

## Clifford Capital Partners Fund

### Quarterly Commentary – Second Quarter 2023

#### Performance Summary

*Average Annual Returns as of June 30, 2023*

	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2023	Year-to-Date	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	Inception (1/30/2014)	Total Return, Inception (1/30/2014)
Institutional Class (CLIFX)	1.46%	-4.18%	1.87%	12.84%	5.84%	8.99%	124.88%
Investor Class (CLFFX)	1.35%	-4.49%	1.45%	12.51%	5.57%	8.74%	120.15%
Russell 3000 <sup>®</sup> Value <sup>1</sup>	4.02%	4.95%	11.18%	14.34%	7.75%	8.40%	113.85%

*Average Annual Returns as of June 30, 2023*

	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2023	Year-to-Date	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	Inception (10/17/2019)	Total Return, Inception (10/17/2019)
Super Institutional Class (CLIQX)	1.39%	-4.21%	1.92%	12.92%	n/a	7.64%	31.35%
Russell 3000 <sup>®</sup> Value	4.02%	4.95%	11.18%	14.34%	n/a	8.19%	33.86%

\*\*Expense Ratio Gross/Net: CLIFX 1.29%/0.90%; CLFFX 1.50%/1.15%; CLIQX 1.21%/0.82%

*Performance data quoted represents past performance; past performance does not guarantee future results. The investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance of the fund may be lower or higher than the performance quoted. Performance data current to the most recent month end may be obtained by calling (800) 628-4077. Short term performance, in particular, is not a good indication of the fund's future performance, and an investment should not be made based solely on returns.*

\*\*Clifford Capital Partners, LLC (the "Adviser") has contractually agreed to reduce fees and/or reimburse certain Partners Fund expenses until January 31, 2024.

#### Performance Summary and Market Observations

The Clifford Capital Partners Fund ("the Fund") was slightly positive in the second quarter, thanks to a strong June, but underperformed its benchmark. 2023 thus far has been a challenging short-term period for the Fund and we are disappointed with our results. As a long-term investor, we are always focused on longer-term performance, but we acknowledge that the magnitude of recent underperformance versus the Russell 3000 Value benchmark has also affected the Fund's longer-term relative performance results. We've long believed that the stock market is an excellent 'humbling machine', and while we maintain strong conviction in our investments and our relatively high weighting to smaller-cap companies, the Fund's positioning in a few regional banks and in smaller-cap companies has resulted in humbling results so far in 2023. While it's small consolation, we note that the absolute losses year-to-date are relatively small. This is important to us because we diligently strive to avoid the permanent loss of capital, which is hard to overcome.

As we'll discuss below, most of the disappointing performance results came during and shortly after the period of stress surrounding the regional bank crisis in early March, a period that resulted in a massive market rotation towards large-cap stocks (especially large cap technology stocks), while smaller-cap companies—especially smaller value companies—lagged as many investors believed that they would be more vulnerable to recession or disruption in credit/banking markets. This trend was supercharged by new excitement in generative artificial intelligence ("AI") during the second quarter, which led to even more large-cap, and tech, outperformance.

<sup>1</sup> The Russell 3000<sup>®</sup> Value Index is a capitalization-weighted index which is designed to measure performance of Russell 3000 Index companies, respectively, with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. Numbers presented include the reinvestment of dividends (total return).

Despite our disappointment with short-term performance, we remain very encouraged by the longer-term value we see in the Fund, and we maintain strong conviction in the strategy's individual investments. We think the valuation of the Fund today is attractively low, and we have identified Key Thesis Points™ (“KTPs”, which are long-term catalysts for fundamental improvement for every investment in the strategy), which we believe will lead to a brighter future.

### **Context for the Recent Underperformance**

With a concentrated portfolio of 25-35 stocks, we can usually point to a few stock-specific events that explain significant deviations from the Fund's benchmark. Year-to-date performance, however, has been a bit more anomalous as there has been almost a perfect storm of headwinds for the Fund, most of which are not stock-specific events.

Specifically, we observed that the regional bank crisis that began in early March spurred a market rotation that:

- 1) Led to a rapid and extreme period of outperformance from large technology stocks,
- 2) Led to expensive stocks outperforming inexpensive stocks,
- 3) Led to large cap stocks significantly outperforming smaller-cap stocks, and in a Fund-specific factor,
- 4) The strategy had few strong performing stocks to help partially offset these market-related factors.

### **Fund Headwind #1 – Large Cap Tech Leading the Market**

The “tech wreck” of 2022 is almost a distant memory today as the Nasdaq 100 Index<sup>2</sup> (“NDX Index”) experienced a historic increase in the first half of 2023, increasing over 39%, led by the newest iteration of the FAANG/FANMAG group of mega cap tech stocks, now known as the “Magnificent Seven”: Apple<sup>3</sup>, Amazon, Alphabet/Google, Meta/Facebook, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla (tickers: AAPL, AMZN, GOOG/GOOGL, META, MSFT, NVDA, TSLA - none of which are owned in the Fund as of 6/30/2023). Several of these companies experienced outsized gains in the second quarter because of a sudden burst in excitement around AI with investors clamoring to determine the long-term winners from a relatively new and exciting technological development.

The Magnificent Seven had some direct impact on the Fund's relative performance results (META and GOOGL were constituents of the Russell 3000 Value benchmark in the first six months of 2023 and not owning them accounted for ~1.75% of the Fund's relative underperformance). But we think the *indirect* impacts of the market's preference for large cap tech stocks were much larger as we have observed that market behavior is much different in tech-led environments.

As we mentioned in our last quarterly commentary, we performed a study of how the Fund performed since its inception during any period when the Russell 3000 Value index (“RAV Index”) outperformed the NDX Index by at least 5% (a “Value period”) before subsequently underperforming by a similar 5% (a “Tech/Growth period”). We noted that the Fund has recently struggled in Tech/Growth periods, while performing very well during the Value periods.

Quoting excerpts from last quarter's letter:

*We attribute much of the Fund's divergence between Value and Tech/Growth periods to our contrarian nature, where we've found many of our favorite investments among companies that have been overlooked or are misunderstood because of the popularity of many widely owned tech and growth stocks. We also have observed that during the Tech/Growth periods, stock valuations are a secondary (or lower) consideration. In fact, it is during these recent Tech/Growth periods that we've seen some of the highest and some of the*

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<sup>2</sup> The NASDAQ-100 Index is a modified capitalization-weighted index of the 100 largest and most active non-financial domestic and international issues listed on the NASDAQ exchange.

<sup>3</sup> We noted with interest that Apple's market capitalization of \$3.05 trillion at the end of June was larger than the entire Russell 2000 Index and equated to about 12% of total U.S. GDP in 2022.

*lowest valuations we've ever witnessed – it almost feels as if valuation simply doesn't matter. But we will not deviate from our discipline of buying companies at what we think are low valuations.*

*During the Value periods, however, we have observed that companies with lower valuations tend to outperform as investors seek bargains (when valuation seemed to matter again).*

After a long Value period that began last year (August 5, 2022 – January 5, 2023), the most recent Tech/Growth period has been by far the largest—and most rapid—since the inception of the Fund in 2014. From January 5 until June 30, 2023, the NDX Index outperformed the RAV Index by over 37% in a span of only 176 days.

**Table 1: Unusually Strong Tech/Growth Periods**

Tech/Growth Period	NDX Index	RAV Index	Difference	Calendar Days
May 7, 2014 – Dec 8, 2015	35.0%	4.7%	30.3%	580
Jun 3, 2019 – Mar 23, 2020	1.3%	-28.2%	29.5%	294
Jan 5, 2023 – Jun 30, 2023	41.9%	4.5%	37.4%	176

***Why We Believe this Headwind May Abate***

We do not believe there is a *rule* that Tech/Growth periods will always result in difficult performance for the Fund. For example, it was more common prior to the pandemic for the Fund to outperform its benchmark during Tech/Growth periods. During the first 8 Tech/Growth periods from the Fund's inception in 2014 through April 2020, the Fund outperformed its benchmark 4 times (50%), while during the latest 15 Tech/Growth Periods since April 2020 it only outperformed 4 times (~27%).

We attribute much of the shift since the pandemic to increased investor uncertainty, given the unknown long-term effects of the pandemic on companies, their workers, and consumer behavior. We think many “value” investments have been viewed as particularly susceptible to disruption from the major tech giants, which has resulted in the performance see-saw lately between value and tech. It has also led to several investment babies being thrown out with the bathwater, which is our playing field for finding undervalued stocks.

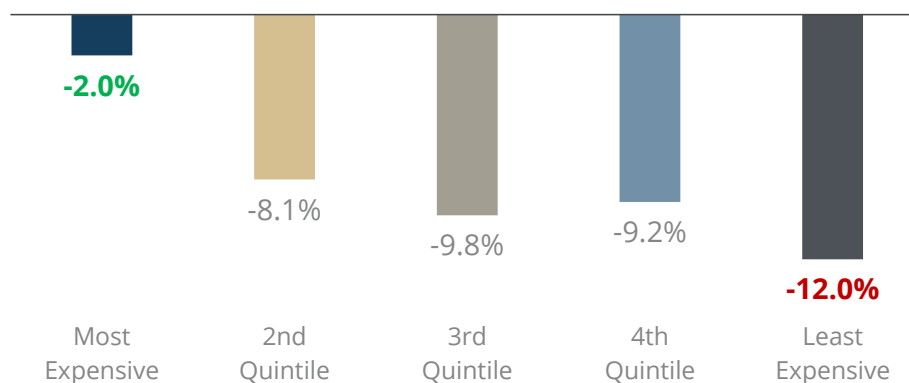
We have a divergent viewpoint on a select group of companies that we think are positioned to thrive in the future, despite recent challenges that have led to low valuations. We believe the Fund's individual stocks—led by the successful realization of each company's KTPs—can transcend market forces over longer-term time periods, irrespective of whether we're in a Tech/Growth period or a Value period.

**Fund Headwind #2 – Expensive Stocks Outperforming Inexpensive Stocks**

We observed that during the most acute part of the regional bank crisis (the 3-month period ended on May 31), the U.S. stock market's most expensive stocks significantly outperformed the least expensive stocks, as measured by the Russell 3000 Index<sup>4</sup> (see **Figure 1**). This 3-month period also corresponded to the Fund's greatest period of relative underperformance (about -7.8%).

<sup>4</sup> The Russell 3000 Index measures the performance of ~3000 stocks and includes large-cap, midcap and small-cap U.S. equities, along with some microcap stocks. The combined market capitalization of these stocks represents ~98% of the value of all U.S. equities.

**Figure 1: Performance of Russell 3000 stocks by valuation quintile during bank crisis**  
(March 1, 2023 – May 31, 2023)

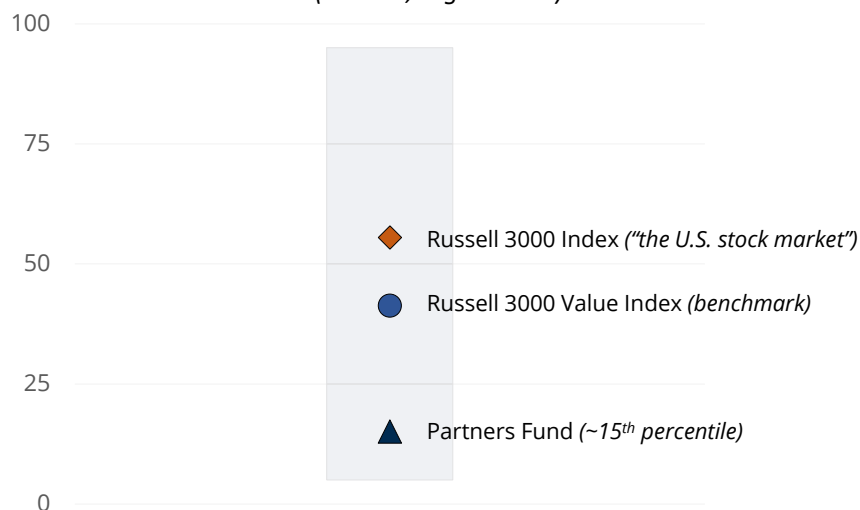


Valuation metric used was the Price to Sales ratio, which is the ratio of a company's or index's current market capitalization to its sales over the prior 12 months as of 12/31/2022. For this chart, the Russell 3000 Index was sorted by highest to lowest price to sales ratio in fifths (quintiles) for all index stocks with available price/sales data for each time period (about 93% of total Index constituents were included). The datapoint presented on the chart is the average performance (simple mean) from March 1, 2023 – May 31, 2023 of all stocks within each quintile (~558 stocks per quintile).

Data Source: FTSE Russell & Bloomberg

As shown in **Figure 2**, the Fund's investments are found among the market's least expensive stocks, so the market's preference for more expensive stocks was a significant obstacle to performance during the quarter and year-to-date period.

**Figure 2: Price to Sales Continuum of U.S. stock Market**  
(% Rank, High to Low)



Based on Russell 3000 Index constituents with price to sales data at 6/30/2023.

Data Source: Bloomberg as of 6/30/2023

### ***Why We Believe this Headwind May Abate***

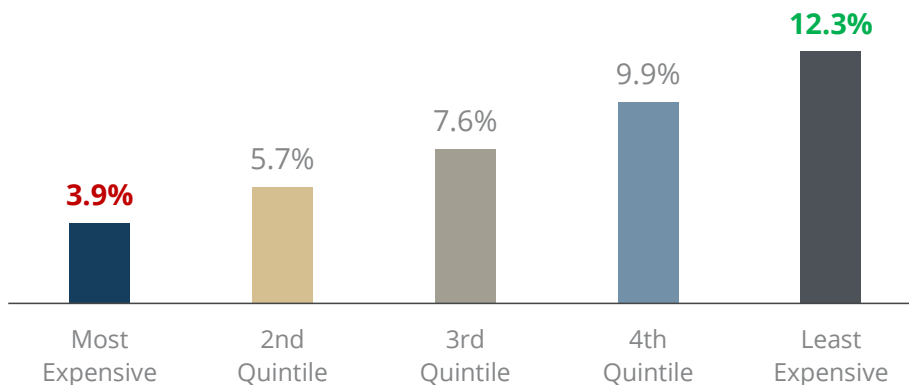
Valuation is typically a very important consideration to the long-term investor. We think even the best performing company in the world can be a terrible investment if an investor pays too high a price for it, while conversely, a company facing temporary struggles could be a fantastic investment at a low enough price. In short-term periods valuations may not matter to investors, but we think over the long-term, buying securities below a reasonable fair value estimate at a sufficiently low valuation is a prudent investment discipline. We think this is especially true when we've identified catalysts (KTPs) that should improve the fundamentals of these 'cheap' investments beyond expectations.

The market's most expensive stocks continue to hover at valuation levels that are historically high. While it's possible this time could be different (dangerous words, in our view) and the market will continue to reward

more expensive stocks, we will stick to our value discipline by selecting stocks among the market’s least expensive companies.

We were pleased that less expensive stocks performed better in June (see **Figure 3**), and the Fund also outperformed that month, which we’re hopeful is the start of a trend.

**Figure 3: Performance of Russell 3000 stocks by valuation quintile during June**  
(June 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023)



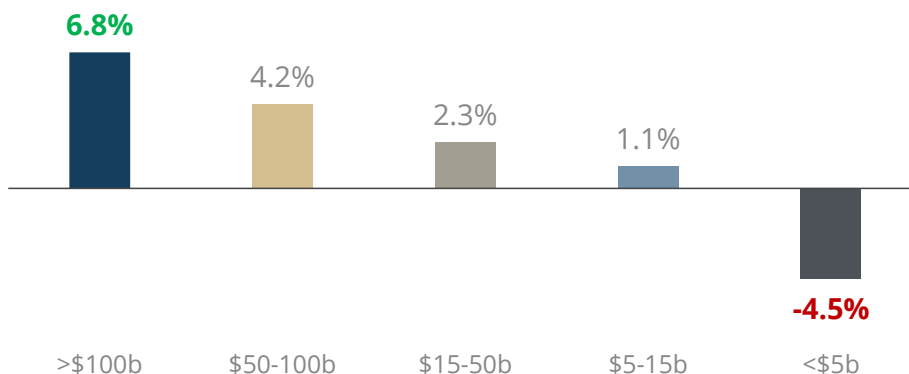
Valuation metric used was the Price to Sales ratio, which is the ratio of a company’s or index’s current market capitalization to its sales over the prior 12 months as of 12/31/2022. For this chart, the Russell 3000 Index was sorted by highest to lowest price to sales ratio in fifths (quintiles) for all index stocks with available price/sales data for each time period (about 93% of total Index constituents were included). The datapoint presented on the chart is the average performance (simple mean) from June 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023 of all stocks within each quintile (~558 stocks per quintile).

Data Source: FTSE Russell & Bloomberg

### Fund Headwind #3 – Large Cap Stocks Outperformed Small Cap Stocks

We discussed this in our last commentary as well, but we witnessed significant outperformance of large cap stocks versus small cap stocks since the regional bank crisis began in March. While June saw a slight reversal in this dynamic, the large cap outperformance has been striking (see **Figure 4**).

**Figure 4: Average return of Russell 3000 Value stocks by market cap since bank crisis began**  
(March 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023)



Average (simple mean) total return for the period March 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023, of the Russell 3000 Value Index constituents based on their market capitalization as of 12/31/2022.

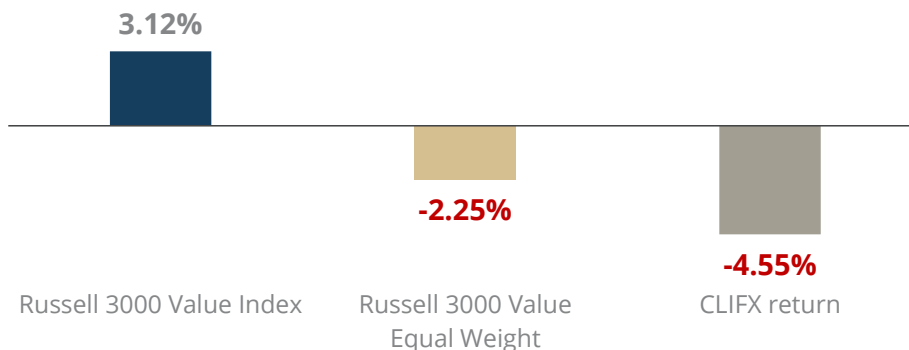
Data Source: FTSE Russell & Bloomberg

As of June 30, 2023, about 37% of the Fund’s weighting was in companies with a market capitalization of \$5 billion or lower, and ~75% had a market cap of less than \$50 billion, so the market’s preference for larger companies was a strong headwind since the bank crisis began.

Looking at it another way, during this same 4-month period (March 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023), we calculated that the simple average return of the Russell 3000 Value benchmark—an equal weighted return—was about 5.4% lower than the official cap-weighted return of the index (**Figure 5**). We think this provides additional context for the Fund’s large deviation from its benchmark during this same period – it wasn’t nearly as bad when compared to the average stock in the benchmark. To be sure, we aren’t trying to make excuses—it is our

active decision to position the Fund in smaller-cap names and we take responsibility for that—but it helps illustrate the market conditions the Fund has faced recently.

**Figure 5: Performance results since bank crisis began**  
(March 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023)



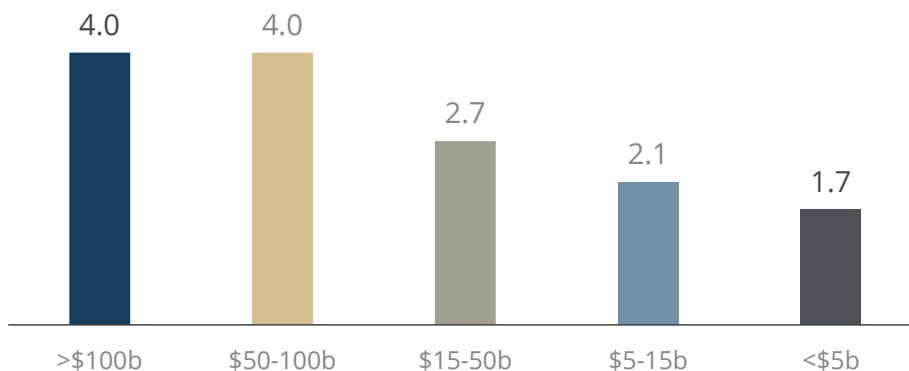
Russell 3000 Value Index returns are presented as reported for the period indicated. Russell 3000 Value Equal Weight returns are presented as the Average (simple mean) total return for the period March 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023, of all constituents in the Russell 3000 Index as of 12/31/2022.

Data Source: FTSE Russell & Bloomberg

**Why We Believe this Headwind May Abate**

We strive to find our investments from the bottom-up, based on individual stock investment merit, and only when we identify KTPs coupled with a compelling valuation. Lately we’ve found more of these opportunities in smaller businesses that are trading at lower valuations than their larger counterparts (see **Figure 6**).

**Figure 6: Median price to sales ratio of Russell 3000 stocks by market cap**  
(June 30, 2023)



Median price to sales ratio at 6/30/2023 for Russell 3000 constituents that were found within the market capitalization bands shown in the figures. Market capitalizations were sorted by 6/30/2023 values.

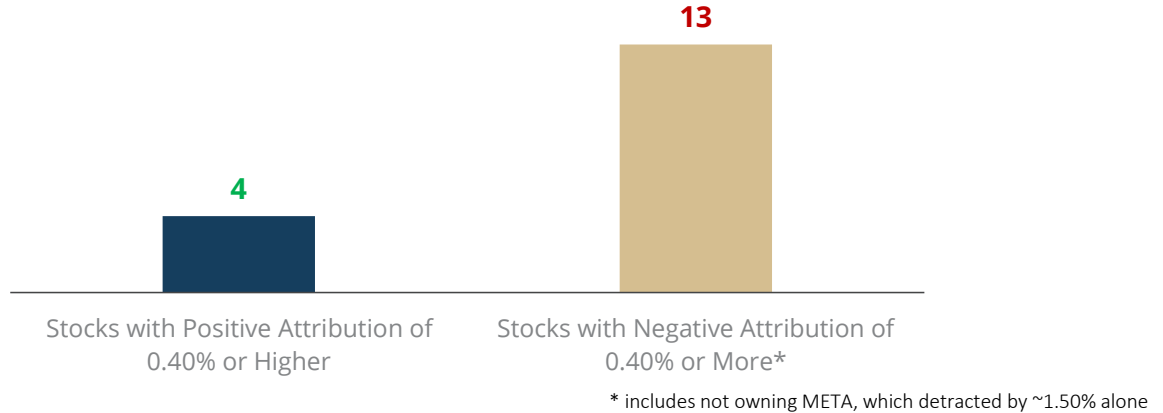
Data Source: FTSE Russell & Bloomberg

Our portfolio decisions are made with a long-term, individual stock focus, and are not based on a top-down view of what market cap segment we think will outperform in any given quarter or year. However, with valuation discrepancies between large caps and small caps this wide within the U.S. stock market (investors are paying an extra ~\$2.30 per dollar of sales for large caps vs. small caps, on average), we think smaller companies are more likely to outperform in the future.

**Fund Headwind #4 – Relatively Few Outperformers So Far in 2023**

Quite simply, there haven’t been very many stocks within the Fund that have strongly outperformed this year to help fully offset the pressures the strategy has faced from its underperforming investments. It’s not entirely unusual to see this phenomenon—or the more positive opposite of it—in any given short-term period. But it was unfortunate timing, given the market obstacles the Fund has encountered. **Figure 7** shows the number of Fund stocks that have contributed or detracted (vs. the benchmark) by at least 0.4% this year.

**Figure 7: # of significant outperforming and underperforming stocks within the Fund**  
(January 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023)



### ***Why We Believe this Headwind May Abate***

We are stock pickers. Our job is to strive to assemble a portfolio of individual stocks that outperforms the market over the long term. While there will be short-term stretches of time that the number of underperformers outweighs the outperformers, we believe our investment philosophy and process is sound and repeatable. We also believe that as we do our job well, we will see far more outperforming stocks than we have so far this year.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the Fund has faced significant performance headwinds—a perfect storm in many ways—that has led to difficult comparisons to our benchmark and peers. That said, we continue to believe that the Fund’s individual stocks are very attractive going into the second half of the year and we’re encouraged by the progress we see in the individual companies’ KTPs. We think this bodes well for the long-term future of the Fund.

### **Significant Fund Changes**

There was one new addition to the Fund, Vodafone Group PLC (ticker: VOD – 2.02% of the Fund at 6/30/2023).

**VOD:** Vodafone—a U.K. based international telecommunications firm—has several compelling KTPs in our view and has recently traded at the lowest valuation ratios in its history. We see the potential for significant synergies and cost savings from recent, and expected, strategic actions. We also believe the company’s new CEO is highly motivated to change the trajectory of the firm and there are several activist investors that have taken meaningful stakes in the company. We think the presence of several activists makes it much more likely that the company’s ample cash flow will be used in shareholder-friendly ways over the next several years.

### **Individual Stock Performance**

**Contributors:** The two greatest contributors during the quarter were Core Value stock Cardinal Health (ticker: CAH – 5.07% of the Fund at 6/30/2023) and Deep Value stock First Citizens Banc. (ticker: FCNCA – 2.86% of the Fund at 6/30/2023).

**CAH:** Cardinal Health continues to make good progress improving its operations in its core pharmaceutical distribution business and turning around its smaller underperforming medical products division. Recent earnings results have been better than expected and the stock’s valuation discount compared to its larger two rivals has begun to narrow.

**FCNCA:** During its first earnings report after purchasing Silicon Valley Bank from the FDIC in March, it became apparent how good of a deal FCNCA received, with book value per share<sup>5</sup> essentially doubling during

<sup>5</sup> Book Value Per Share is the portion of a company’s equity attributed to each share of common stock, and is calculated as Total Common Equity (Total Assets minus Total Liabilities) divided by Number of Shares Outstanding. In general, higher book value per share is associated with better company financial health.

the quarter. We think the benefits of the deal are now fully reflected in the stock price and subsequent to quarter-end we sold the stock as it neared its fair value estimate and we had better uses for the capital.

**Detractors:** The two largest detractors were Deep Value stock CVB Financial (ticker: CVBF – 3.35% of the Fund at 6/30/2023) and Core Value stock General Mills (ticker: GIS – 3.89% of the Fund at 6/30/2023).

**CVBF:** CVB Financial underperformed again in the second quarter as regional bank stress affected many California-based banks, especially those that have a concentration in business customers. We continue to think CVB is misunderstood and is a very high-quality bank in a good position to pick up market share from weaker competitors in California. We also believe CVB will be an active acquirer of other banks, which we think will increase its earnings potential.

**GIS:** General Mills posted slightly disappointing earnings results in its most recent earnings report, led by its customers ordering less product as they work through existing inventory. The company has proven that it has strong pricing power and a formidable distribution network, which we expect it to leverage with its pet food division that has stronger long-term growth prospects.

### Final Comments

Thank you for your investment in the Fund. We have high conviction in the Fund's stocks, and we are invested alongside you. We appreciate your support, and we will continue to strive to prudently manage your money.

Sincerely yours,

Ryan Batchelor, CFA, CPA  
Principal, Chief Investment Officer  
Clifford Capital Partners, LLC

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*The fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses must be considered carefully before investing. The prospectus contains this and other important information about the investment company, and it may be obtained by calling (800) 628-4077, or by going to the Clifford Capital Funds website at [cliffordcapfunds.com](http://cliffordcapfunds.com) and clicking on the "Prospectus" link. Read it carefully before investing.*

*Fund holdings are subject to change at any time and should not be considered a recommendation to buy or sell any security.*

### *Information about Risk*

**Risks of Investing in Equity Securities.** Overall stock market risks may affect the value of the Fund. Factors such as domestic economic growth and market conditions, interest rate levels, and political events affect the securities markets. When the value of the Fund's investments goes down, your investment in the Fund decreases in value and you could lose money.

**Risks of Small-Cap and Mid-Cap Securities.** Investing in the securities of small-cap and mid-cap companies generally involves substantially greater risk than investing in larger, more established companies.

**Risks of Large-Cap Securities.** Prices of securities of larger companies tend to be less volatile than companies with smaller market capitalizations. In exchange for this potentially lower risk, the Fund's value may not rise as much as the value of funds that emphasize companies with smaller capitalizations.

**Focused Investment Risk.** The Fund is a focused fund and generally holds stocks of between only 25 and 35 companies. Focused funds may invest a larger portion of their assets in the securities of a single issuer compared to a more diversified fund. Focusing investments in a small number of companies may subject the Fund to greater share price volatility and therefore a greater risk of loss because a single security's increase or decrease in value may have a greater impact on the Fund's value and total return.

**Sector Risk.** The Fund may emphasize investment in one or more particular business sectors at times, which may cause the value of its share price to be more susceptible to the financial, market, or economic events affecting issuers and industries within those sectors than a fund that does not emphasize investment in particular sectors.

**Management Style Risk.** Because the Fund invests primarily in value stocks (*stocks that the Adviser believes are undervalued*), the Fund's performance may at times be better or worse than the performance of stock funds that focus on other types of stock strategies (*e.g., growth stocks*), or that have a broader investment style.

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