

## Mercadien's Starr advises: Play long ball



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PLAINSBORO — Whether the playing field is the gridiron or the stock market, a long-term game plan is critical, according to a high-profile visitor to a local investment company last week.

Understanding that, Mercadien Asset Management used the charisma and celebrity power of Hall of Fame quarterback Bart Starr to emphasize that message to current and prospective clients Tuesday evening at the Princeton Marriott hotel here.

"We need to have a game plan that's workable," said the man whose teams won five NFL titles. "Succeeding in the 21st century requires a solid foundation of quality people."

The Hamilton-based firm, which has more than \$250 million under management, had two primary goals in presenting Starr to a packed ballroom of approximately 180 people. His appearance was a client appreciation gift from Mercadien in which he posed for photos and greeted Mercadien clients, and his speech was a rallying cry about the virtues of developing a long-term plan and sticking to it.

With the markets displaying extreme volatility in this battered economy — up more than 300 points one day, down more than 300 another — the financial managers at Mercadien said nervous invest-

tors need reassurance to keep from pulling their money out of the markets.

Mercadien brought in former Bucks County, Pa., Republican Rep. Jim Greenwood last fall, and such well-known motivational speakers give Mercadien an opportunity to advertise its expertise to clients. "With the volatility in the marketplace," said Conrad Druker, managing director of the parent firm The Mercadien Group, "one of our biggest jobs is *keeping* them in the marketplace."

"It's easy to invest in the long term when you're making money in the short term," said Kenneth Kamen, president of Mercadien Asset Management. The trick, he explained, is to convince investors not to be disheartened by current events. And the philosophies that served Starr well in getting past defensive linemen translate well to life in general and to the financial arena in particular, Kamen said.

Starr emphasized that attitude is critical to success in any pursuit and recalled his first meeting with legendary football coach Vince Lombardi when the Packers had just hired Lombardi to turn around a losing team.

"He said that we will relentlessly chase perfection," Starr told the Mercadien audience. "We won't attain it, because no one is perfect. But along the way we will catch excellence." Starr said that Lombardi paused, then added, "I am not remotely interested in just being good."

Starr, 74, who said he is cutting back his schedule to about six appearances a year, acknowledged it is easy to have enthusiasm when things are going well. Lombardi, Starr told his audience, knew it was easy to motivate players when they were winning games; the trick was motivating them past the inevitable losses. The trick for financial managers is to motivate their clients past the inevitable downturns.

Kamen underscored Starr's words when he pointed out that 10 years ago — April 29, 1998 — the Dow closed at 8,951. A decade later, despite the terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, record deficits, the collapse of Bear Stearns, \$4-a-gallon gasoline and the subprime mortgage implosion, the Dow finished at 12,871, a 44 percent increase.

Regarding the Standard & Poor's 500, an investor who merely let their money sit during that time and didn't even make a trade would have enjoyed a return of approximately 8.4 percent, according to Kamen.

Investors who try to time the market — jumping in and out quickly — are especially at risk in this chaotic economy, according to Kamen. He said 75 percent of the market's top 40 days have occurred within two weeks of one of the 40 worst days. "We need to look at our assets in a long-term way," Kamen said.

Starr, who listed ethics, courtesy, enthusiasm, preparation and even a sense of humor as necessary attributes in sports or in life, kept returning to the topics of attitude: "We don't have to be satisfied with being good," Starr said. "We can be excellent. I am convinced," he said, "that 10 percent of life is what happens to us, and the other 90 percent is how we respond to it."