

5 questions

with Thomas W. Wilkins

Thomas W. Wilkins is chairman, president and CEO of the Trust Company of Oklahoma, which he joined in January 1990. A native of Kansas City, Wilkins earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Kansas State University. He is a certified public accountant and holds several securities licenses from the National Association of Securities Dealers.

1 Please share a little about the origins of the Trust Company of Oklahoma. How and why did it start?

Opening its doors for business in 1981, the Trust Company of Oklahoma is the oldest and largest independent trust company in the state. It was founded by Paul Mindeman on the principle of sound asset management supported by superior client service and consultation. Asset management, trust administration and financial advice is not only what we do — it's all we do. We don't make loans or sell insurance, annuities and other high-commission products. With offices in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and Muskogee, the company now manages close to \$2.5 billion in financial assets for clients throughout the country.

2 Does the company handle only trusts as the company's name might imply? If not, what other types of investments does it deal with?

Our company did, in fact, start with the vision that we would primarily serve as trustee for our clients' assets. Over the years, however, more and more of our clients asked us to manage more of their assets without having to serve as trustee. As a result, nontrust investment business now represents a major percentage of the assets we manage. Even if you do not have a trust or need us to serve as trustee, we welcome the opportunity to manage your investments.

Because of our trust abilities, we also oversee extensive holdings in real estate and mineral interests. We manage over 10,000 oil and gas properties, for example.

The company also manages

401(k) plans and IRAs. These represent about a third of our business, which makes us one of the leaders in Oklahoma in the retirement market. In addition, our company offers in-depth retirement planning analysis.

3 Who should consider setting up a trust, and why?

Anyone who owns property or who may inherit property should have a will and in many cases should also have a revocable trust. A revocable trust avoids probate and provides for the management and transfer of assets in a private, tax efficient way for the family.

Trusts are also used to accomplish a variety of specific needs. For example, there are trusts specifically designed to take care of children with special needs and trusts designed to protect assets from creditors. Deciding whether

to use a trust depends on a person's financial goals and needs. Trusts are definitely not just for the wealthy.

4 How many different types of trusts are available? What is the most common type of trust your firm sees, and what is its purpose?

Most of our clients set up what's called a revocable living trust to provide for their own financial security during their lifetimes. These trusts are very flexible and meet many needs within an estate plan. It is important to remember that the creators of these living trusts give up no control over their assets, can change any provision of the trust and can even revoke the trust if they so desire.

In addition to the living trust, we serve as trustee for irrevocable trusts and public and private foundations. Many of our high net worth clients set up private foundations as

part of their estate plans.

We always like to be involved with our clients and their attorneys in the estate-planning process. We don't draft wills or trusts but can offer practical advice.

5 When it comes to investing, in general, what is the best advice you would give investors during a bear market?

Simply put, investors should "stay the course." The inexperienced investor tends to buy in good markets when stocks are overpriced and sell, out of fear, during bear markets when stocks are cheap. If we think about it, that approach just doesn't make much sense.

The best strategy for investors in bear, as well as bull markets, is to establish an investment plan that makes sense over the long run and stick with it. No one can time the market.



JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

Interview conducted by
Laurie Winslow, World
staff writer.