

## Market Commentary

During the second quarter of 2023, domestic stocks exhibited continued strength across investment styles, and any fears of recession or banking contagion have taken a back seat for the moment. The broader U.S. equity market moved higher in each of the three months of the second quarter as corporate earnings and relatively strong employment trends continued to defy the skeptics. There were also signs suggesting that inflation has peaked, which gave the Federal Reserve the wiggle room to pause its aggressive rate hikes. All this was welcome news for stocks, which have rebounded smartly during the first half of 2023 after a dreadful 2022.

In terms of investment styles, growth stocks had their second consecutive quarter of outperformance, perhaps reflecting market exuberance regarding artificial intelligence (AI), following challenging performance in 2022. The Russell 3000® Growth Index<sup>1</sup> was up 12.47% in the quarter and 28.05% year-to-date through the first half of the year, with more than two-thirds of that performance coming from seven stocks. The Russell 3000® Value Index<sup>2</sup> was up a more modest 4.03% during the quarter and 4.98% through June 30, 2023, after two consecutive years of outperforming its growth peer.

Despite the robust rebound for stocks during the first half of this year and the generally improving sentiment, there are some potential headwinds ahead. For starters, there are concerns over the typically lagging impact of higher interest rates, and many investors may be overly optimistic given today's tighter lending conditions. Although the Federal Reserve paused its rate hikes in May, there are rumblings that the inflation fight is not over, and more hikes could be ahead. If rate hikes continue, will bank instability reappear, and/or will economic growth grind to a halt? The slowdown in housing and lower earnings expectations also bear watching, as does the inverted yield curve. And there are ample geopolitical concerns as well, including the ongoing war in Eastern Europe and diplomatic tensions between the U.S. and China.

Still, one cannot deny the improved market sentiment and impressive rebound for stocks during the first half of the year. The technology sector, and especially large-cap tech, has been on a torrid pace this year. That has certainly contributed to the outperformance of growth styles. Meanwhile, Energy, Utilities, Health Care and Financials have been among the relative underperformers which, in turn, have hampered value-oriented indices. Nevertheless, our team continues to see the current environment as ripe for picking stocks within the universe of value-oriented investment styles. We don't believe that we are on the cusp of a return to an environment of sub-2.0% inflation and very low interest rates that supported more speculative growth-oriented companies with the promise of future earnings. Rather, today's environment with its higher cost of capital should favor companies that have strong balance sheets and improving cash flows. Specifically, our team seeks to identify companies with a combination of improving ROIC (return on invested capital) and stock prices trading at what we perceive as a deep discount to intrinsic value. We believe that allocating to these types of

businesses is a means to generate attractive risk-adjusted returns over longer time periods, and this continues to be a primary focus for us as we look to the second half of 2023.

## Performance Review

For the three months ended June 30, 2023, the Victory RS Value Fund (A shares without sales charge) underperformed its benchmark Russell Midcap® Value Index<sup>3</sup> (the "Index") and returned 2.64% versus a return of 3.86% for the Index.

In the second quarter, strong performance from stock selection in Health Care and Utilities aided relative performance, while stock selection in Industrials and Consumer Discretionary detracted.

## Investment Strategy

The RS Value Team seeks to invest in good companies, led by strong management teams, that are attractively valued. Our decision to invest in any company starts with business analysis and an understanding of the company's unit-level economics. Our work on unit-level economics helps us determine the quality and key drivers of the business. We are ROIC-focused investors and seek to invest in companies that we believe have the potential to create shareholder value due to an improvement in the returns of the existing assets or through attractive reinvestment opportunities. We are long-term investors who use our investment time horizon as a competitive advantage and are attracted to out-of-favor and/or misunderstood companies in the market.

The next step in our process is to assess the management team. Our evaluation of a company's management team is critical to our investment decision. We regularly meet with management to gauge how they think about their business: Are they focused on (and compensated for) growing earnings at any cost, or do they understand ROIC and how value is created? Additionally, we perform detailed historical analyses of management's capital decisions—looking at acquisitions, asset sales, and measures of capital stewardship. This analysis provides us with the conviction to invest with strong management teams that we expect will be able to navigate through short-term market volatility and appear to be poised to deliver long-term shareholder value.

The final step in our analysis is valuation. To the RS Value Team, value investing is buying a business at a discount to what we believe it is actually worth. We determine what a company is worth by assessing a company's current share price versus its expected cash flow streams or long-term net asset value based upon the management team's plan for value creation. ROIC is the lens through which we analyze that value creation. Our research has shown that, over time, stock price performance has a strong correlation to improving ROIC as opposed to traditional valuation measurements like price to earnings (P/E). We seek to invest in companies that we believe can create shareholder value due to an improvement in the returns of the existing assets or through attractive reinvestment opportunities. We pay close attention to a company's financial strength, scrutinizing financial statements, and we run various financial models to understand our downside. This quantitative analysis gives us confidence in our investment thesis

and helps us determine at what stock price we are comfortable investing.

### Select Position Review

Below, we review two businesses in an effort to use tangible examples to highlight our investment process.

During the quarter our holding in **Federated Hermes, Inc. (FHI)** negatively impacted performance despite better-than-expected earnings. The company was founded in 1955 and provides investment advisory services for a number of equity, fixed-income, and money market funds. FHI manages over \$700 billion in assets, with more than \$500 billion in money market funds.

We initially purchased shares of FHI in October of 2020. We were attracted to the company's diverse business mix of equities, fixed income, and money market funds. At the time of purchase, the shares were trading at a double-digit free cash flow yield, with no net debt on the balance sheet, and were offering a 4% dividend yield. Equally importantly, we felt that any increase in interest rates would improve the attractiveness of the company's money market business.

We continue to hold shares of FHI, and despite the recent sell-off in the shares, our conviction in the investment has not changed.

**Encompass Health Corp. (EHC)** is a healthcare facility business that provides inpatient rehabilitation therapy to patients who are stable enough to move outside of the acute care hospital setting but still require 24/7 nursing care and at least 3 hours of therapy per day. These patients are older (>70 on average). Many of them are being treated for a variety of neurological diseases while others have experienced a stroke, or have been through a traumatic accident, or have undergone an elective surgery. EHC's payer mix is ~85% Medicare (including Medicare Advantage), and shares underperformed late in the first quarter as investors grew fearful of a negative reimbursement update. Ultimately, in early April when Medicare published its final payment rule, the lack of this negative provision was a positive catalyst for shares. The positive momentum carried into late April when EHC published strong first quarter results, including growing patient volumes and improved labor cost management, which has been a meaningful margin headwind over recent periods. During June several of the leading Medicare Advantage payers (namely United Healthcare and Humana) publicly disclosed a notable rebound in utilization by their Medicare members, mostly for elective procedures and post-acute services, both of which should benefit EHC. If Medicare utilization recovers to "normal" pre-COVID levels, it could present a previously unexpected tailwind to EHC volumes given their patient mix. We have held the shares throughout as we see multi-year tailwinds to EHC only beginning to materialize. These include the demographic tailwinds from an aging population, as well as labor costs that are receding from historical peaks. In addition, EHC has numerous compelling ways to reinvest its organic cash flows, specifically by building new facilities, adding new beds to existing facilities, and by expanding joint venture partnerships. These JVs offer the most compelling return profile due to their capital-light structure, which involves EHC partnering with a traditional acute care hospital that owns an inpatient rehabilitation facility (IRF) but

lacks the expertise to run it profitably. These hospitals bring on EHC to run their IRF, and EHC collects half of the earnings with minimal capital requirements. This is particularly attractive in the context of the overall IRF market, where 75% of the ~1,200 IRFs in the US are captive (hospital owned) and most of those are losing money, suggesting that EHC has a long runway of organic and inorganic share gain. We believe the current share price ascribes very little value to these types of reinvestment opportunities.

### Outlook

Since early 2022, the Federal Reserve has aggressively raised interest rates in an effort to lower inflation, and both equity and bond markets are likely to remain volatile until investors better understand the impact of monetary tightening. Inflation in the U.S. and the rest of the world has fallen but remains elevated. The recent turmoil in the banking sector is a wild card, as fundamentals remain stressed and lending standards have tightened. In our assessment, the markets are pricing in a reasonably high probability of a mild recession.

While aspects of the macro picture remain murky, it's important to acknowledge some of the positives as well. Employment remains strong. Supply/demand imbalances in the labor market continue to bode well for the health of the consumer given full employment and the prospect for further wage gains, which partially mitigates the impact of inflation on the consumer. Home prices have remained stable despite higher interest rates and affordability concerns, as over a decade of underinvestment following the global financial crisis of 2007–2009 has limited supply. Lower-income consumers have been most impacted by the current inflationary environment, but consumer balance sheets remain generally healthy for the majority of Americans, and consumer credit quality remains strong at the moment. These are a few of the reasons to believe that even if a recession takes hold, it could be less significant than the previous two recessionary periods here in the U.S.

Following years of lower interest rates helping to drive ever-higher growth stock valuations, we feel value investing is ripe for a period of outperformance. This already occurred in 2022, and we see that trend continuing. Further, given the volatility, we are finding opportunities to invest in businesses undergoing significant positive structural change, with solid balance sheets and cash flows, whose share prices have detached from our assessment of the fundamentals. The apparent bargains inherent in our portfolios should attract acquirers and other investors over time. That bodes well for the longer term, in our opinion. So, while there remain challenges and lingering questions ahead, we can also find reasons for optimism, particularly for value as an investment style.

We thank you, as always, for your support.

Sincerely,

RS Value Team

**Sector Allocation<sup>4</sup>**

As of June 30, 2023

Sector	% of Portfolio
Communication Services	1.18%
Consumer Discretionary	8.11%
Consumer Staples	6.79%
Energy	4.70%
Financials	21.57%
Health Care	9.50%
Industrials	19.12%
Information Technology	5.20%
Materials	6.15%
Real Estate	7.62%
Utilities	6.90%

**Top 10 Holdings<sup>5</sup>**

As of June 30, 2023

Holding	% of Portfolio
Vistra Corp.	3.60%
Progressive Corporation	3.16%
Globe Life Inc.	3.15%
Market Group Inc.	3.14%
Equity Commonwealth	2.70%
Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited	2.57%
Encompass Health Corporation	2.54%
US Foods Holding Corp.	2.40%
Brown & Brown, Inc.	2.33%
Verint Systems Inc.	2.22%

**Performance**

Average Annual Total Returns as of June 30, 2023

Victory RS Value Fund (Class A – RSVAX)	Second Quarter 2023	YTD	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	10-Year	Since Inception (6/30/93)
without sales charge	2.64%	3.54%	10.81%	17.23%	7.99%	8.80%	7.67%
with maximum sales charge (5.75%)	-3.26%	-2.43%	4.43%	14.94%	6.72%	8.16%	7.46%
Russell Midcap <sup>®</sup> Value Index <sup>3</sup>	3.86%	5.23%	10.50%	15.04%	6.84%	9.03%	10.40%

**Past performance does not guarantee future results. The performance data quoted represents past performance and current returns may be lower or higher. The investment return and principal value will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than the original cost. To obtain performance information current to the most recent month-end, visit [www.vcm.com](http://www.vcm.com).** Returns include reinvestment of dividends and capital gains. Performance returns for periods of less than one year are not annualized. Fee waivers and/or expense reimbursements were in place for some or all periods shown, without which Fund performance would have been lower.

The Fund's total gross/net annual operating expense ratio as of the most current prospectus for the Class A Shares is 1.32%/1.30%. Net expense ratio reflects the contractual waiver and/or reimbursement of management fees through April 30, 2024. Other share classes are available, but not all share classes are available to all investors.

**Carefully consider a fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses before investing. To obtain a prospectus or summary prospectus containing this and other important information, visit [www.vcm.com/prospectus](http://www.vcm.com/prospectus). Read it carefully before investing.**

**All investing involves risk, including the potential loss of principal.** In addition to the normal risks associated with investing, international investments may involve risk of capital loss from unfavorable fluctuation in currency values, from differences in generally accepted accounting principles or from economic or political instability in other nations. Investments in smaller companies typically exhibit higher volatility. Investments concentrated in an industry or group of industries may face more risks and exhibit higher volatility than investments that are more broadly diversified over industries or sectors. The financial services industry is subject to extensive government regulation that affects the scope of their activities, the prices they can charge and capital maintenance. The industry is subject to severe competition and can be significantly affected by market conditions and activity. The fund is also subject to liquidity risk, which is the risk that the Adviser may not be able to sell a security at an advantageous time or price, which may adversely affect the Fund. The value of your investment is also subject to geopolitical risks such as wars, terrorism, environmental disasters, and public health crises; the risk of technology malfunctions or disruptions; and the responses to such events by governments and/or individual companies.

The opinions are as of the date noted and are subject to change at any time due to changes in market or economic conditions. The comments should not be construed as a recommendation of individual holdings or market sectors, but as an illustration of broader themes. Any discussions of specific securities should not be considered a recommendation to buy or sell those securities.

Index performance is shown for illustrative purposes only. It is not possible to invest directly in an unmanaged index.

- 1 The Russell 3000<sup>®</sup> Growth Index is a market-capitalization-weighted index that measures the performance of those companies in the Russell 3000<sup>®</sup> Index (which consists of the 3,000 largest U.S. companies based on total market capitalization) with higher price-to-book ratios and higher forecasted growth values.
- 2 The Russell 3000<sup>®</sup> Value Index is an unmanaged market-capitalization-weighted index that measures the performance of those companies in the Russell 3000<sup>®</sup> Index (which consists of the 3,000 largest U.S. companies based on total market capitalization) with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values.
- 3 The Russell Midcap<sup>®</sup> Value Index is an unmanaged market-capitalization-weighted index that measures the performance of those companies in the Russell Midcap<sup>®</sup> Index with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. (The Russell Midcap<sup>®</sup> Index measures the performance of the 800 smallest companies in the Russell 1000<sup>®</sup> Index, which consists of the 1,000 largest U.S. companies based on total market capitalization.)
- 4 The Fund's holdings are allocated to each sector based on their GICS classification. If a holding is not classified by GICS, it is assigned a GICS designation by RS Investments. Cash includes short-term investments and net other assets and liabilities.
- 5 Portfolio holdings are subject to change and should not be considered a recommendation to buy or sell individual securities.

The Funds are distributed by Victory Capital Services, Inc., an affiliate of Victory Capital Management Inc., the Fund's investment adviser.

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