

# **Quarterly Portfolio Commentary – Third Quarter 2024** Clifford Capital All Cap Value Portfolio

## Summary of the Clifford Capital All Cap Value Portfolio Composite Historical Return\* (unaudited)

|                                      |                         |                  |        | annualized return |        |         |             |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|---------|-------------|
|                                      | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter | Year-to-<br>Date | 1-year | 3-year            | 5-year | 10-year | Inception** |
| Portfolio, net of fees <sup>1</sup>  | 11.73%                  | 9.19%            | 21.78% | 4.45%             | 10.28% | 9.83%   | 12.59%      |
| Russell 3000® Value,<br>total return | 9.47%                   | 16.23%           | 27.62% | 8.66%             | 10.57% | 9.15%   | 11.34%      |

<sup>\*</sup> Individual account performance will differ from the overall Composite
\*\* Inception Date: August 1, 2010, annualized
Past Performance does not guarantee future results.

## **Portfolio and Market Observations**

The Clifford Capital Partners All Cap Value Portfolio ("the Portfolio") had a strong quarter and outperformed its benchmark during the third quarter. While the Portfolio's performance results over the last couple of years have been disappointing, we believe there are signs of recent improvement, and we're encouraged by the Portfolio's holdings and its positioning today.

## The "Great Rotation" of July

The third quarter of 2024 was eventful. It began with a soft inflation report on July 11 that resulted in an immediate market rotation away from popular large cap Tech and growth stocks into smaller-cap companies and value stocks that lasted until near the very end of July. We think this was driven by higher expectations of a potential rate cut by the Fed, which could benefit some areas of the market that had underperformed. The quarter then culminated with the Fed actually lowering interest rates by 0.50% at the end of the quarter. While the "great rotation" of July did not accelerate as the quarter progressed, we believe this market shift was notable and could portend a change in investor sentiment.

We also believe that the "great rotation" was driven, in part, by the unwinding of some popular—and crowded trades that we've discussed in prior commentaries. We think many of these trades have dominated the U.S. stock market in recent periods, including two that we think were particularly powerful influences: the price momentum trade (buying stocks with high price momentum and shorting stocks with low price momentum), and a "long Tech short Small Cap" trade that buys large cap Tech stocks and shorts small cap value stocks. Even though the acute "great rotation" period only lasted about three weeks, the performance results were remarkable as shown in Charts 1 and 2, which led to a solid full quarter for smaller-cap and value market indices and for the Portfolio.

While we could not predict if, or when, this type of market rotation would occur, we hinted in our last commentary that such an event was possible. We still believe the Portfolio provides a diversified exposure to today's stock market, which continues to be very heavily influenced by megacap companies and is still driven by artificial intelligence ("AI") excitement. As stated in our last letter:

We're disappointed in performance results thus far in 2024, but we still have strong conviction in the Portfolio's investments. We believe there are risks brewing in today's momentum-driven stock market, which has led to well-publicized market concentration and expensive stocks within megacap U.S. stocks, especially

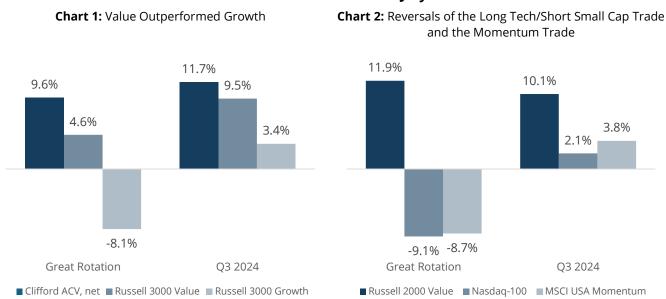
<sup>1</sup> Performance results for the All Cap Value composite reflect the reinvestment of dividends and other account earnings, are net of transaction costs and includes the deduction of advisory fees. Past performance does not guarantee future results.

The benchmark for the All Cap Value composite is the Russell 3000 Value index. The Russell 3000 Value index is a capitalization-weighted index which measures the performance of Russell 3000 index companies, respectively with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. Index returns include the reinvestment of dividends (total returns). Performance of the composite and the index will not be comparable due to differences amongst them including, but not limited to, risk profile, liquidity, volatility and asset composition. An investor cannot invest directly in an index. Moreover, index performance does not reflect the deduction of advisory fees, transaction charges, and other expenses.

AI-related companies. While we think generative AI has exciting potential, we believe the excitement over this 'potential' may be outrunning the ultimate economics implied in many of the stock prices.

We believe the Portfolio provides much lower valuations and strong diversification if AI excitement wanes and/or the Momentum factor were to reverse. We've seen this pattern historically, and we think the Portfolio is positioned very well for a weakening or reversal in the Momentum factor's strength.

## The "Great Rotation" of July



Please see definitions below.2

While the "great rotation" didn't accelerate like we'd hoped it might, we are optimistic that the stock market is beginning to recognize some of the value in areas outside of what's been popular. We're certainly not declaring any victories—and we've still got some work to do to improve our performance results—but we believe our disciplined approach to investing is a prudent way to compound wealth over the long term. Importantly, we also believe that the Portfolio looks and acts differently than the overall stock market, providing diversification against some of the risks we see in a market that is still dominated by a handful of popular megacap stocks.

Most importantly, we continue to see our investments making solid progress towards their Key Thesis Points™ ("KTPs"), which we believe will result in better-than-expected fundamental results over time. And as mentioned before, we continue to see increased activist investor campaigns and mergers and acquisitions ("M&A") activity among our holdings, which we believe can also catalyze better performance results.

<sup>2</sup> Portfolio performance is based on a representative All Cap Value account, managed within the All Cap Value composite (a "Representative Account". Performance of the Representative Account is net of the highest applicable fee (0.8%) charged to institutional clientele, accrued daily. Returns for the Representative Account are based on end of day holdings versus transaction values as in the actual composite. Therefore, composite returns will deviate from Representative Account performance.

Russell 3000 Growth Index is a capitalization-weighted index which measures the performance of Russell 3000 index companies, respectively with higher price-to-book ratios and higher forecasted growth values. Index returns include the reinvestment of dividends (total returns). Russell 2000 Value Index is a capitalization-weighted index which measures the performance of Russell 2000 index companies, respectively with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. Index returns include the reinvestment of dividends (total returns). Nasdaq-100 Index is a modified capitalization-weighted index of the 100 largest and most active non-financial issues listed on the NASDAQ. MSCI USA Momentum Index is designed to reflect the performance of an equity momentum strategy by selecting stocks with high price momentum, which are selected from the MSCI USA Index, an index of large and midcap U.S. stocks.

### Rates, Realities, and Elections

The biggest story of the quarter was the Fed's decision to lower interest rates in a move that was only surprising in its magnitude (0.50% cut was as large as almost anybody was expecting). We think interest rates are a critical input in determining asset prices, including stocks, so we're not surprised at the stock market volatility we've seen surrounding the Fed's movements—including the "great rotation" in July—as investors and traders strive to position their accounts appropriately to take advantage of the "new" interest rate environment.

Even though we are fundamental, bottom-up stock investors, not macro economists, we're often asked our opinion on the macroeconomic environment and Fed policies. Based on what we see today, the realities of today's economic and stock market environment are basically unchanged after the Fed's move because we are witnessing significant crosscurrents for the positive and negative in the U.S. economy. As a few anecdotal examples of these crosscurrents, we see signs of consumer stress (higher credit card and vehicle delinquencies and muted spending by certain subsets), but also strong overall consumer spending metrics. We see many companies struggling to grow revenues as quickly as hoped (lots of downward revisions to revenue estimates), but cost cutting resulting in solid profit growth. We see ample access to capital markets for debt and equity issuance, but also an increase in distressed companies and some bankruptcies.

Given these mixed economic signals, we do not anticipate the Fed to aggressively lower interest rates in the near term, and we certainly don't see many paths to go back to the near-zero interest rates of the past, barring some sort of very negative economic shock. So, we wouldn't be surprised if Fed policies begin to have less of an influence on U.S. stock markets in upcoming periods. If this premise is correct, we think it would be a positive development for stock picking because the fundamentals of, and valuations of, individual companies will begin to matter more than simply positioning for whatever trade is going to be the most lucrative based on the Fed's next moves.

Additionally, the U.S. presidential election is nigh, which results in significant conjecture and guesswork about how the stock market will react to the ultimate victor. In that spirit of providing our own prognostication, we think the Portfolio would likely benefit more from a Republican victory than a Democratic victory, but we have not positioned the Portfolio significantly in either direction.

Our blueprint for investing in today's environment with uncertainty about rates, economic realities, and the election is to stay the course. We strive to build a portfolio that is well balanced against macroeconomic and political factors in environments like today's, and we believe our investments' KTPs are catalysts for fundamental improvements that should transcend these non-stock-specific issues over time.

## **Conclusion**

We were encouraged by the Portfolio's progress in the third quarter. We believe the Portfolio continues to provide a strong diversifying exposure to today's stock market, and we think it's trading at an attractive level today with a solid reward to risk ratio, based on our fundamental analysis.

#### **Significant Portfolio Changes**

There were three new holdings added to the Portfolio during the quarter: Core Value stock Dolby Laboratories (ticker: DLB), and Deep Value stocks Delek US Holdings (ticker: DK) and OPENLANE (ticker: KAR). We also sold Core Value stock Stericycle (ticker: SRCL).

### New Holdings

**DLB**: Dolby is a repeat holding for the strategy. The company is essentially a patent and licensing business, which has a dominant market share of basically any device that produces sound. We believe its newer products, Dolby Atmos and Dolby Vision, should continue to grow significantly over the next several years, which will raise the company's overall revenue growth rates and produce significant cash flow above current market expectations. We expect this cash flow to be deployed to us through dividends and share repurchases more

abundantly than in the past. We also think that the firm's recent acquisition of video patents was a wise use of capital that should diversify its revenue stream and integrate well with some of Dolby's proprietary video products.

**DK**: Delek Holdings owns and operates four oil refineries in Texas and the Gulf Coast region and owns over 72% of a publicly traded pipeline operator Delek Logistics (ticker: DKL). Delek is a special situation where the current market capitalization of the company trades below the value of its stake in DKL, essentially valuing the refineries below zero. Management and the board are aware of this disconnect and are striving to eliminate this "sum of the parts" discount. We initiated a position shortly after the company announced that they had sold their convenience store operations and a small pipeline to DKL for total proceeds of over \$500 million, which is enough to completely repay all of DK's net debt and provide dry powder for significant share repurchases. Shortly after the announcement of the sale of the convenience stores, the company announced an additional share repurchase authorization that would allow the company to repurchase over 40% of its outstanding stock. We believe the company is seeking ways to eventually realize its inherent value by selling, or spinning off, its stake in DKL and repurchasing stock in the meantime to take advantage of the undervaluation of the company. We also think the company's refineries are valuable but have some room for improvement, and recent investments should help improve the operations and profitability of these plants.

**KAR**: OPENLANE is a leading digital wholesale vehicle auction company that specializes in auctioning off-lease vehicles from dealerships. The company has longstanding relationships with many of the largest dealerships and brands in the country, and the firm's business model is characterized by low capital intensity and solid margins. The investment opportunity in KAR arose because of an anomaly in used car pricing over the past several years, which resulted in a historically high percentage of lessees purchasing their vehicle at the end of their lease term because used car prices were so high that the lessees had significant equity in their vehicle (i.e. lessees could buy a vehicle at the end of the lease at the contractual residual price baked into the lease and then immediately sell the car for a profit). We've seen evidence that the used car market is normalizing, and lease turn-in rates are reverting closer to historical averages. This shift back to a "normal" lease environment should result in significant benefits for KAR's auction business, which we expect to accelerate revenue and profit growth. Although there's still uncertainty about the volume of new leases being originated (another key input into the company's profit equation), we think the reversion of the lease market back to normalized lease turn-in rates should outweigh potential negatives, leading to better-than-expected profit growth.

#### Sales

**SRCL:** We sold Stericycle as the stock was near the price of its buyout offer from Waste Management (ticker: WM). While the buyout price was about 38% higher than where SRCL had been trading shortly before the offer, we believe the final purchase price was a bit of a disappointment, given that we estimated a higher intrinsic value for the company.

#### **Individual Stock Performance**

| Top Contributors³ – Q3 2024 | Largest Detractors - Q3 2024   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pitney Bowes (PBI)          | Walgreens Boots Alliance (WBA) |
| 3M Co. (MMM)                | Green Plains Inc. (GPRE)       |
| Solventum (SOLV)            | Liberty Energy (LBRT)          |
| Kenvue (KVUE)               | Schlumberger (SLB)             |
| eBay (EBAY)                 | Walt Disney (DIS)              |

Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Source: Bloomberg as of 9/30/2024

## Commentary on the Top Two Contributors and Bottom Two Detractors

**PBI**: Pitney Bowes announced during the quarter that it will shut down its e-commerce division, which had been losing a substantial amount of money. The cost of this shutdown was lower than we expected, which was a positive, and we think the company now has current earnings power of over \$1 per share compared to a share price that ended September around \$7. The stock increased on the news of this strategic action, and we think the management team and the board—under the direction of activist investor Hestia Capital—is aggressively managing costs and improving operations to increase the firm's cash flows.

**MMM:** 3M's latest quarterly results were better than expected and the new CEO has gained favor with market participants leading to a strong stock price reaction during the quarter. We believe that MMM is more focused now that its major litigation is close to being settled and after the spin-off of Solventum.

**WBA**: Walgreens continues to grapple with two major issues: a weaker economic environment that is affecting its retail sales in the U.S., and reimbursement pressures in its pharmacy division, which is an industry-wide phenomenon. While the economic backdrop may continue to be weak, we think expectations are sufficiently low for Walgreen's retail sales. We also continue to believe the price of WBA's stock today reflects almost zero equity value for WBA's U.S. retail pharmacy business (its largest segment), given the value of WBA's other segments, and we expect the firm to complete some strategic sales of parts of, or all, these segments, which should significantly reduce the company's debt and lead to a higher stock price. We also think the company's decision to shutter underperforming stores is a solid strategic plan, which should begin producing meaningful benefits over the next couple of years.

**GPRE**: Green Plains most recent earnings were disappointing, and the company's high protein segment (an area we think will generate meaningful profits over the next few years) hit a soft patch, which led to a lower stock price. We think there is some shareholder nervousness around the upcoming U.S. presidential election and a potential regime change, which could potentially reduce some of the governmental benefits of Green Plains' operations. Despite these near-term concerns, we still think the company has several other initiatives that should increase its free cash flow potential over the next 12-18 months (e.g. clean sugar, carbon capture projects, sustainable corn oil yields).

<sup>3</sup> Portfolio holdings are from a representative account managed within the investment composite. The representative account is selected based on account characteristics that Clifford Capital believes accurately represent the investment strategy as a whole. Should these characteristics change materially, Clifford Capital may select a different representative account. Holdings may change daily and may vary among accounts, which may contribute to different investment results.

For informational purposes only. The specific securities shown represent only the top contributors and detractors for the reporting period discussed in this Commentary, and do not represent all of the securities purchased, sold or recommended for the representative account or Portfolio. The reader should not assume that an investment in any of these securities, or in the Portfolio, was or will be profitable. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.

You may obtain information about (i) the calculation methodology; and (ii) a list showing the contribution of each holding to the overall performance of the representative account during the reporting period discussed in this Commentary by contacting us at (385) 387-1212 or support@cliffordcap.com.

## **Final Comments**

Thank you for your investment with Clifford Capital. We will continue to focus on building long-term wealth through disciplined portfolio management.

Sincerely yours,

Ryan Batchelor, CFA, CPA Principal and Portfolio Manager Clifford Capital Partners, LLC \_\_\_\_\_

## Disclaimers & Disclosures

Identifying undervalued securities and other assets is difficult, and there are no assurances that such a strategy will succeed. Any fair value estimates are subject to actual known and unknown risks, uncertainties, and other factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those projected. Information is as of the period stated in this letter and is subject to change. Clifford Capital Partners undertakes no obligation to update this information if circumstances or management's estimates or opinions should change.

This document has been prepared for informational purposes only. The opinions expressed herein, and materials provided are for general information; they do not constitute an offer to sell any securities, the solicitation of an offer to buy any securities or a recommendation or endorsement of any securities or other financial instruments. All statements in this document are opinions of Clifford Capital and should not be construed as investment advice or recommendations. - there is no assurance that such views are accurate or will be correct over time. Nothing presented herein is intended to provide specific legal or tax advice and must not be relied upon as such. Financial and planning decisions must be based on each investor's specific due diligence, investment objectives, economics, risk tolerance, and individual financial and personal circumstances. Before investing, you should consult with a qualified professional - a competent financial, legal, or tax advisor or another, to aid in due diligence as proper for your situation to determine the suitability of the risk and tax consequences associated with any investment.

The information presented herein is as of the period stated unless otherwise noted, is subject to change without notice, and is based upon numerous factors, such as further analyses, economic, market, political and other conditions that may impact the market. Clifford Capital disclaims any obligation to update this document to reflect subsequent developments and expressly disclaims liability for errors or omissions herein to the extent permitted by law.

Certain information contained herein has been obtained from sources prepared by other parties, which in some instances has not been updated through the date hereof. While such data is believed to be reliable for the purpose used herein, no representations or warranties, expressed or implied, are made regarding the data's accuracy, reliability or completeness nor its appropriateness for any use which any recipient may choose to make of it.

This document may also contain certain forward-looking statements. Such statements are subject to several assumptions, risks and uncertainties which may cause actual results, performance or achievements to be materially different from future results, performance or achievements expressed or implied by these forward-looking statements or projections. Readers are cautioned not to invest based on these forward-looking statements. Any prospective investment, projection, forecast or return on investment illustrations herein is for illustrative purposes only, and actual investments and returns may vary materially from those illustrated or anticipated.

### Information about Risk

**Risks of Investing in Equity Securities**. Overall stock market risks may affect the value of an equity portfolio. Factors such as domestic economic growth and market conditions, interest rate levels, and political events affect the securities markets. When the value of the portfolio investments goes down, the portfolio 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.

**Focused Investment Risk.** The All Cap Value strategy is a focused strategy and generally holds stocks of between only 25 and 35 companies. Focused strategies may invest a larger portion of their assets in the securities of a single issuer compared to a more diversified strategy. Focusing investments in a small number of companies may subject the portfolio to greater 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 portfolio's value and total return.

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

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

## **Definitions**

Core Value Stocks. We define Core Value stocks as high-quality companies with sustainable competitive advantages and long-term records of strong returns on capital. These companies tend to have stable and predictable cash flows as well as steady growth in the intrinsic value of their stock.

**Deep Value Stocks.** We define Deep Value stocks as opportunistic investments in deeply discounted shares of businesses that do not meet the high requirements of a Core company. Deep Value investments are deemed by us to have high potential returns

with acceptable downside risks. These investments may be considered traditional value stocks with low price multiples, and low near-term investor and analyst expectations.

**Price-to-Book Ratios.** Ratio used to compare a stock's market value to its book value. It is calculated by dividing the current price of the stock by the latest quarter's book value per share.

**Price-to-Earnings Ratios.** Ratio used to compare a stock's market price to its earnings per share. It is calculated by dividing the current price of the stock by the last 12-months' earnings per share.

## About Us

Clifford Capital Partners LLC ("CCP") is an investment adviser in Alpine, Utah. CCP is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"). Registration of an investment adviser does not imply any specific level of skill or training and does not constitute an endorsement of the firm by the Commission. CCP only transacts business in states in which it is properly registered or is excluded or exempted from registration. A copy of CCP's current written disclosure brochure filed with the SEC which discusses among other things, CCP's business practices, services and fees, is available through the SEC's website at www.adviserinfo.sec.gov.