

Romano Wealth named a top investment advisor

NB native's company makes Financial Times 300 list

MATT YAN, Editor

Joe Romano knows that a steady pace wins in the end. It might've been a few years since Romano ran 3 miles in 16:42 at the Illinois state cross country meet, but the Glenbrook Academy graduate is still one of the best at what he does.

Romano, who grew up in Northbrook and went to Glenbrook North, is a certified financial planner and the president of Romano Brothers & Co. Wealth Management, which was just listed in the Financial Times 300 Top Registered Investment Advisors. The 53-year-old firm currently manages more than \$1 billion in assets, a quarter of which Romano manages himself.

"It's been 53 years in the making," Romano said of the listing. "I feel like it's a great honor and I feel happy that we've served our clients by putting them first, and that's gotten us to the top of the crop. I'm totally ecstatic about that."

Romano's father Richard and uncle Robert founded the firm — thus the Romano Brothers moniker — in 1962, before Joe was born. Back then, the family didn't have much in the way of money and Joe's mother supported her kids Kathryn and Jim through her teaching job with Chicago Public Schools, while Richard earned money on the side as a part-time teacher and Northwestern University lab assistant. Richard, who acted as general partner and president from 1964-2003, is now the chairman of the company and lives in Northbrook.

Joe Romano said he could never have imagined his father's firm would become so successful, "especially because we came from such humble beginnings. My father didn't take a dime out of this company for five years.... I never thought it would be anything like it's become today. It's happened slowly, steadily."

Joe graduated with honors with a B.A. in Economics from Wesleyan University in Connecticut in 1992 and spent some time traveling the world,



Northbrook native Joe Romano (right) and father Richard Romano, of Northbrook, are the president and chairman, respectively, of Romano Brothers & Co. Wealth Management, which was named to the Financial Times 300 top Registered Investment Advisors.

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Joe Romano — Northbrook native whose wealth management firm was named one of the top 300 investment advisors in the United States by Financial Times.

then worked for his brother Jim's business before accepting a position at Romano Brothers & Co.

Though his father was the president of the company, Joe didn't need any push from him to get into the family business. His love for the wealth management industry was already there.

"[My dad] was certainly my mentor and inspiration, so growing up ... there was a lot of talk about the stock market and specific companies," Joe explained. "When I was in high school I took a (fundamentals of investment) class that he taught for many years at New Trier extension."

Joe became president in 2003, taking over day-to-day operations after his father stepped down, and will be celebrating 20 years with the company this August. The lessons he's learned in that time are

valuable, especially considering the market conditions he's been forced to reckon with.

"One of the biggest lessons that I've learned is managing risk rather than return," he said. "Having gotten in on one of the greatest bull markets in history and then seeing two downturns — one of them being the biggest downturn since the Great Depression — has really been an exciting time to be in the business because you see the full range of possibilities."

The Romano philosophy is founded on long-term growth and outstanding value based on growth trends, but relationships are the core of the firm's success, Joe Romano said.

"We're just focusing on one relationship at a time and the quality of the relationships is much more important than the quantity of the relationships," he said. "Growth is really a by-product for us, rather than a driver."

Joe Romano pointed to former Glenbrook Academy teacher David Pasquini as another one of his influences growing up. Pasquini was the Glenbrook South cross country coach and taught Joe's sophomore American History class. Because of their shared love for running, the two formed a special bond.

Sadly, Pasquini passed away in 1996 of a sudden heart attack. But his influence on Joe Romano remains.

"He inspired me to be a great

writer, great history student and a great athlete," Joe said. Northbrook schools also played a major role in forming a young Joe Romano. He qualified for the state cross country meet three years in high school — no small feat for any runner, even today.

"The Glenbrook schools are committed to excellence and when I was there, I tried to be the same way," he explained. "[I] definitely [learned] discipline, work ethic, endurance, stamina. A lot of those attributes have carried over to my work ethic, whether in school or my career."

Joe's work ethic is undeniable — he still teaches a New Trier Extension investment fundamentals class, the one his father taught, on top of his responsibilities at the firm. In addition, he's the chairman of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority Small Firm Advisory Board and a former president of the Illinois Securities Industry Association (2005-07).

Most of the time, Joe hardly feels like he's working. He said he feels fortunate to be able to work alongside both family and non-family members committed to providing a quality investment experience for clients.

"It's just been a thrill," he said. "It's great to come into every day and I don't dread a single moment of it. I love my clients, I love my coworkers and I love working with my father. It's a dream."