

Finding a Picture of the Economy in a Wave of Data

When Chris Varvares isn't juggling phone calls, texts and emails while hurrying through airports on the way to client meetings and speaking engagements, he's scouring sources to keep current on global inflation, interest rates, securities and monetary markets, and geopolitical and environmental events.

"Economists are supposed to be good at math, so I hope you'll excuse me when I say I have 110 percent days," jokes Mr. Varvares, BA '77, senior managing director and co-founder of Macroeconomic Advisers in St. Louis. "Digesting and analyzing information, helping manage the firm and being a husband to my wife, Jill, and father to our 12-year-old son and 3-year-old twin boys keeps me more than busy."

The Amazing Kreskin has nothing on Mr. Varvares—especially when it comes to the U.S. economy. Mr. Varvares has spent the past 30-plus years predicting the future and building a reputation as one of the nation's top economists.

"If you know economists, many of us are a bit constrained in terms of our ability to communicate effectively," says Ellen Hughes-Cromwick, chief economist at Ford Motor Co. and a Macroeconomic Advisers client. "Chris is one of the top economists working in the private sector, someone with great insight and whose communication skills and ability to relate to non-economists set him apart."

While the firm has an office inside the Beltway, Mr. Varvares believes that its St. Louis base of operations is often perceived as an advantage.

"Wall Street is the epicenter, with D.C. not far behind, but our clients say that they like the idea that we are outsiders, because folks from those places are always talking to each other, creating a bit of a herd mentality," he says.

Almost every major American financial institution, government agency and corporation uses economic forecasts to strategize, and Mr. Varvares is like a master juggler of economic variables, tossing them into the air and seeing how they all factor into the short term and the next 10 years. The firm counts among its clients the President's Council of Economic Advisers, the Congressional Budget Office and

the departments of Treasury, Labor and Commerce. Macroeconomic Advisers has nondisclosure agreements with almost all its nongovernmental clients, but Mr. Varvares says the list includes 12 of the 20 largest U.S. financial institutions, as well as major trade associations and corporations.

The firm, which Mr. Varvares co-founded in 1982 in his hometown with Joel Prakken and Laurence Meyer (his former professor in graduate school at Washington University), has 14 economists following the U.S. economy.

"Outside of the Federal Reserve, we are the largest private sector team that focuses on macroeconomics," he says.

As an undergraduate, Mr. Varvares' sights had been set on political science and law school when he was inspired by a group of economics professors, including two, Anthony Yezer and Joseph Cordes, who still teach at GW. "I realized early on that behind political motivations, there is almost always an economic story," he says.

Beyond economics, Mr. Varvares co-founded the International Medical Assistance Foundation in 2005, with the encouragement of his younger brother, Mark, a head and neck cancer specialist and professor at the St. Louis University Cancer Center. The all-volunteer, not-for-profit group organizes and funds medical trips to developing countries and, to date, has sent 20 teams of doctors, nurses and others to Honduras. "It does a huge amount of good, and I'm very proud of it," he says. —**Bill Glovin, BA '77**



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