

## Tad Edwards' new firm is steeped in the family tradition

Aim is to follow A.G. Edwards' client-first, people-second, shareholder-third business model

By Sue Ascii  
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A year after he quietly launched his own brokerage firm in St. Louis, Benjamin F. "Tad" Edwards IV — the great-great-grandson of Albert Gallatin Edwards, who founded A.G. Edwards Inc. in the 19th century — is moving right along with his expansion plans, having opened his first two branch offices in the past two months.

The philosophy of privately held Benjamin F. Edwards & Co. is based on the business model of the storied regional brokerage, said Mr. Edwards, the founder, chairman, chief executive and president of the firm.

In August, the firm opened its first branch office in Springfield, Mo., and late last month, it opened one in White Plains, N.Y. Mr. Edwards plans to have six branches up and running by the end of the year.

The home office staff of 24 is made up of former A.G. Edwards employees. The broker teams joining the branch offices also have experience at A.G. Edwards.

### Q. What was your goal in launching the firm?

A. I felt like this was a wonderful opportunity to build something that is pretty special and modeled after what we had been known for — a client-first, people-second and

shareholder-third business model. The business was in our family for 120 years [A.G. Edwards is now part of Wells Fargo & Co.]. And the brand, the reputation and the culture didn't just evaporate overnight.

I think there is an opportunity for this legacy to continue. A legacy is only really made up of people. There are a lot of people out there who have retired from A.G. Edwards, but believe in this business model.

### Q. Do you plan to take the company public?

A. That's certainly not anything that we're focused on right now. No one knows what the future might eventually bring, but right now, I can tell you that our focus is on building Benjamin F. Edwards & Co. by adding branches and introducing as many clients as possible to our client-first philosophy.



Michael L. Abramson

**Q. Do you have an advisory panel?**

A. We have dozens and dozens of retired A.G. Edwards people who held some sort of leadership position who wanted to be involved. The group also includes some former board members. Some are owners, and some will serve as volunteers and advisers. There are 50 people in this advisory group, and they are involved in different ways.

**Q. Your branch offices include many former A.G. Edwards brokers. Are you looking in that area for talent?**

A. We have placed a priority on character, trust, good team players, competence and talent. Those advisers who share those values of how to treat clients are people we would be honored to talk to and explore if it would be the right fit.

I am having a dialogue with lots of different people. It's not a strategic plan [to hire former Edwards people]. I am interested in the fit and the quality and character of the individual.

**Q. What's the geographic strategy behind the branch office locations?**

A. There are good people everywhere. I think it's likely that we would be in major markets and some of the middle markets over time, not because we want to be in a particular city, but if we have the right leader and the right group who are dedicated and really want to be part of this environment. For example, we could have two offices in one city and no offices in another big city.

It's really about the people. We have chosen to go where the strong leadership is. We are looking for evidence of success, positive results from a team of people that work well together.

**Q. How is the recruiting going?**

A. We have had people from multiple firms that contact us to explore if they could be part of the firm.

**Q. What obstacles and challenges have you encountered to your expansion plans in this environment?**

A. The economy isn't what we would like it to be, but it really hasn't had an impact on us.

We want people who have solid long-term relationships with clients, built on trust. We believe the clients will follow [the advisers]. I think clients like our business model.

It's a very similar model to the old A.G. Edwards model that talks about, and lives out, the golden rule — you really want to treat people the way you like to be treated. A lot of clients feel they are coming home.

**Q. What in this industry environment offers you more opportunities to grow?**

A. Clients want safety, history, consistency, security and peace of mind — and probably more today than other times. Part of the reason for that is the economy. But also for the last number of years, in our industry, there have been rampant changes of different ownership of different firms. Clients like something that is safe and solid and will be independent.

I think financial advisers want a place that will be independent, too.

**Q. Are you targeting any particular client group, such as high-net-worth?**

A. We are not targeting any group of people in any category. Almost all have come to us and want to be part of what we are doing.

**Q. When can we expect to hear about the next branch?**

A. Hopefully, around the next month, we could open another office. There will be more between now and the end of the year.

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