



Rachael Garrity

**Paul French:** "It is a highly personal service."

earnest when he describes his profession. "If one [and he does say "one" instead of "you," in a fluid British baritone] does this work as it is meant to be done, it involves quite a bit more than investment advice.

"We are focused on providing the full range of services that will help our clients handle their money in ways that meet not just current, but future needs, and extend well beyond a decision regarding what to invest in. It is a highly personal service, and one that even includes helping to

build relationships with other professionals, such as attorneys and accountants, who can enrich the process."

French did not start his professional career by concentrating on financial services. Having grown up in Ipswich, slightly more than 75 miles northeast of London, he received a degree in chemical engineering from Exeter University, where he met his wife, Janet. Today she serves as the administrative associate for Plott & French, which is housed on First Street in Radford, just off the New River.

For the next two decades, his professional pursuits centered on manufacturing firms and took the couple first to Belgium, then Canada, New England, and Tennessee. Over that time, he moved from the production side of the operations to marketing. By 1990, he had landed a position as vice president for marketing with Arcade, the company that invented what is known as the "Scentstrip," that aromatic shiny portion of inserts in high-end women's fashion magazines. Arcade was

sold in 1994, and the new owners wanted French to move to New York.

"I had a young family," he remembers, "and a large metropolitan area simply had no appeal."

Instead, he became chief operating officer of Magnox in Pulaski, a division of a Japanese company that manufactured iron oxide (rust) used in laser printer ink and in audio tapes. And then, as many professionals who have met with early career success do, he became interested in going out on his own.

"I thought long and hard about what I wanted to do, about something that would both put bread on the table and help people," he muses, leaning forward on his desk and tenting his fingers. "It occurred to me that I'd been involved in a wide range of financial decision-making in my various jobs, and that I'd spent a good amount of time on my own investment and estate issues. The base was there; I simply needed the training."

In 1997, he officially began his financial services career, first as part of an American Express franchise. Then, in 2005, he and Plott, who also had been affiliated with American Express, decided to collaborate on an independent operation.


A good decision, given the crises that

have followed since then?

"Absolutely," he insists. "Frankly, the 2000-2003 period was much rougher than this most recent one. I believe our industry has learned how to handle these crises better, and I know we have. Part of it is skill, but another important part is that we have a better, more varied pool of investments from which to choose."

The bulk of French's clients are either professors or small business owners, most of whom are either retired or expecting to retire in the not-too-distant future. And most have come to him as referrals from clients or professionals.

He devotes a significant amount of time to working in leadership positions with community-based organizations—Rotary International, Lions Club, YMCA—and professional alliances, such as the New River Valley Estate Planning Council. Even his "leisure" activities have a helping focus: witness the fact that he bought a boat largely to be able to work with the United States Coast Guard to help improve safety at Claytor Lake.

In sum, French may be an expert in the kind of wealth that carries a dollar sign, but it's obvious he is not ready to give up on what is often called "the greater good." Not just Wall Street, not just Main Street—and definitely not Easy Street. 

## 'Work as it's meant to be done ...' >

### Executive Summary:

*Managing wealth involves a lot more than pushing paper around and Paul French at Plott & French in Radford extends the definition even more.*

### By Rachael Garrity

There are certain semantic affectations in today's business world that set the teeth on edge—sanitation engineer for garbage collector being perhaps the most often quoted. And then there are those that, when they're understood, actually mean something. So it is with "wealth management."

Paul French, who with his partner, Mary Plott, is in a wealth management business, is quite



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