

Financial goals are as varied as the individuals who make them to become tomorrow's newest millionaire by using the stock market as scheme, investing huge sums of money in today's riskiest ventures. Others seek security for themselves and their families as their primary objective, placing smaller amounts of money in businesses with a good, proven record. The first group are impetuous gamblers, whose investment choices could be immensely prosperous... or devastatingly ruinous. The second are more patient, willing to wait longer for steady, dependable returns.

I am primarily a member of the second category. My ultimate purpose for entering the investment world would be ensuring my family's financial security, though I am willing to risk a small amount of money on more dangerous but potentially profitable stocks. With this goal in mind, my allotted \$100,000 would be divided several ways. Though such a method may not yield the largest possible profits, it is a safeguard against contingencies: with diversified investments, I would not lose everything should a company suddenly fail.

Before reaching a fiscal decision, the investor should carefully examine all stock options. Important resources include stock charts, both current and historical. Company websites, which post the corporation's annual reports and dividend information, are also valuable tools. I utilized both in my research, ending January 17, 2006. Stock charts for all six companies were accessed through Yahoo! Finance.

Public utilities are indisputably one of the safest investments available, with a history of slow, steady growth. As such, they are the perfect choice for a person interested in their future more than immediate gains. Consolidated Edison is no exception. A utility company primarily serving the New York metropolitan area with natural gas, steam, and electric divisions, Con Edison's product deliveries were up for the third quarter of 2005, and the company's monetary information web page (<http://investor.conedison.com>) proudly proclaims that "Con Edison has increased dividends

for the thirty-first consecutive year." The stock chart as of January 13, 2006 for Con Edison shows a reliable upward trend in the stock's value since the early 1980s. I feel that Con Edison is a safe investment worth \$20,000.

Though recent events have sent the cost of oil shooting upwards and left Americans feeling the pinch in their pocketbooks, high gas prices have translated into large profits for the oil companies. Currently, there is no major alternative to the nation's dependence on oil. As a result, investment in an oil company is a good choice. Chevron Corporation, not surprisingly, finished the January 13, 2006 trading day with a price per share that was \$0.47 higher than the previous day's closing. Despite two major hurricanes in the Gulf Coast region, the company still managed to produce a net income of \$3.6 billion for the third quarter of 2005. In the same quarter, Chevron's stock earned an additional \$1.64 per share. (Information from Chevron's financial website: <http://investor.chevron.com>.) Chevron seems set to continue producing profits well into 2006. I would place \$20,000 in Chevron Corporation stock.

In contrast to the profits and growth of Con Edison and Chevron, General Motors is in serious financial trouble. The company, however, has recently taken steps to avoid bankruptcy, and those measures appear to be working, at least in the short term. Given all the negative publicity and the fact that, as of the third quarter of 2005, the net income report registered no profits, it is little wonder that GM's stock value is currently falling. Surprisingly, however, a check of GM's stock history shows that the share price was noticeably below present levels in 1975. Obviously, the company remained in business following that troublesome period. Today, General Motors products remain some of America's favorite vehicles. Chevrolet was the nation's best-selling line for 2005. Hummer earned the title of the "industry's fastest-growing brand" (according to www.gm.com/company/investor_information/sales_prod/), and the truck division recorded the second-best sales year in company history. With such reliable, popular products, and the previous recovery of its share value, I am confident that GM will successfully restructure

itself and that the company's stock will earn a profit in the future. While admittedly a risky gamble and an extremely long-term investment, I would purchase \$10,000 of General Motors stock.

Unlike GM, the value of a share in Caterpillar has been steadily increasing for the past decade. On January 13, 2006, CAT closed trading \$1.43 above its one-year target estimate. Thanks to the strong demand for its construction machinery, Caterpillar would likely begin making immediate, though moderate, returns. The "Investor Information" segment of Caterpillar's home page, www.cat.com, informs the reader that the profit of \$677 million from sales in 22 countries during the third quarter of 2005 resulted in the best quarter in company history. This record-breaking profit earned shareholders an additional \$0.94 per share. CAT expects revenues to increase by 10% in 2006. Caterpillar seems to be a strong stock with no signs of faltering, and worthy of a \$20,000 investment.

Time-Warner, one of the nation's best-known media companies, is another good choice for a long-term investment. Though immediate returns are not likely, business at Time-Warner is brisk, based upon the corporate news found on the web at www.timewarner.com/corp/. Internet holding AOL has reached an advertising agreement with Google, and another subsidiary, Warner Brothers Pictures, recently set an industry record in gross sales. The investment segment of Time-Warner's home page notifies the reader that a "regular quarterly cash dividend of \$0.05 per share" was paid, as promised, December 15, 2005, in keeping with the company history of prompt payment to its shareholders. This stock can be expected to continue its modest upward trend into the future. I would purchase \$10,000 of Time-Warner shares.

The maker of some of America's most popular food products, General Mills has a history of solid financial performance. The "investors" portion of the company website (www.generalmills.com/corporate/investors/index.aspx) informs stockholders that, impressively, "General Mills has paid shareholder dividends, uninterrupted and without reduction, for 107 consecutive years." The most recent dividend, for December 2005, earned \$0.34 per

share, in cash. For the second quarter of fiscal 2006, sales among General Mills' brands, including Betty Crocker and Pillsbury, were up 5% when compared to the same quarter of fiscal 2005. In December 2005, revenues were high enough to result in an increase in the "2006 earnings guidance". Given the popularity of General Mills' products, and the company's strong economic history, I feel General Mills is worth an investment of \$20,000.

The stock market is a powerful tool for investors who can make informed and wise economic choices. There are many options available for everyone, from those willing to take huge risks, to the more conservative and patient who prefer to depend on the most reliable stocks. Though often overlooked, economic knowledge is vital in today's world. It is important that each investor understand his or her financial goals and the best way to achieve them.