

The first quarter of 2021 produced very strong results for equities. Looking at market sectors, Infrastructure, Value-Based, and certain Technology stocks were especially strong during the quarter.

This past year has been extraordinary. With the pandemic being an extremely rare crisis (and hopefully not likely to occur again this century), uncertainties were at highly elevated levels. Presently the economy is stable, with a significant rebound projected as businesses and more normal activities resume. Likely, with even more government investment (infrastructure and much more in the pending proposals), the potential for more job creation and an extremely strong recovery are increasing in probability. At present, the equity market is generally at all-time highs. Our research team has been working hard to find value in this somewhat overvalued market. Despite this expensive time period for stocks, we are still adding companies to our buy list at designated price levels, often below current market values. With the upward market movement, an increasing number of stocks are reaching price levels where partial or full sales are becoming increasingly probable.

Given the tragedies that have occurred in this past year and the challenges facing us, the economy has performed remarkably well. Once the pandemic gets under improved control, there is a lot of encouraging news. However, it is important to share that we do have very significant intermediate and longer-term concerns. The amount of money being printed and expended by the government for Coronavirus relief is beyond unprecedented. There is a real and significant cost to the huge debt that had been and is still being incurred by the federal government. While higher taxes are more than likely to be implemented, they are almost certainly not going to be significant enough to avoid large ongoing deficit spending. Additionally, Social Security, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, and Medicaid are not sustainable at current funding levels.

The exceptional level of recent investment appreciation is exciting and more than welcome, but markets have been and will continue to be volatile. It is our desire and intention to continue with what we believe to have been an exceptionally productive and effective model, along with a highly analytical and disciplined investment philosophy. Please be safe, healthy and hopefully happy as we begin to move back to a more typical lifestyle.

THE FUNDS

The Diversified Equity Fund, the 100% stock Fund, had a great 2021 first quarter both in historical and relative terms. The Fund had a total return of 11.6% exceeding the Russell 3000 benchmark index by 5.3%. This outperformance was due to strong stock selection in addition to an overall investor rotation away from high growth towards value-oriented securities. The market rotation which benefited our value-based investment style was the result of 1) a normalization of the overall economy as the Covid-19 vaccine was rolled out and 2) a rise in the 10 year US Treasury yields increasing from 0.91% to 1.74% over the three month time period. As the appreciation of growth stocks rely on potential profits distant into the future, the higher bond yield (and discount rate) adversely impacts them as these future cash flows are less valuable now, relative to value-oriented securities that by contrast are more reliant on near-term cash flows and have been less impacted by the year-to-date rally in interest rates. The Fund's performance also benefit by over-weights in both Healthcare securities which were attractively priced with investors searching for value and by Industrial stocks; these are generally cyclical and benefited from the economic recovery and the potential of a \$2 trillion infrastructure bill. While the Fund is equal-weight to the benchmark in Information Technology, the sector contributed to an outperformance for the Fund as our high quality stock selection with stable cash flows outperformed the "momentum" stocks that had done well over the previous year.

The Growth & Income Fund, offering a strategic allocation of 50% equities / 50% fixed income, also had a great first quarter of the year with a total return of 6.4% versus its blended benchmark of 2.6%. Similar to the Diversified Equity Fund, the Growth & Income Fund equities benefited from the market rotation towards value-based securities. In addition to strong contributions from Healthcare, Industrial and Technology sectors, the overweight in Utilities led to strong returns. The Fund's fixed income holdings benefited from its positioning in short-term bonds as the Macaulay Duration of the portfolio of 1.8 years is far lower than the benchmark's 3.9 years. The risk of rising interest rates materialized over this quarter, and impacted longer-term bonds more

adversely than short-term bonds. Our focus on near-term bonds with high credit quality helps to reduce interest rate risk in addition to credit quality risk and macro-economic risks.

The Balanced Income Fund with a current mix of 42% equities and 58% fixed income securities also outperformed this past quarter with a 4.2% total return versus the blended benchmark of 1.5%. The Fund Utility sector is high as it offers favorable risk/reward characteristics suitable for the Fund's objective. While the Russell 3000 index is trading at a record high of 37x Price to Earnings, the Fund's holdings are more modestly priced at 25x Price to Earnings. The better valuation is also seen across other metrics including dividend yield with the Fund yielding 2.8% versus the benchmark's 1.9%. The Fund's Fixed Income holdings also did relatively well as their high quality and short-term characteristics designed to reduce volatility/risk also contributed to relative performance as longer-termed bonds sold off.

The Bond Fund of 100% bonds' underlying holdings had an unusual negative performance for the quarter as bonds sold off with interest rates rallying. The Bond Fund had a total return of -0.4% but still beat its blended benchmark which returned -0.6%. The average Yield to Maturity of the Fund is still low at 0.8% but higher than the benchmark at 0.6%. This higher yield is achieved even with a lower Macaulay Duration of 2.2 years versus the benchmark's 2.9 years. Although bond yield curves are upward sloping, we are able to invest in higher yielding bonds with near-term maturity dates as our Fixed Income Portfolio Manager actively searches for enhanced yield albeit with the constraints of suitable investment grade characteristics.

Current Challenges:

- Inflation is a key risk as the Federal Reserve expanded its balance sheet from \$4 trillion to \$7.7 trillion over the past year in combination with massive fiscal stimulus rounds totaling over \$850 billion of direct US government payments.
- Heightened geopolitical risks and global trade conflicts continue to persist as there are new sanctions on Russia and unresolved tensions with China.
- Valuation is challenging as stock multiples reached record highs with fewer opportunities in the market that can be invested in with a value based investment philosophy.

Current Opportunities

- The United States economy is strong as recent Gross Domestic Product growth rates have been high while unemployment rates have dropped dramatically over the last year.
- The Covid-19 vaccine rollout has largely been successful across the United States although there have been reported distribution issues elsewhere including in Europe and South America.
- The higher interest rates (compared to 2020) create opportunities within Fixed Income securities.

Please refer to the UMFF Q1 2021 Fund Fact pages, which are provided separately, for portfolio performance, sector allocation and other characteristics of each Fund.

1. This document may include forward-looking statements. All statements other than statements of historical fact are forward-looking statements (including words such as "believe," "estimate," "anticipate," "may," "will," "should," and "expect"). Although we believe that the expectations reflected in such forward-looking statements are reasonable, we can give no assurance that such expectations will prove to be correct. Various factors could cause actual results or performance to differ materially from those discussed in such forward-looking statements.
2. Past performance is not indicative of any specific investment or future results. Views regarding the economy, securities markets or other specialized areas, like all predictors of future events, cannot be guaranteed to be accurate and may result in economic loss to the investor.



John G. Ullman
& Associates, Inc.