

## Clifford Capital Focused Small Cap Value Fund

### Quarterly Commentary – Fourth Quarter 2022

#### Performance Summary

*Average Annual Returns as of December 30, 2022*

	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter 2022	2022	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	Inception (10/1/2019)	Total Return, Inception (10/1/2019)
Institutional Class (FSV VX)	14.68%	-11.39%	-11.39%	5.78%	n/a	7.41%	26.15%
Russell 2000 <sup>®</sup> Value <sup>1</sup>	8.39%	-14.50%	-14.50%	4.67%	n/a	7.55%	26.68%

*Average Annual Returns as of December 30, 2022*

	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter 2022	2022	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	Inception (1/31/2020)	Total Return, Inception (1/31/2020)
Super Institutional Class (FSV QX)	14.65%	-11.30%	-11.30%	n/a	n/a	8.45%	26.71%
Investor Class (FSV RX)	14.57%	-11.60%	-11.60%	n/a	n/a	8.12%	25.58%
Russell 2000 <sup>®</sup> Value	8.39%	-14.50%	-14.50%	n/a	n/a	6.82%	21.21%

\*\*Expense Ratio Gross/Net: FSV VX 3.01%/1.05%; FSV QX 2.93%/0.97%; FSV RX 3.30%/1.30%

*Performance data quoted represents past performance; past performance does not guarantee future results. The investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance of the fund may be lower or higher than the performance quoted. Performance data current to the most recent month end may be obtained by calling (800) 628-4077. Short term performance, in particular, is not a good indication of the fund's future performance, and an investment should not be made based solely on returns.*

\*\*Clifford Capital Partners, LLC (the "Adviser") has contractually agreed to reduce fees and/or reimburse certain Focused Small Cap Value Fund expenses until January 31, 2024.

#### Performance Summary and Market Observations

The fourth quarter was a solid end to a tough year. Despite the year ending with a difficult December, October and November were strong months for the Clifford Capital Focused Small Cap Value Fund ("the Fund") and small cap value stocks overall. The Fund outperformed its benchmark during the quarter, leading to full year outperformance as well. While we were pleased with the last quarter, 2022 was a disappointing year for the Fund and small cap value stocks. We attribute much of 2022's losses to inflationary pressures and the Fed's actions to fight these pressures, coupled with angst about an impending recession, which is generally thought to affect smaller companies the most.

We are not macroeconomists, and our macro views rarely influence our investment decisions, but we do believe recession is a likely scenario (if we're not in one already) and we've witnessed recessionary conditions within some of our investment companies' results in recent quarters. We don't envy the Fed in its quest to achieve a soft landing for the economy that has been propped up in recent years by unprecedented fiscal stimulus and years of near-zero interest rates. To us, it's the equivalent of trying to land a 747 jumbo jet on a municipal airport runway that's meant for little Cessna prop planes – it's not impossible, but the chances of something bad (like a recession) happening are high!

In our view, most of the Fund's holdings are trading as if a recession is already priced in, so we view the Fund's—and the benchmark's—2022 declines as simply a cyclical downturn in anticipation of a probable economic

<sup>1</sup> The Russell 2000<sup>®</sup> Value Index is a capitalization-weighted index which is designed to measure performance of Russell 2000 Index companies, respectively, with lower price-to-book ratios and lower forecasted growth values. Numbers presented include the reinvestment of dividends (total return).

decline. We think stocks typically recover well before recessions officially end and at points that are difficult to ascertain beforehand (isn't the future always difficult to predict??!!), so we're content holding on to our investments that are fighting recessionary conditions today, but whose long-term Key Thesis Points™ ("KTPs") are still intact, coupled with valuations that are compellingly low, in our view.

The Fund's Core Value stocks were the bright spot in 2022, posting a full year positive return, based on our internal calculations, while its Deep Value stocks underperformed. That said, we remain bullish on the prospects of the Fund's Deep Value investments. We believe these investments are very attractive coming into 2023 – in many cases historically attractive.

Quite simply, many of our Deep Value stocks fell more than we thought they would during 2022, which we attributed mostly to recessionary concerns and in some cases because of relatively high (but manageable in our view) debt levels. While this performance was disappointing, we also believe that these companies' fundamental long-term prospects and our estimates of their intrinsic values did not decline much, if at all. As such, we think these Deep Value investments (which we believed were attractive when we purchased them) are even more compelling coming into the new year *because* of their underperformance. We view this as short-term pain for long term gain!

Consistent with our investment process, we took advantage of this opportunity by adding to our Deep Value investments during the year, resulting in a full year increase of about 5% to the Fund's Deep Value weighting. As such, the Fund entered 2023 with almost a 44% weight, which is near an all-time high. As a reminder, Deep Value investments are capped at 50% (Core Value stocks will always have a higher weighting: 50-75% of the Fund), so this positioning is reflective of our bullish views for Deep Value opportunities.

We strongly believe that the Fund—and especially its Deep Value stocks—are attractive today, recession or not! And we think the Fund is well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities we see.

### **More on the Core Value and Deep Value Dynamic**

In our last quarterly commentary, we showed how the Fund's Core Value stocks had meaningfully outperformed and its Deep Value stocks had meaningfully underperformed over the prior 5 calendar quarters including Q3 2022, while exhibiting the exact opposite behavior during the 7 calendar quarters prior to that. Those statistics are reproduced in **Table 1**. We argued then—and still believe—that the heightened volatility we've witnessed, and the see-saw behavior between the two sleeves, is unusual and is likely related to pandemic-influenced and bubble-like market conditions over the past several years. We also think that much of 2022's volatility is due to macroeconomic conditions, rather than company-specific happenings. Quoting from last quarter's commentary:

*So far in 2022 there has been significant upheaval in interest rates, investor expectations, and a clear slowdown in economic conditions that has moved investor focus more towards macro concerns rather than the long-term outlook for individual companies. As such, we've observed that some companies' clear progress towards long term KTPs has often been ignored this year. However, we believe most of these macro issues will eventually subside (or become fully discounted by the stock market) and our Deep Value "beach balls" (we likened our Deep Value stocks to beach balls being held under water) will lead the charge when our investment companies' performance improves, catalyzed, in our opinion, by KTPs.*

Although it was only one quarter, we noted that Deep Value stocks rebounded strongly in Q4, catalyzed in our view by KTPs starting to come to fruition, and we think there's more to come! Core Value stocks also performed well during the quarter, a dynamic we welcome because we do not think that strong performance in one sleeve precludes good performance in the other. For 2022, we were certainly thankful for the Fund's Core Value investments, which enabled the Fund to outperform its benchmark, despite Deep Value's struggles. We also believe the time will come again when, like Q4, we'll be very thankful for our Deep Value investments, which we view as generationally attractive.

**Table 1: Core Value and Deep Value Sleeves Produce Different Performance Streams**

	Inception (10/1/19) to June 30, 2021 (first 7 quarters)	June 30, 2021 to Sept. 30, 2022 (next 5 quarters)	Q4 2022	2022 Full Year
FSVXX	53.7%	-28.4%	14.7%	-11.4%
Fund Core Value stocks*	27.0%	-4.3%	11.0%	3.9%
Fund Deep Value stocks*	106.4%	-52.7%	20.7%	-27.8%
Russell 2000 Value	46.4%	-20.2%	8.4%	-14.5%

\* Performance of Core Value and Deep Value stocks are unofficial numbers provided for illustrative purposes only, gross of fees, as calculated from Bloomberg based on our designation of Core Value and Deep Value holdings within the Fund. Fund holdings are subject to change. Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Data Source: Bloomberg

**Will 2023 be the Year of the Bargains? We Think Investors are Starting to Care about Valuations Again.**

In our commentaries throughout 2022 we've shown a graphic (see **Figure 1**) that depicts the valuation levels of the Russell 3000 Index<sup>2</sup>, which is generally considered to be a proxy for the entire U.S. stock market, sorted into valuation quintiles (most expensive to least expensive 1/5 of the stock market, ranked by the price to sales ratio). The data showed that the market was much more expensive coming into 2022 than it was at the end of 1999 (near the end of the dotcom bubble), and significantly higher than it was at the end of 2008, (near the end of the Great Financial Crisis and what, in hindsight, was a great buying opportunity). After 2022's stock market declines, valuations have indeed improved meaningfully, but we note that valuations remain higher at 12/31/2022 than they were at 12/31/1999 for every quintile except for the most expensive one.

Also as shown in **Figure 1**, the market's most expensive stocks declined sharply and underperformed the U.S. stock market in 2022 while the less expensive quintiles were still down but outperformed. This dynamic was particularly acute in Q4 when the market's cheapest two quintiles posted solid performance. We think this dynamic was a tailwind to the Fund's Deep Value holdings in Q4.

**Figure 1: Price to Sales Ratios<sup>3</sup> at the end of 1999, 2008, 2021, and 2022**  
(most expensive to least expensive quintiles)



Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Data Source: Bloomberg

2 The Russell 3000® Index is a capitalization-weighted index which is comprised of the stocks within the Russell 1000® and the Russell 2000® Indices. This index of securities represents approximately 98% of the investable U.S. equity market. Numbers presented include the reinvestment of dividends (total return). An investor cannot invest directly in an index. Moreover, index performance does not reflect the deduction of advisory fees, transaction charges, and other expenses.

3 Price to Sales ratio is the ratio of a company's or index's current market capitalization to its sales over the prior 12 months as of the date of the analysis. For this chart, the Russell 3000® Index was sorted by highest to lowest price to sales ratio in fifths (quintiles) for all index stocks with available price/sales data for each time period (about 90%, 95%, and 92% of total Index constituents were included for 1999, 2008, and 2021, respectively). 12/31/2022 data was obtained from the same constituents as at 12/31/2021 for comparability. The datapoint presented on the chart is the median price/sales ratio for each quintile.

## Why Do We Think Cheaper Stocks Will Continue to Outperform?

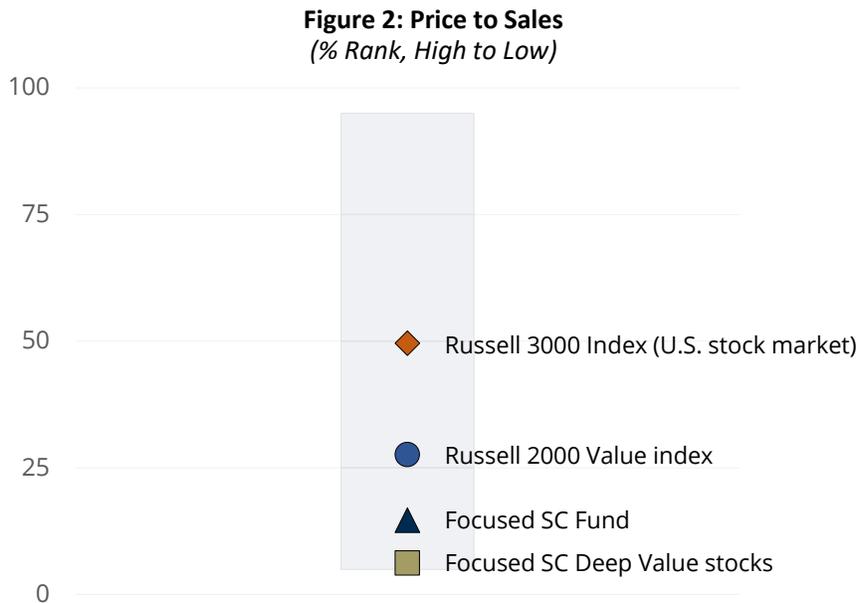
In an environment like today's, we continue to believe that owning investments with low valuations makes sense. Borrowing from commentary two quarters ago that we think bears repeating:

*We think owning stocks with lower valuations is always prudent, but especially today in an environment where many investors are taking a more skeptical view of the future. From a pragmatic viewpoint, we think companies with lower valuations have more options to improve their stock prices. For example, share repurchases made at low valuations can result in material share count reductions and earnings per share accretion, dividend yields become more meaningful, and we believe activist investors and strategic/financial buyers become more interested in cheaper companies, leading to mergers and acquisitions activity.*

We have seen some of these types of shareholder-friendly actions happen already and it helped the Fund's fourth quarter results. In particular, we've seen an uptick in activist shareholders agitating for change in some of the Fund's least expensive holdings, which has resulted in higher stock prices. We view inexpensively valued stocks as fertile ground for activists to begin planting seeds, and also for companies' management teams to seek ways to improve shareholder returns.

Many of our investment KTPs revolve around shareholder-friendly capital allocation (e.g. spin-offs, share repurchases, dividend increases, debt paydowns, etc.) that we expect to occur and we've seen evidence of this starting to happen within the Fund's investments. Given how attractive valuations are in certain segments of the market (including the Fund's Deep Value investments), we think these inexpensive stocks will continue to garner attention from investors, which we believe could lead to 2023 being a banner year for shareholder-friendly actions.

The Fund continues to be positioned inexpensively at the end of 2022. The overall Fund and its Deep Value stocks were valued in the lowest quintile of the overall U.S. stock market based on price to sales, well below its benchmark. (see **Figure 2**) We think the Fund's cheaper positioning (coupled with KTPs for each stock because statistical cheapness is not enough for us!) is a great place to be if less expensive stocks continue to outperform, as we think they will.



Based on Russell 3000 Index constituents with price to sales data at 12/31/2022.

Data Source: Bloomberg as of 12/31/2022

## **Conclusion**

While we were disappointed in the Fund's 2022 losses, we think the Fund is well positioned headed into 2023 with a portfolio of attractively valued stocks coupled with catalysts for fundamental improvement (our Key Thesis Points™) that we believe will be recognized and rewarded by the stock market. We are particularly bullish on the Fund's Deep Value stocks (an atypically high ~44% weighting), which have significant potential for future appreciation, in our opinion.

## **Significant Fund Changes**

We purchased one new Core Value stock, Western Union (ticker: WU – 3.01% of the Fund at 12/31/22) and we sold one Core Value stock, Wesbanco (ticker: WSBC – 0.00% weight at 12/31/22) and one Deep Value stock, AMC Networks (ticker: AMCX – 0.00% weight at 12/31/22).

### ***Purchases***

**WU:** Western Union is best known for its money transfer business, which is used primarily for cross-border cash transactions. We think Western Union's brand is powerful in its core markets and will help the company build up its growing digital transfer business in a more profitable way than most market participants believe. We think the company has the potential to make significantly accretive purchases of other financial technology businesses that are now being priced more realistically. We also expect the company's impressive track record of share repurchases to continue, which we think will benefit shareholders.

### ***Sales***

**AMCX:** We sold AMC Networks during the quarter as new information arose that contradicted some of our main Key Thesis Points™. Importantly, the firm's chairman announced in conjunction with a companywide layoff memo that the monetization models for entertainment content was in disarray (one of our primary KTPs was that the firm's content had significant value that would be monetized in some form within the next 2 years). In addition, his memo suggested that the company's niche streaming services were not growing quickly enough to make a significant impact on the firm's overall profits, which was another one of our KTPs. As such, we sold the stock despite it having a very low current valuation.

**WSBC:** We sold Wesbanco—a regional bank—to provide capital for other investments that we believed had better reward/risk profiles. We also sought to lower the Fund's regional bank weighting, which had grown during 2022 from strong performance, and WSBC's loan book was the most economically sensitive of our regional bank investments, so we believed it would be the best candidate to sell.

## **Individual Stock Performance**

**Contributors:** The two greatest contributors during the quarter were Deep Value stocks KLX Energy Services (ticker: KLXE – 3.46% of the Fund at 12/31/22) and Pitney Bowes (ticker: PBI – 3.76% of the Fund at 12/31/22).

**KLXE:** KLX Energy's earnings and liquidity profile continued to improve during the quarter and the company generated significant cash flow, which alleviated many investor concerns. We expect KLXE's business to continue improving in 2023, as oilfield services companies are in the early stages of benefiting from improved pricing and higher activity levels.

**PBI:** Pitney Bowes announced several significant new business wins in its ecommerce shipping business, that it expects will drive that segment to break-even cash flows, or better, in 2023 (one of our primary KTPs). Additionally, an activist investor has been agitating for change, which increased investor interest in the company and led, in our view, to a late-year pop in the stock.

**Detractors:** The two largest detractors were Deep Value stocks Qurate Retail Preferred stock (ticker: QRTEP – 2.55% of the Fund at 12/31/22) and Millicom (ticker: TIGO – 2.51% of the Fund at 12/31/22).

**QRTEP:** Qurate Retail's preferred stock (which pays a \$2 quarterly dividend) fell alongside Qurate Retail common stock (ticker: QRTEA – 0.66% of the Fund at 12/31/22) during the quarter, given continued weak results from the ecommerce retailer. Industrywide supply chain issues plus the complete loss of its largest distribution center in a fire late last year significantly disrupted Qurate's 2022 results. We think the company is on the path to improved financial results in the second half of 2023 and has significant financial flexibility despite relatively high debt (a trait common to companies associated with John Malone, who is a key board member of the firm), which gives the company time to turn around its results. Our KTPs remain valid, in our opinion, so we added to the preferred stock during the quarter.

**TIGO:** Millicom's stock declined modestly during the quarter because of relatively weak quarterly earnings and its industry being out of favor. We believe the firm may increase its share repurchases and potentially start a meaningful dividend within the next couple of years, which we think will improve the valuation of the stock. We also think the primary reason for TIGO's underperformance in 2022 was the consolidation of one of its segments, which was a prudent action, but required a rights offering (common stock issuance) that significantly pressured the price of the stock, in our view, for nonfundamental reasons.

### **Final Comments**

Thank you for your investment in the Fund. We have high conviction in the Fund's stocks, and we are invested alongside you. We appreciate your support, and we will continue to strive to prudently manage your money.

Sincerely yours,

Ryan Batchelor, CFA, CPA  
Principal and Portfolio Manager  
Clifford Capital Partners, LLC

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*The fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses must be considered carefully before investing. The prospectus contains this and other important information about the investment company, and it may be obtained by calling (800) 628-4077, or by going to the Clifford Capital Funds website at [cliffordcapfunds.com](http://cliffordcapfunds.com) and clicking on the "Prospectus" link. Read it carefully before investing.*

*Fund holdings are subject to change at any time and should not be considered a recommendation to buy or sell any security.*

### **Information about Risk**

**Risks of Investing in Equity Securities.** Overall stock market risks may affect the value of the Fund. Factors such as domestic economic growth and market conditions, interest rate levels, and political events affect the securities markets. When the value of the Fund's investments goes down, your investment in the Fund decreases in value and you could lose money.

**Risks of Small-Cap and Mid-Cap Securities.** Investing in the securities of small-cap and mid-cap companies generally involves substantially greater risk than investing in larger, more established companies.

**Focused Investment Risk.** The Fund is a focused fund and generally holds stocks of between only 25 and 35 companies. Focused funds may invest a larger portion of their assets in the securities of a single issuer compared to a more diversified fund. Focusing investments in a small number of companies may subject the Fund to greater share price volatility and therefore a greater risk of loss because a single security's increase or decrease in value may have a greater impact on the Fund's value and total return.

**Sector Risk.** The Fund may emphasize investment in one or more particular business sectors at times, which may cause the value of its share price to be more susceptible to the financial, market, or economic events affecting issuers and industries within those sectors than a fund that does not emphasize investment in particular sectors.

**Management Style Risk.** Because the Fund invests primarily in value stocks (*stocks that the Adviser believes are undervalued*), the Fund's performance may at times be better or worse than the performance of stock funds that focus on other types of stock strategies (*e.g., growth stocks*), or that have a broader investment style.

**New Fund Risk.** The Fund is recently formed. Accordingly, investors in the Fund bear the risk that the Fund may not be successful in implementing its investment strategy, may not employ a successful investment strategy, or may fail to attract sufficient assets to realize economies of scale, any of which could result in the Fund being liquidated at any time without shareholder approval and at a time that may not be favorable for all shareholders. Such liquidation could have negative tax consequences.

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