Ethics. Our firm and representatives must conduct business in an honest, ethical, and fair manner and avoid all circumstances that might negatively affect or appear to affect our duty of complete loyalty to all clients. This disclosure is provided to give all clients a summary of our Code of Ethics. If a client or a potential client wishes to review our Code of Ethics in its entirety, a copy will be provided promptly upon request.

Our firm recognizes that the personal investment transactions of our representatives demands the application of a Code of Ethics with high standards and requires that all such transactions be carried out in a way that does not endanger the interest of any client. At the same time, our firm also believes that if investment goals are similar for clients and for our representatives, it is logical, and even desirable, that there be common ownership of some securities.

[1] For purposes of the policy, our associate's personal account generally includes any account (a) in the name of our associate, his/her spouse,

his/her minor children or other dependents residing in the same household, (b) for which our associate is a trustee or executor, or (c) which our associate controls, including our client accounts which our associate controls and/or a member of his/her household has a direct or indirect beneficial interest in.

In order to prevent conflicts of interest, our firm has established procedures for transactions effected by our representatives for their personal accounts[1]. In order to monitor compliance with our personal trading policy, our firm has pre-clearance requirements and a quarterly securities transaction reporting system for all of our representatives.

Neither our firm nor a related person recommends, buys or sells for client accounts, securities in which our firm or a related person has a material financial interest without prior disclosure to the client.

Related persons of our firm may buy or sell securities and other investments that are also recommended to clients. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's Code of Ethics, a copy of which is available upon request.

Likewise, related persons of our firm buy or sell securities for themselves at or about the same time they buy or sell the same securities for client accounts. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's Code of Ethics, a copy of which is available upon request. Further, our related persons will refrain from buying or selling securities that will be bought or sold in client accounts unless done so after the client execution or concurrently as a part of a block trade.

Item 12: Brokerage Practices

Custodian & Brokers Used

Our firm does not maintain custody of client assets (although our firm may be deemed to have custody of client assets if given the authority to withdraw assets from client accounts. See *Item 15 Custody*, below). Client assets must be maintained in an account at a "qualified custodian," generally a broker-dealer or bank. Our firm recommends that clients use Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. ("Schwab"), a FINRA-registered broker-dealer, member SIPC, or Altruist Financial, LLC (Altruist), as the qualified custodians. Our firm is independently owned and operated, and not affiliated with Schwab or Altruist. Schwab and Altruist will hold client assets in brokerage accounts and buy and sell securities when instructed. While our firm recommends that clients use Schwab or Altruist as custodian/broker, clients will decide whether to do so and open an account with Schwab or Altruist by entering into an account agreement directly with them. Our firm does not open the account. Even though the account is maintained at Schwab or Altruist, our firm can still use other brokers to execute trades, as described in the next paragraph.

How Brokers/Custodians Are Selected

Our firm seeks to recommend a custodian/broker who will hold client assets and execute transactions on terms that are overall most advantageous when compared to other available providers and their services. A wide range of factors are considered, including, but not limited to:

- combination of transaction execution services along with asset custody services (generally without a separate fee for custody)

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- capability to execute, clear and settle trades (buy and sell securities for client accounts)
- capabilities to facilitate transfers and payments to and from accounts (wire transfers, check requests, bill payment, etc.)
- breadth of investment products made available (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, exchange traded funds (ETFs), etc.)
- availability of investment research and tools that assist in making investment decisions quality of services
- competitiveness of the price of those services (commission rates, margin interest rates, other fees, etc.) and willingness to negotiate them
- reputation, financial strength and stability of the provider
- prior service to our firm and our other clients availability of other products and services that benefit our firm, as discussed below (see "*Products & Services Available from Custodians*")

Custody & Brokerage Costs

Custodians generally do not charge a separate fee for custody services, but are compensated by charging commissions or other fees to clients on trades that are executed or that settle into the custodial accounts. For some accounts, custodians may charge your account a percentage of the dollar amount of assets in the account in lieu of commissions. Commission rates and/or asset-based fees applicable to client accounts were negotiated based on our firm's commitment to maintain a minimum threshold of assets statement equity in accounts. This commitment benefits clients because the overall commission rates and/or asset-based fees paid are lower than they would be if our firm had not made the commitment. In addition to commissions or asset-based fees, custodians charge a flat dollar amount as a "prime broker" or "trade away" fee for each trade that our firm has executed by a different broker-dealers but where the securities bought or the funds from the securities sold are deposited (settled) into a custodial account. These fees are in addition to the commissions or other compensation paid to the executing broker-dealer. Because of this, in order to minimize client trading costs, our firm has custodians execute most trades for the accounts.

Products & Services Available from Custodians

Schwab and Altruist serve independent investment advisory firms like our firm. They provide our firm and clients, both those enrolled and not enrolled in the program, with access to its institutional brokerage – trading, custody, reporting and related services – many of which are not typically available to retail customers. Schwab also makes available various support services. Some of those services help manage or administer our client accounts while others help manage and grow our business. Schwab's support services are generally available on an unsolicited basis (our firm does not have to request them) and at no charge to our firm. The availability of Schwab's products and services is not based on the provision of particular investment advice, such as purchasing particular securities for clients. Here is a more detailed description of support services:

Services that Benefit Clients

The custodian's institutional brokerage services include access to a broad range of investment products, execution of securities transactions, and custody of client assets. The investment products available through the custodian include some to which our firm might not otherwise have access or that would require a significantly higher minimum initial investment by firm clients. Custodial services described in this paragraph generally benefit clients and their accounts.

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Services that May Not Directly Benefit Clients

The custodian also makes available other products and services that benefit our firm but may not directly benefit clients or their accounts. These products and services assist in managing and administering our client accounts. They include investment research, both Schwab's and that of third parties. This research may be used to service all or some substantial number of client accounts, including accounts not maintained at Schwab. In addition to investment research, Schwab also makes available software and other technology that:

- provides access to client account data (such as duplicate trade confirmations and account statements);
- facilitates trade execution and allocate aggregated trade orders for multiple client accounts;
- provides pricing and other market data;
- facilitates payment of our fees from our clients' accounts; and
- assists with back-office functions, recordkeeping and client reporting.

Services that Generally Benefit Only Our Firm

Schwab also offers other services intended to help manage and further develop our business enterprise. These services include:

- educational conferences and events
- technology, compliance, legal, and business consulting;
- publications and conferences on practice management and business succession; and
- access to employee benefits providers, human capital consultants and insurance providers.

Schwab may provide some of these services itself. In other cases, Schwab will arrange for third-party vendors to provide the services to our firm. Schwab may also discount or waive fees for some of these services or pay all or a part of a third party's fees. Schwab may also provide our firm with other benefits, such as occasional business entertainment for our personnel.

Schwab has agreed that when the assets in our clients' accounts maintained a total of at least $50 million, it will pay for certain research, technology and marketing products and services provided to us by third parties. The availability of the services described above from Schwab benefits us because we do not have to produce or purchase them. We don't have to pay for Schwab's services so long as we keep a total of at least $10 million of client assets in accounts at Schwab. In addition, we don't have to pay for certain third party research, technology and marketing products and services once the total of our clients' assets maintained in accounts at Schwab reaches $50 million. These required amounts of client assets ($10 million and $50 million) may give us an incentive to require that you maintain your account with Schwab based on our interest in receiving Schwab's and the third parties' services that benefit our business rather than based on your interest in receiving the best value in custody services and the most favorable execution of your transactions. This is a potential conflict of interest. We believe, however, that our selection of Schwab as custodian and broker is in the best interests of our clients. It is primarily supported by the scope, quality and price of Schwab's services and not Schwab's or third parties' services that benefit only us or may only indirectly benefit you. Given the AUM noted in Item 4 Advisory Business, we do not believe that maintaining at least $10 million of those assets at Schwab in order to avoid paying Schwab quarterly service fees presents a material conflict of interest.

Irrespective of direct or indirect benefits to our client through Schwab, our firm strives to enhance the client experience, help clients reach their goals and put client interests before that of our firm or associated persons.

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Our Interest in Schwab's Services.

The availability of these services from Schwab benefits our firm because our firm does not have to produce or purchase them. Our firm does not have to pay for these services, and they are not contingent upon committing any specific amount of business to Schwab in trading commissions or assets in custody.

With respect to the Program, our firm does not pay SWIA fees for its services in the Program so long as our firm maintains $100 million in client assets in accounts at Schwab that are not enrolled in the Program. If our firm does not meet this condition, then our firm will pay SWIA an annual fee of 0.10% (10 basis points) on the value of our client assets in the Program. This fee arrangement gives our firm an incentive to recommend or require that clients with accounts not enrolled in the Program be maintained with Schwab.

In light of our arrangements with Schwab, a conflict of interest exists as our firm may have incentive to require that clients maintain their accounts with Schwab based on our interest in receiving Schwab's services that benefit our firm rather than based on client interest in receiving the best value in custody services and the most favorable execution of transactions. As part of our fiduciary duty to our clients, our firm will endeavor at all times to put the interests of our clients first. Clients should be aware, however, that the receipt of economic benefits by our firm or our related persons creates a potential conflict of interest and may indirectly influence our firm's choice of Schwab as a custodial recommendation. Our firm examined this potential conflict of interest when our firm chose to recommend Schwab and have determined that the recommendation is in the best interest of our firm's clients and satisfies our fiduciary obligations, including our duty to seek best execution.

In seeking best execution, the determinative factor is not the lowest possible cost, but whether the transaction represents the best qualitative execution, taking into consideration the full range of a broker-dealer's services, including the value of research provided, execution capability, commission rates, and responsiveness. Although our firm will seek competitive rates, to the benefit of all clients, our firm may not necessarily obtain the lowest possible commission rates for specific client account transactions. Our firm believes that the selection of Schwab as a custodian and broker is the best interest of our clients. It is primarily supported by the scope, quality and price of Schwab's services, and not Schwab's services that only benefit our firm.

Soft Dollars

Our firm does not receive any transition assistance in the form of soft dollars from any custodian.

Client Brokerage Commissions

Custodians do not make client brokerage commissions generated by client transactions available for our firm's use.

Client Transactions in Return for Soft Dollars

Our firm does not direct client transactions to a particular broker-dealer in return for soft dollar benefits.

Brokerage for Client Referrals

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Our firm does not receive brokerage for client referrals.

Directed Brokerage

Neither our firm nor any of our firm's representatives have discretionary authority in making the determination of the brokers-dealers and/or custodians with whom orders for the purchase or sale of securities are placed for execution, and the commission rates at which such securities transactions are effected. Our firm routinely recommends that clients direct us to execute through a specified broker-dealer. Our firm recommends the use of Schwab and/or Altruist. Each client will be required to establish their account(s) with one of these custodians if not already done. Please note that not all advisers have this requirement and by recommending a certain firm, this may cost the client more money.

Special Considerations for ERISA Clients

A retirement or ERISA plan client may direct all or part of portfolio transactions for its account through a specific broker or dealer in order to obtain goods or services on behalf of the plan. Such direction is permitted provided that the goods and services provided are reasonable expenses of the plan incurred in the ordinary course of its business for which it otherwise would be obligated and empowered to pay. ERISA prohibits directed brokerage arrangements when the goods or services purchased are not for the exclusive benefit of the plan. Consequently, our firm will request that plan sponsors who direct plan brokerage provide us with a letter documenting that this arrangement will be for the exclusive benefit of the plan.

Client-Directed Brokerage

Our firm does not allow client-directed brokerage outside our recommendations.

Purchase or Sale of Securities

Transactions implemented by the firm for client accounts are generally affected independently, unless an Investment Advisor decides to purchase or sell the same securities for several clients at approximately the same time. This process is referred to as aggregating orders, batch trading or block trading and is used by a firm when it believes such action proves advantageous to clients. When the firm aggregates client orders, the allocation of securities among client accounts will be done on a fair and equitable basis. Typically, the process of aggregating client orders is done in order to achieve better execution or to allocate orders among clients on a more equitable basis by avoiding differences in prices that might be obtained when orders are placed independently. When trades are not aggregated, clients will not always see the effects of lower commission per share costs that often occurs as a result of aggregating trades and as a result, pay a higher transaction cost than could be received elsewhere. While there is more than one process for allocating, generally the transactions will be averaged as to price and will be allocated among the firm's clients in proportion to the purchase and sale orders placed for each client account on any given day. Because we do not require the aggregation of trades, not all trades are aggregated even when there is an opportunity to do so.

Item 13: Review of Accounts or Financial Plans

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Our Chief Compliance Officer Joseph Darpel III reviews accounts on at least a quarterly basis for our Asset Management and Comprehensive Portfolio Management clients. The nature of these reviews is to learn whether client accounts are in line with their investment objectives, appropriately positioned based on market conditions, and investment policies, if applicable. Our firm does not provide written reports to clients, unless asked to do so. Verbal reports to clients take place on at least an annual basis when our Asset Management and Comprehensive Portfolio Management clients are contacted.

Our firm may review client accounts more frequently than described above. Among the factors which may trigger an off-cycle review are major market or economic events, the client's life events, requests by the client, etc.

Financial Planning clients do not receive reviews of their written plans unless they take action to schedule a financial consultation with us. Our firm does not provide ongoing services to financial planning clients, but are willing to meet with such clients upon their request to discuss updates to their plans, changes in their circumstances, etc. Financial Planning clients do not receive written or verbal updated reports regarding their financial plans unless they separately engage our firm for a post-financial plan meeting or update to their initial written financial plan.

Retirement Plan Consulting clients receive reviews of their retirement plans for the duration of the service. Our firm also provides ongoing services where clients are met with upon their request to discuss updates to their plans, changes in their circumstances, etc. Retirement Plan Consulting clients do not receive written or verbal updated reports regarding their plans unless they choose to engage our firm for ongoing services.

Item 14: Client Referrals & Other Compensation

Charles Schwab & Co., Inc.

Our firm receives economic benefit from Schwab in the form of the support products and services made available to our firm and other independent investment advisors that have their clients maintain accounts at Schwab. These products and services, how they benefit our firm, and the related conflicts of interest are described above *(see Item 12 – Brokerage Practices)*. The availability of Schwab's products and services is not based on our firm giving particular investment advice, such as buying particular securities for our clients.

Product Sponsors

Our firm occasionally sponsors events in conjunction with our product providers in an effort to keep our clients informed as to the services we offer and the various financial products we utilize. These events are educational in nature and are not dependent upon the use of any specific product. While a conflict of interest may exist because these events are at least partially funded by product sponsors, all funds received from product sponsors are used for the education of our clients. We will always adhere to our fiduciary duty in recommending appropriate investments for our clients.

Representatives of our firm will occasionally accept travel expense reimbursement provided by product sponsors in order to attend their educational events. The reimbursement is not directly dependent upon the recommendation of any specific product. Although we may be incentivized to recommend products from product sponsors that reimburse our travel, our representatives will

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always adhere to their fiduciary duty in recommending appropriate investments for our clients.

Client Referrals

Our firm pays referral fees (non-commission based) to independent solicitors (non-registered representatives) for the referral of their clients to our firm in accordance with relevant state statutes and rules. Such referral fee represents a share of our investment advisory fee charged to our clients. This arrangement will not result in higher costs to the referred client. In this regard, our firm maintains Solicitors Agreements in compliance with relevant state statutes and rules and applicable state and federal laws. All clients referred by Solicitors to our firm will be given full written disclosure describing the terms and fee arrangements between our firm and Solicitor(s). Our firm's referral agreement is in compliance with each state where state law requires, each client is given a copy of the referral agreement prior to or at the time of entering into any advisory contract. In cases where state law requires licensure of solicitors, our firm ensures that no solicitation fees are paid unless the solicitor is registered as an investment adviser representative of our firm. If our firm is paying solicitation fees to another registered investment adviser, the licensure of individuals is the other firm's responsibility.

Our firm advertises their investment advisory services on the website of The Lampo Group, LLC d/b/a Ramsey Solutions™ ("RS"), which operates a program known as SmartVestor™. As RS may be deemed to be a third-party promoter within the meaning of Rule 206(4)-3 under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, the firm makes the following disclosure: SmartVestor™ is an advertising service for investing professionals. When a consumer provides contact information through the SmartVestor™ website, the program introduces the consumer to up to five (5) investing professionals ("Pros") in their geographic area. It is up to the consumer to interview the Pros and decide whether to directly retain them. As a SmartVestor™ Pro, The firm pays RS a flat monthly membership and advertising fee to advertise their services in the SmartVestor™ Program. In return, the firm receives contact information for prospective investment advisory clients. Consumers entering a zip code corresponding to the firm's advertising markets can view their profile, and other Pros in the same markets, on the SmartVestor™ website. The advertising fee is based upon criteria including market size (small, medium, large or premium) and historic volume of web traffic to RS's SmartVestor™ website. The fees paid by the firm are irrespective of whether someone becomes a client, and the fees are not passed on to the client. The fees paid are not based upon the number of leads, contacts, or referrals which the firm may receive from RS or the SmartVestor™ website. The firm does not pay to or share with RS or SmartVestor™ any portion of the investment advisory fees a client is charged. Neither RS nor its affiliates are engaged in providing investment advice. RS does not receive, control, access or monitor client funds, accounts, or portfolios of the firm. Any services rendered by the firm are solely their services and not those of RS or SmartVestor™

Item 15: Custody

Deduction of Advisory Fees:

State Securities Bureaus generally take the position that any arrangement under which a registered investment adviser is authorized or permitted to withdraw client funds or securities maintained with a custodian upon the adviser's instruction to the custodian is deemed to have custody of client funds and securities. As such, our firm has adopted the following safeguarding procedures:

a) Clients must provide our firm with written authorization permitting direct payment of

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advisory fees from their account(s) maintained by a custodian who is independent of our firm;

b) Our firm sends monthly or quarterly statements to the client showing the fee amount, the value of the assets upon which the fee is based, and the specific manner in which the fee is calculated as well as disclosing that it is the client's responsibility to verify the accuracy of fee calculation, and that the custodian does not determine its accuracy; and
c) The account custodian sends a statement to the client, at least quarterly, showing all account disbursements, including advisory fees.

Clients should compare the account statement from the custodiam to the invoice provided by the advisor for accuracy. Further, clients are encouraged to raise any questions with us about the custody, safety or security of their assets and our custodial recommendations.

Third Party Money Movement:

On February 21, 2017, the SEC issued a no-action letter ("Letter") with respect to Rule 206(4)-2 ("Custody Rule") under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 ("Advisers Act"). The letter provided guidance on the Custody Rule as well as clarified that an adviser who has the power to disburse client funds to a third party under a standing letter of authorization ("SLOA") is deemed to have custody. The Virginia State Corporation commission Division of Securities has not adopted the safe harbor provisions noted here and therefore if the SLOA meets the custody definition set forth in Securities Act Rule 21VAC5-80-146, the requirements of the rule will be met.

As such, for any third party SLOAs, our firm has adopted the following safeguards in conjunction with our custodian:

- The client provides an instruction to the qualified custodian, in writing, that includes the client's signature, the third party's name, and either the third party's address or the third party's account number at a custodian to which the transfer should be directed.
- The client authorizes the investment adviser, in writing, either on the qualified custodian's form or separately, to direct transfers to the third party either on a specified schedule or from time to time.
- The client's qualified custodian performs appropriate verification of the instruction, such as a signature review or other method to verify the client's authorization, and provides a transfer of funds notice to the client promptly after each transfer.
- The client has the ability to terminate or change the instruction to the client's qualified custodian.
- The investment adviser has no authority or ability to designate or change the identity of the third party, the address, or any other information about the third party contained in the client's instruction.
- The investment adviser maintains records showing that the third party is not a related party of the investment adviser or located at the same address as the investment adviser.
- The client's qualified custodian sends the client, in writing, an initial notice confirming the instruction and an annual notice reconfirming the instruction.

Item 16: Investment Discretion

Our firm manages accounts on a discretionary basis. After you sign an agreement with our firm, we're

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allowed to buy and sell investments in your account without asking you in advance. Any limitations will be described in the signed advisory agreement. We will have discretion until the advisory agreement is terminated by you or our firm.

Item 17: Voting Client Securities

Our firm does not accept the proxy authority to vote client securities. Clients will receive proxies or other solicitations directly from their custodian or a transfer agent. In the event that proxies are sent to our firm, our firm will forward them to the appropriate client and ask the party who sent them to mail them directly to the client in the future. Clients may call, write or email us to discuss questions they may have about particular proxy votes or other solicitations.

Item 18: Financial Information

Our firm is not required to provide financial information in this Brochure because:

- Our firm does not require the prepayment of more than $500 in fees when services cannot be rendered within 6 months.
- Our firm does not take custody of client funds or securities.
- Our firm does not have a financial condition or commitment that impairs our ability to meet contractual and fiduciary obligations to clients.

Our firm has never been the subject of a bankruptcy proceeding.

Item 19: Requirements for State-Registered Advisers

Executive Officers & Management Persons

Joseph F. Darpel III
Year of Birth: 1970

Educational Background:

- 1994: Saint Louis University; Bachelor of Science in Finance

Business Background:

- 04/2024 – Present Smart Steps Wealth Management, LLC; Managing Partner
- 09/2021 – 04/2024 Gunpowder Capital Management, LLC DBA Oliver Wealth Management; Senior Vice President
- 10/2019 – 09/2021 Hayden Royal; Investment Advisor
- 01/2009 – 10/2019 Raymond James Financial Services Advisors, Inc.; Investment Advisor
- 12/1993 – 10/2019 Raymond James Financial Services, Inc.; Registered Representative

Exams, Licenses & Other Professional Designations:

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- 2021 – Certified Financial Planner (CFP®)
- 2018 – Securities Industry Essential (SIE) Examination
- 2009 – Series 53 Exam
- 2005 – Series 65 Exam
- 1994 – Series 24 Exam
- 1993 – Series 7 and Series 63 Exams

CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™, CFP®

The CFP® certification is obtained by completing an advanced college-level course of study addressing the financial planning subject areas that the CFP® Board's studies have determined as necessary for the competent and professional delivery of financial planning services, a comprehensive certification exam and agreeing to be bound by the CFP® board's *Standard of Professional Conduct*. As a prerequisite, the individual must have a Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited United States college or university (or foreign university equivalent) and have at least 3 years of full time financial planning experience (or equivalent measured at 2,000 hours per year). This designation requires 30 hours of continuing education every 2 years and renewing an agreement to be bound by the *Standards of Professional Conduct*.

Please see Item 10 of this Firm Brochure for any other business in which our firm is actively engaged.

Our firm does not charge performance-based fees.

Our firm and management persons address any arbitration awards, any civil, self-regulatory organization or administrative proceedings for which they have been involved in Item 9: Disciplinary Information.

Neither our firm nor any of its Management persons have any relationships or arrangements with any issuers of securities.

Our firm does not have compensation arrangements connected with advisory services which are in addition to our advisory fees. Our management persons and representatives do not have a relationship or arrangement with any issuer of securities. As a fiduciary, our firm always put our Client's interest above our own. Information regarding participation of interest in client transactions can be found in our Code of Ethics as well as Item 11 of this Brochure. Clients may obtain a copy of our Code of Ethics by contacting Joseph Darpel III, Chief Compliance Officer at 314-970-2377.