STONE PINE
FINANCIAL PARTNERS

Retirement in Focus

FALL 2025

The ABCs (and D) of Medicare

Understanding Medicare is an important step in making sure you have the coverage you need and can make informed decisions for your future. Courtney and Brian Elfand from *The Elfand Group* recently joined us to host an educational webinar on the evolving Medicare landscape. During the presentation, they shared practical insights and strategies to help clients navigate changes and make informed choices. Below are the key takeaways:

1. Timing Is Everything

Clients should begin the Medicare enrollment process three months prior to turning 65. For those employed by companies with fewer than 20 employees, Medicare becomes the primary insurer, and delays in enrollment can result in denied claims and late penalties.

2. Know Your Options

Choosing between Original Medicare with a Medigap supplement and Medicare Advantage depends on individual health needs, financial goals, and lifestyle preferences. Each path offers distinct differences in terms of flexibility, cost structure, and coverage.

3. Prescription Coverage Is Improving

Starting in 2025, Part D prescription drug plans will cap annual out-of-pocket costs at $2,000. Despite this improvement, it remains important to review plans annually during Open Enrollment (October 15–December 7), as premiums and coverage details vary widely.

4. Medigap Enrollment Has a Deadline

New Medicare enrollees have a six-month window after enrolling in Part B to obtain Medigap coverage without medical underwriting. After this period, coverage may be denied based on pre-existing conditions.

5. The Elfand Group's Personalized Support

As independent advisors, The Elfand Group offers unbiased, concierge-style guidance tailored to each client's unique circumstances. We'd be happy to connect you with Courtney and Brian if you'd like, or you can reach out to them directly using the contact information below.

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Will the Magnificent 7 Stay on Top?

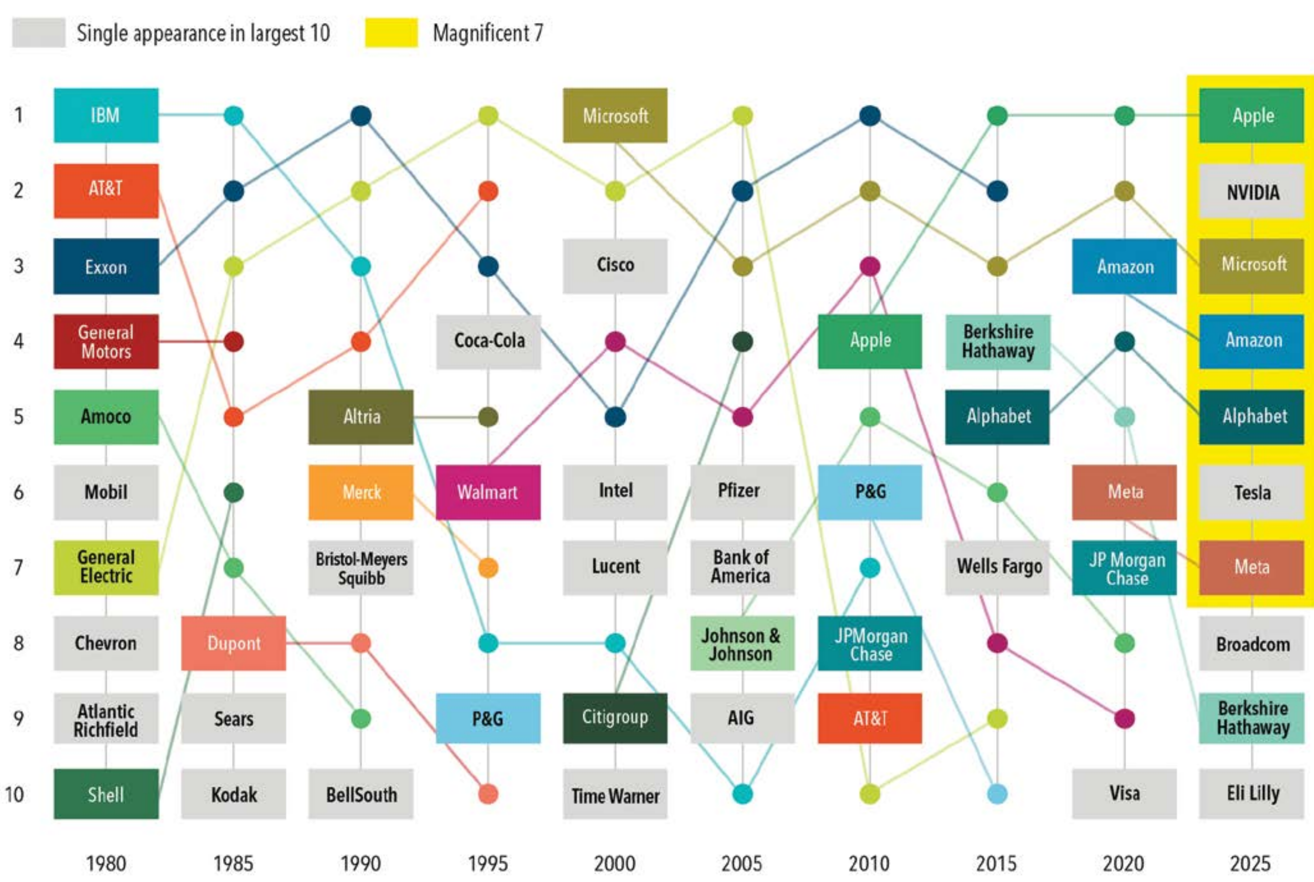
The Magnificent 7 entered 2025 among the Top 10 largest US stocks. But before making an outsize bet on gains from these technology giants, investors should consider a few lessons from market history.

- **It's hard to stay on top.** For example, only three of the 10 biggest companies from 1980 made the 2000 list—and none of them were in 2025's Top 10.
- **Industries ebb and flow.** Technology-focused firms currently dominate the list. But in 1980, six of the 10 largest companies were in the energy sector.
- **New technology doesn't benefit only tech firms.** Throughout history, companies across industries have used technology to innovate and grow.

Diversification enables investors to share in the success of today's top companies while staying positioned to benefit from tomorrow's market leaders.

LARGEST 10 US STOCKS BY MARKET CAP

Rankings as of start of years shown, 1980–2025



Cybersecurity Reminder

We wanted to share a few important cybersecurity reminders, especially as phishing scams via email and text continue to rise. Phishing is a cybersecurity attack frequently used to obtain user information, such as login credentials and credit card details.

While fraud and cybercrime remain real threats, there are simple and effective steps you can take to protect your identity and assets.

Here are some best practices to help keep your accounts secure:

- **Enable two-factor authentication:** This provides an added layer of security by requiring a unique code each time you log in to your Schwab account or any other online account.
- **Use strong, unique passwords:** Choose long passwords that include a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols. Avoid reusing the same password across multiple sites. A password manager can help you generate and securely store unique passwords.
- **Be cautious with unexpected communications:** Do not respond to unsolicited phone calls, emails, or texts asking for personal or financial information.
- **Avoid clicking links in texts or emails:** Schwab will never ask you to click a link to log in via email or text. This is a common tactic used in phishing scams.
- **Verify DocuSign requests:** Fraudulent DocuSign emails have become more common. If you're expecting a document from us and something doesn't look right, call us to confirm before taking action.

Buyback or Dividend?

Stock buybacks, also known as share repurchases, have been in the news lately after a flurry of them happened this year. While many investors are familiar with how dividends work, the decades-long trend of firms returning cash to investors through buybacks in lieu of dividends may have some investors wondering how they differ. The process and ramifications, in fact, are quite similar.

In both cases, a firm spends a cash surplus from its earnings. In the case of a dividend, this cash is distributed directly to investors. This reduces the company's market cap, as the price per share drops by the dividend per share amount. That cash distribution represents economic value being transmitted to the investors. It also reduces the company's book value by the same dollar amount, because the dividend was sourced from an asset (cash) of the firm.

Buybacks can be executed by a firm repurchasing its own shares on the open market or making tender offers to buy shares at a certain price, up to a certain amount. Spending on buybacks reduces book equity by the same value as dividends. Market value also drops the same—although the price per share is not directly affected, the total number of shares is reduced. The resulting price-to-book ratio is the same as it would be in the dividend scenario.

A company may prefer buybacks based on tax considerations or if it believes the stock is undervalued by the market. Investors may also prefer one over the other. But the important takeaway is for investors to think of buyback programs similarly to dividend payments: a component that, along with capital appreciation, may contribute to an investor's total return.

We're Here to Help

At Stone Pine Financial, we love supporting not just our clients, but their families as well. One area we're especially excited about is helping the next generation build strong financial habits early on. Whether your children are just starting out and want to learn how to save, considering buying their first home, beginning to fund their own retirement, or simply looking to track and manage their expenses, we're here to provide guidance and practical strategies.

Our goal is to give them the tools and confidence they need to make smart financial decisions and set themselves up for long-term success. If there's a young adult in your family who could benefit from this support, we'd be happy to connect with them and help them take their first steps toward financial independence.

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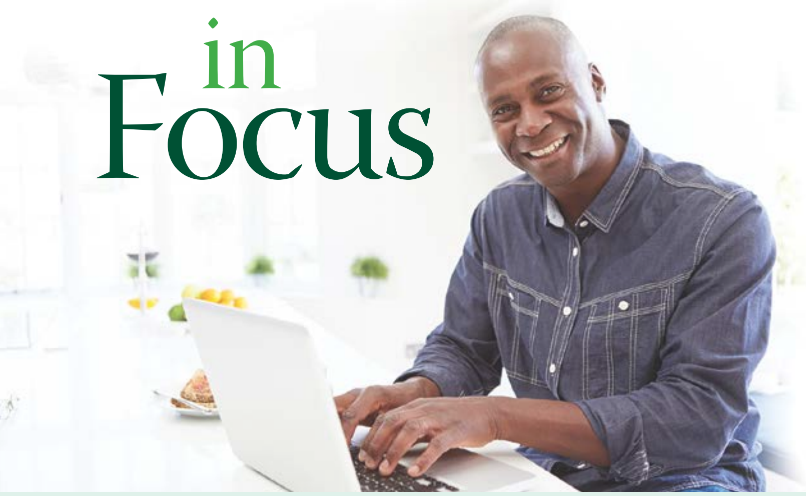

Upcoming Client Appreciation Event:

Please join us for our upcoming Client Appreciation Event on Wednesday, October 8th, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM at La Cabra Brewing (642 Lancaster Ave, Berwyn, PA 19312). La Cabra will be hosting us and guiding us through a tasting experience, giving us the chance to enjoy some of their craft offerings.

It will be a relaxed and fun evening to connect, enjoy great drinks, and mingle with fellow clients. Feel free to bring a friend or two - we hope to see you there!

Upcoming Fall Meetings:

We'll be in touch soon to schedule your fall review meeting, which we are scheduling from late October through early November. During the meeting, we'll focus on implementing year-end tax strategies and addressing any other relevant matters. We'll also review your annual performance and answer any questions or concerns you may have. Meetings can be held in person at our office, over Zoom, or by phone; we recommend in-person or Zoom meetings so we can share materials with you. We look forward to connecting with you soon!