



THE SHEPPARD LAW FIRM

# Sharing Wealth Wisely: Maximizing Protection and Tax Efficiency with Lifetime Gifts

## A Guide to Trusts for Lifetime Giving



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## Introduction



*Meet John and Lisa, a couple in their 60s who have spent decades building a comfortable life for their family. With retirement on the horizon, they dream of seeing their children enjoy the fruits of their labor now, not just after they're gone. Their daughter, Emily, wants to start her own business, and their son, Michael, hopes to purchase an investment property. John and Lisa want to help them achieve these dreams while ensuring that their gifts are protected.*

At The Sheppard Law Firm, we understand that many of our clients, like John and Lisa, wish to support their loved ones during their lifetime. The joy of witnessing your children benefit from your hard work is immeasurable. Whether it's helping a child start a business, invest in real estate, pay off debt, or simply enjoy life's opportunities, making lifetime gifts can be deeply fulfilling.

However, it's crucial to ensure that these generous gifts don't inadvertently expose your loved ones—or your assets—to unnecessary risks. Traditional methods of gifting, like handing over cash or transferring property outright, may leave assets vulnerable to creditors, divorce settlements, or tax burdens. Without careful planning, the gifts intended to enrich your family's lives could become sources of stress or loss.

This white paper explores how you can make meaningful lifetime gifts while maintaining the protections you've carefully built into your estate plan. We introduce two powerful tools—**Heritage Trusts** and **Annual Gift Trusts**—that allow you to support your children and loved ones today without sacrificing creditor protection, divorce protection, and tax efficiency.

By utilizing these trusts, you can share your wealth now and enjoy peace of mind knowing your legacy is secure.

## Who Is This For?

If you're like John and Lisa—eager to see your loved ones thrive now while safeguarding their future—this white paper is for you.

### Are you considering...

- ...helping your child purchase a home or start a business?
- ...providing funds for your grandchildren's education?
- ...making regular gifts to family members to share in your success?

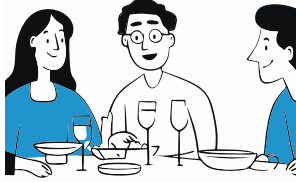
### And do you want to...

- ...protect these gifts from potential creditors or divorce proceedings?
- ...maintain control over how and when the assets are used?
- ...maximize tax efficiency to preserve more of your wealth for your family?

This guide is designed for individuals and families who wish to make lifetime gifts to children, grandchildren, or other loved ones, ensuring that these gifts are as secure and protected as the assets in their estate plan. Whether you're planning significant one-time transfers or a series of smaller annual gifts, we'll show you how strategic trust options can help you provide for your family today while enhancing your overall legacy.

By the end of this white paper, you'll understand how Heritage Trusts and Annual Gift Trusts work, their benefits, and how they can be tailored to meet your unique needs and goals. Let's explore how you can give generously and wisely, securing both your family's present and future.

## I. The Challenges with Traditional Lifetime Gifts



*John and Lisa were excited about helping their children now, not just leaving an inheritance later. They wanted to give their daughter, Emily, funds to start her dream business and help their son, Michael, purchase an investment property.*

*It seemed simple enough to write them checks or transfer assets, but a conversation with us opened their eyes to potential pitfalls they hadn't considered.*

### The Appeal and Risks of Giving Now

Making lifetime gifts to loved ones is a wonderful way to share your success and witness the joy it brings. Whether it's assisting with a major purchase, funding a new business venture, or enhancing their quality of life, the satisfaction is immediate and heartfelt.

However, John and Lisa learned that giving substantial gifts outright isn't as straightforward as it seems. Without proper planning, these generous acts could unintentionally expose their children to risks and undermine the protections they've carefully established in their estate plan.

### Common Misconceptions About Lifetime Gifting

Like many people, John and Lisa believed that as long as they stayed under the annual gift tax exclusion limit—\$18,000 per person in 2024—they could freely give money without any concerns. They had heard from friends and even their CPA that they could each give this amount to anyone every year without triggering any tax issues.

They also knew that the lifetime gift and estate tax exemption was over \$13 million per person, allowing them to make larger gifts if they wished.

It all seemed simple—**until they considered the following:**

#### **Creditor Vulnerability**

If Emily's business faced financial difficulties, any assets gifted directly to her could be seized by creditors. Similarly, if Michael encountered legal issues, his gifted assets could be at risk.

#### **Divorce Risk**

Although their children weren't anticipating divorce, John and Lisa understood that life is unpredictable. Gifts made directly could become part of marital assets, potentially subject to division if a marriage ended.

#### **Tax Implications**

Gifting appreciated assets like stocks or property could lead to unexpected capital gains taxes for their children. Unlike assets inherited after death, lifetime gifts don't receive a "step-up" in cost basis, potentially resulting in higher taxes if the asset is sold.

## Just Because You Can, Doesn't Mean You Should

John and Lisa realized that while they could make outright gifts within the legal limits, it didn't mean that was the best approach for their family's long-term well-being.

They wanted to ensure that their generosity wouldn't inadvertently create problems down the road.

We explained that traditional gifting methods often overlook important considerations:

### Impact on Estate Plan Integrity

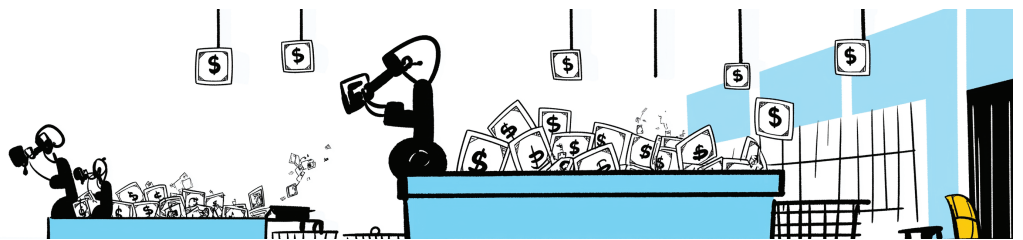
John and Lisa had spent years carefully crafting an estate plan that included protective trusts to safeguard their assets for their children after their passing. These trusts were designed to provide creditor protection, divorce protection, and tax advantages. By making outright gifts during their lifetime, they were bypassing these protections and not taking advantage of the comprehensive planning they had put in place.

### Missed Opportunities for Protection

By giving assets directly, they missed the chance to safeguard those assets from potential creditors, lawsuits, or divorce proceedings that could affect their children. The protections built into their estate plan weren't automatically applied to lifetime gifts made outside of their trusts.

### Missed Opportunities for Tax Savings

Without proper planning, they could inadvertently create unfavorable tax situations. For example, gifting appreciated assets might saddle their children with significant capital gains taxes if they decide to sell the assets later. In contrast, assets inherited through their estate plan often receive a step-up in basis, reducing or eliminating capital gains taxes upon sale.



## A Better Way Forward

Understanding these challenges, John and Lisa were eager to find solutions that would allow them to help Emily and Michael now while keeping the assets secure and tax-efficient. They didn't want to burden their children with potential financial or legal complications resulting from well-intentioned gifts.

We introduced them to the **Heritage Trust** and **Annual Gift Trust**—tools that could provide immediate support to their children while maintaining the protections and benefits of their estate plan.

By considering not just what they wanted to give but how they gave it, John and Lisa took a thoughtful approach that safeguarded their family's future while fulfilling their desire to share their success today.

## II. The Heritage Trust – Maximizing Protection for Lifetime Gifts



*John and Lisa were eager to help their children now but worried about potential risks. They asked us:*

*"Is there a way to support Emily & Michael without exposing them to these dangers?"*

### Introducing the Heritage Trust

We introduced them to the **Heritage Trust**, a powerful tool that acts like a **protective vault** for their lifetime gifts. Imagine placing your assets in a secure vault: your loved ones have the keys to access and use what's inside, but the sturdy walls shield those assets from external threats like creditors or divorce settlements. A Heritage Trust functions in much the same way, allowing you to give generously while maintaining essential protections.

### What Is a Heritage Trust?

A Heritage Trust is an irrevocable trust established during your lifetime for the benefit of your children, grandchildren, or other loved ones. It mirrors the protective features of the trusts in your estate plan that take effect after your passing but brings those benefits into the present. By using a Heritage Trust, you can:

**Provide Immediate Support:** Potentially reduce estate taxes for you and future generations.

**Maintain Protections:** Your beneficiaries can access and use the assets now.

**Enhance Tax Efficiency:** Assets remain safeguarded from creditors, lawsuits, and divorce.

### How the Heritage Trust Worked for John and Lisa

#### Setting Up the Protective Vault

We helped John and Lisa create a Heritage Trust tailored to their family's needs. This trust served as the protective vault for the assets they wished to gift. The trust's terms mirrored the protections in their estate plan, ensuring continuity and alignment with their long-term goals.

#### Funding the Trust

Instead of giving cash or property outright, they transferred \$500,000 into the Heritage Trust for Emily and another \$500,000 for Michael. These assets were now securely placed within the vault, shielded from external risks.

#### Empowering Their Children with Control and Protection

Since Emily and Michael were responsible adults, they could serve as their own trustees—the keyholders to the vault. This allowed them to manage and use the assets to pursue their dreams while benefiting from the trust's protective structure.

#### Preserving Tax Benefits

We guided John and Lisa through the necessary steps to file a gift tax return (IRS Form 709), utilizing a portion of their lifetime gift and estate tax exemption. This careful planning helped reduce their taxable estate and set the stage for potential estate tax savings for future generations.

## Benefits of the Heritage Trust

### A Secure Shield Against Risks

Just like a vault protects valuables, the Heritage Trust safeguarded the gifted assets from creditors and divorce. If Emily's business faced financial difficulties or Michael encountered legal issues, the assets within the trust would remain untouchable.

### Control with Confidence

Emily and Michael had the freedom to use the assets to achieve their goals. Serving as their own trustees, they could make decisions about investments and expenditures, all while knowing that the trust's protections were firmly in place.

### Tax Efficiency for Generations

By transferring assets through the Heritage Trust, John and Lisa potentially reduced their future estate tax liability. Additionally, because the trust is irrevocable, the assets could be excluded from Emily and Michael's taxable estates, providing tax advantages that could extend to their own children.

### Preserving Family Wealth Across Generations

The Heritage Trust allowed John and Lisa to not only support their children now but also set up a mechanism for preserving wealth for future generations. The trust could continue to benefit their grandchildren, keeping the family's legacy intact.

## Is a Heritage Trust Right for You?

Consider the Heritage Trust as your personal protective vault if you:

- *Are planning significant one-time gifts to your loved ones.*
- *Wish to maintain the creditor and divorce protections of your estate plan for lifetime gifts.*
- *Seek to reduce potential estate taxes for yourself and future generations.*
- *Want your beneficiaries to have control over assets without exposing them to external risks.*

## A Secure Path Forward

By viewing the Heritage Trust as a protective vault, John and Lisa found a solution that met their desire to help their children now while safeguarding their family's financial future. They could witness Emily launching her business and Michael investing in real estate, all with the peace of mind that their gifts were protected.

Just like John and Lisa, you can take advantage of strategies that allow you to give generously today without compromising the protections you've carefully built into your estate plan. The Heritage Trust offers a way to open the vault to your loved ones now while keeping the walls strong against any threats.



*In the next section, we'll explore the **Annual Gift Trust**, another flexible tool that provides protection for smaller, incremental gifts, allowing you to support your loved ones in a way that suits your unique circumstances.*



While John and Lisa were pleased with the Heritage Trust solution for their significant gifts to Emily and Michael, they also wanted to provide ongoing support to their grandchildren in a way that was both meaningful and protected.

They wondered if there was a way to make smaller, regular gifts that could accumulate over time, benefiting their family without compromising the safeguards they valued.



### III. The Annual Gift Trust – A Flexible Approach for Incremental Lifetime Gifts

#### Introducing the Annual Gift Trust

We introduced them to the **Annual Gift Trust**, a flexible tool designed for incremental lifetime gifts. Think of an Annual Gift Trust as a **growing family tree**, where each small gift is like planting a seed that will flourish over time. This approach allows you to make annual gifts to your loved ones, taking advantage of tax benefits while ensuring the assets remain protected and aligned with your estate planning goals.

#### What Is an Annual Gift Trust?

The Annual Gift Trust is an irrevocable trust established during your lifetime, specifically designed to receive and manage annual gifts that fall within the annual gift tax exclusion limit—\$18,000 per person in 2024. This trust allows you to:

- Provide Ongoing Support** - Make regular, smaller gifts that can accumulate and grow.
- Maintain Protections** - Keep the assets shielded from creditors, lawsuits, and divorce.
- Maximize Tax Efficiency** - Utilize annual gift tax exclusions without reducing your lifetime gift and estate tax exemption.

#### How the Annual Gift Trust Worked for John and Lisa

##### Planting Seeds for the Future

John and Lisa wanted to help their three grandchildren—Sophia, Liam, and Ava—by setting aside funds for their education and future endeavors. Instead of giving money outright, they established an Annual Gift Trust to act as a nurturing environment where their contributions could grow safely.

##### Making Annual Contributions

Each year, John and Lisa could contribute up to \$18,000 per grandchild individually, totaling \$36,000 per grandchild as a couple. With three grandchildren, this allowed them to gift up to \$108,000 annually without triggering gift taxes or using their lifetime exemption.

##### Building Significant Wealth Over Time

By consistently making these annual contributions, John and Lisa were able to remove substantial assets from their estate tax-free. Over 10 years, they contributed a total of \$1,080,000 to the Annual Gift Trust:

- $\$108,000 \text{ per year} \times 10 \text{ years} = \mathbf{\$1,080,000}$

This strategy not only provided significant financial support for their grandchildren but also effectively reduced the size of their taxable estate by over a million dollars.

## Ensuring Tax Compliance with Crummey Powers

To make sure their gifts qualified for the annual exclusion, the Annual Gift Trust included **Crummey Powers**—a provision that gives beneficiaries a temporary right to withdraw the gift, satisfying IRS requirements for a "present interest" gift.

### Simplifying Crummey Powers

Imagine giving your grandchildren gift cards that they could use immediately, but they choose to save them for something special later on. The Crummey Powers work similarly—they provide the right to access the funds now, but the grandchildren allow the assets to remain in the trust to grow and be used for future needs.

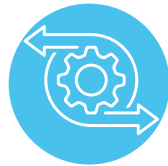
### Managing Compliance

We assisted John and Lisa in handling the necessary notifications and documentation to ensure the trust remained compliant with IRS rules, keeping the process straightforward and hassle-free.

## Growing and Protecting the Assets

The funds in the Annual Gift Trust were invested prudently, allowing them to grow over time. When Sophia started college, the trust could distribute funds to cover her tuition. If Liam decided to start a business, the trust could support his venture. All the while, the assets remained protected from external risks.

## Benefits of the Annual Gift Trust



### Flexible and Incremental Giving

The Annual Gift Trust allowed John and Lisa to make regular contributions that accumulated into significant wealth over time, all while adapting to their family's changing needs.



### Protection from Risks

Assets within the trust were safeguarded from potential creditors, lawsuits, or divorce proceedings involving their grandchildren.



### Tax Efficiency

By leveraging the annual gift tax exclusion and properly implementing Crummey Powers, they maximized tax benefits without reducing their lifetime exemption or incurring gift taxes.



### Estate Reduction

Over a decade, they effectively reduced their taxable estate by over \$1 million, potentially minimizing future estate taxes and preserving more wealth for their family.



### Control with Purpose

The trust's terms provided guidelines on how and when funds could be used, ensuring that the assets served the intended purposes, such as education, health, or starting a business.

## Understanding Crummey Powers Without the Complexity

### The Temporary Withdrawal Right

When you make a gift to the trust, your beneficiaries receive a notice that they have the right to withdraw that amount within a specific time frame, say 30 days. This satisfies the IRS requirement that the gift is a "present interest."

### Why Beneficiaries Don't Withdraw

Typically, beneficiaries understand that leaving the funds in the trust is in their best long-term interest. With guidance, they choose not to exercise the withdrawal right, allowing the assets to grow and remain protected.

### Peace of Mind for You

By including Crummey Powers, you can make annual gifts without worrying about gift taxes, and your beneficiaries can benefit from the assets when the time is right.

## Is the Annual Gift Trust Right for You?

Consider the Annual Gift Trust as your family's nurturing garden if you:

- Want to make smaller, regular gifts that accumulate over time.
- Seek to utilize annual gift tax exclusions efficiently.
- Desire to maintain protections for assets gifted during your lifetime.
- Prefer flexibility in how beneficiaries can access and use the funds.
- Aim to reduce your taxable estate significantly over time without incurring gift taxes.

## A Tailored Approach for Your Family

Just as every garden requires careful planning and nurturing, your family's financial future benefits from a thoughtful approach. The Annual Gift Trust provided John and Lisa with a way to support their grandchildren's growth and dreams, all while keeping the assets secure and reducing their taxable estate by over a million dollars.

## Moving Forward with Confidence

By integrating the Annual Gift Trust into their overall estate plan, John and Lisa could enjoy the satisfaction of contributing to their family's success now and in the years to come. They found a balance between generosity and prudence, knowing that their gifts were both meaningful and protected.

By using the Annual Gift Trust, you too can make the most of your annual gifts, providing substantial support to your loved ones while maintaining essential protections and maximizing tax benefits. Whether you're helping with education expenses, seeding future investments, or simply sharing your success, the Annual Gift Trust offers a flexible and secure way to nurture your family's aspirations while effectively reducing your taxable estate.





After exploring both the Heritage Trust and the Annual Gift Trust, John and Lisa wanted to understand how these options compared to making outright gifts. They needed to determine which approach best aligned with their goals and their family's unique circumstances.

## IV. Comparing Your Gifting Options: Finding the Right Fit for Your Family

### Choosing the Best Path Forward

When considering how to make lifetime gifts, it's essential to weigh the benefits and limitations of each option. Here's a simplified comparison to help you decide which strategy might be right for you:

#### Option 1: Outright Gifts

*The Simple but Unprotected Approach*

**Simplicity:** Outright gifts are straightforward—you give cash or assets directly to your loved ones.

**Control:** Once the gift is made, you have no control over how it's used.

**Protection:** Assets are not protected from creditors, lawsuits, or divorce. If your child faces financial difficulties or a marriage ends, the gifted assets could be at risk.

**Tax Considerations:**

- Gifts within the annual exclusion limit (\$18,000 per person in 2024) generally require no gift tax filing.
- Gifting appreciated assets may lead to capital gains taxes for the recipient if they sell the asset, due to the carryover of your original cost basis.

**Is This Right for You?**

- Ideal if you value simplicity and have minimal concerns about asset protection or control.
- Suitable for smaller gifts where the risks are acceptable

#### Option 2: Annual Gift Trust

*Flexible, Protected, and Tax-Efficient for Regular Gifts*

**Simplicity:** Requires setting up a trust, but we handle the complexities for you.

**Control:** You set the terms of the trust, guiding how and when assets can be used.

**Protection:** Assets are protected from creditors, lawsuits, and divorce. Beneficiaries can enjoy the benefits without exposing assets to external risks.

**Is This Right for You?**

- Ideal if you wish to make regular, incremental gifts while maintaining protections.
- Suitable for building a significant, protected fund for education, business ventures, or future needs.

## Option 3: Heritage Trust

### *Comprehensive Protection for Significant One-Time Gifts*

**Simplicity:** Involves detailed planning and trust setup, but provides robust benefits.

**Control:** Beneficiaries can serve as trustees, managing assets within the protective structure.

**Protection:** Assets are strongly protected from creditors, lawsuits, and divorce. The trust structure preserves wealth across generations.

#### **Tax Considerations:**

- Significant gifts typically require filing a gift tax return (Form 709), utilizing part of your lifetime exemption.
- Can help reduce potential estate taxes for you and your beneficiaries by removing assets from your taxable estate.

#### **Is This Right for You?**

- Ideal if you're considering large, one-time gifts and want to maintain maximum protection.
- Suitable for preserving family wealth and providing beneficiaries with control within a safeguarded framework.



## John and Lisa's Decision

For their situation, John and Lisa chose a combination:

- **Heritage Trust** for their significant gifts to Emily and Michael, ensuring those assets were protected while giving their children control to pursue their goals.
- **Annual Gift Trust** for their grandchildren, allowing them to make regular contributions that would grow over time, providing support for education and future endeavors.

They decided against outright gifts, recognizing that the lack of protection and potential tax implications didn't align with their desire to safeguard their family's future.

## Conclusion: Protecting Your Gifts and Securing Your Family's Future

*John and Lisa felt a profound sense of relief and satisfaction. They had found a way to support their children's dreams and invest in their grandchildren's futures, all while maintaining the protections and tax efficiencies they had worked so hard to establish. By thoughtfully choosing the right gifting strategies, they could witness the joy their generosity brought today and rest assured that their family's legacy was secure for generations to come.*

### Your Opportunity to Give Wisely and Protect What Matters Most

Making lifetime gifts to your loved ones is a meaningful expression of your love and success. It's about more than transferring wealth—it's about empowering your family, supporting their aspirations, and witnessing the positive impact firsthand.

However, as we've explored through John and Lisa's journey, the how of gifting is just as important as the what. Without proper planning, well-intentioned gifts can lead to unintended consequences, exposing assets to risks or creating unnecessary tax burdens.

By considering strategies like the **Heritage Trust** and the **Annual Gift Trust**, you can:

- **Provide Immediate Support:** Help your loved ones achieve their goals now, whether it's starting a business, investing in property, or pursuing education.
- **Maintain Essential Protections:** Safeguard the gifted assets from creditors, lawsuits, divorce, and other potential threats.
- **Maximize Tax Efficiency:** Utilize tax laws effectively to reduce or eliminate gift and estate taxes, preserving more wealth for your family.
- **Preserve Family Harmony and Legacy:** Ensure your estate plan remains intact, preventing potential conflicts and fostering unity across generations.

### Take the Next Step Toward Peace of Mind

Just like John and Lisa, you have the opportunity to give generously and wisely. By choosing the right approach to lifetime gifting, you can enjoy the satisfaction of supporting your family today while securing their future.

#### 1. Personalized Consultation



Every family's situation is unique. We invite you to schedule a no-obligation consultation with our experienced team at The Sheppard Law Firm. We'll take the time to understand your goals, concerns, and the specific needs of your loved ones.

#### 2. Customized Planning



We'll guide you through your options, explaining the benefits and considerations of each strategy in clear, accessible language. Together, we'll design a gifting plan that aligns with your values and objectives.

#### 3. Expert Implementation



Our team will handle all the details, from setting up trusts to ensuring compliance with tax laws. We aim to make the process seamless and stress-free, so you can focus on what matters most—your family.

#### 4. Ongoing Support



Life is full of changes. We'll be here to support you over time, adjusting your plan as needed to reflect new circumstances or goals. Our commitment is to help you maintain the protections and efficiencies you've established, now and in the future.

## Ready to Begin?

There's no better time than now to take control of your gifting strategy and ensure that your generosity brings joy without unintended consequences.

Contact us today online at [sheppardlawfirm.com/contact](https://sheppardlawfirm.com/contact) OR call us at 239.224.3441 to schedule your personalized consultation.

At The Sheppard Law Firm, we're dedicated to helping you give with confidence and protect what you've worked so hard to build. Let us partner with you to create a legacy that reflects your values and supports your family's dreams for generations to come.

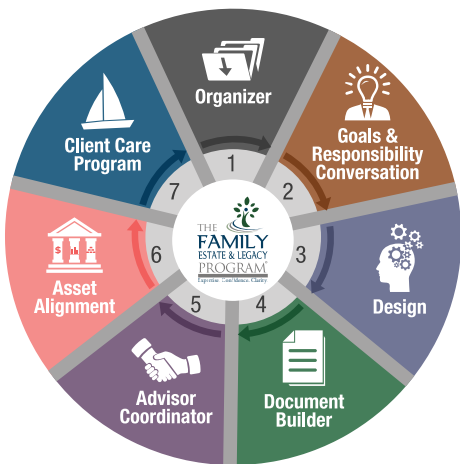
## Final Thoughts

Your generosity has the power to shape your family's future. By choosing the right path, you not only provide for your loved ones today but also set the foundation for lasting security and harmony.

Just as John and Lisa discovered, with thoughtful planning and the right guidance, you can make a profound difference in the lives of those you care about most—now and for years to come.

We look forward to helping you on this important journey.

**Disclaimer:** *This white paper is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Please consult with a qualified attorney to discuss your specific circumstances and the best strategies for your situation.*

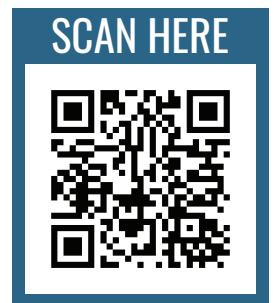


# Comfort. Clarity. Peace of Mind.

Learn more about our Family Estate & Legacy Program™ process, created by our Florida Board-Certified Estate Planning Attorneys.



WATCH OUR SHORT VIDEO!



[LEARN MORE: FLORIDAESTATEPLANNING.COM/OUR-PROCESS/](https://FLORIDAESTATEPLANNING.COM/OUR-PROCESS/)



## Craig R. Hersch

Craig R. Hersch is a Florida Bar Board-Certified Wills, Trusts & Estates attorney and holds his Florida CPA license, with over 30 years of experience in his practice. Craig is a senior partner at Sheppard Law Firm and has created several trademarked processes tied to his estate planning and administration practice, including The Family Estate & Legacy Program and The Estate Settlement Program.

Craig has authored six books for clients: The Florida Estate Planning Guide, Selecting Your Trustee, Common Cents Estate Planning, Legal Matters When a Loved One Dies, Asset Alignment and Your Estate Plan and Common Cents Estate Planning II. His work has appeared in several professional journals, including The Practical Tax Lawyer, and The Florida Bar Journal, as well as being on the editorial advisory board for Trusts & Estates Magazine, the premier trade journal for estate planning attorneys, CPA's, and financial advisors. Craig also writes a weekly estate planning column that is published in Sanibel's Island Sun newspaper and on his firm's blog.

Craig is a multiple graduate of the University of Florida with accounting and law degrees and has provided his expertise as a continuing education lecturer for The Florida Bar and the Florida Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Craig holds an AV Martindale Hubbell rating, the highest attainable by the independent national attorney rating service, has been selected as a Worth 100 Top Attorney and has been named to the Super Lawyers list every year since 2009, a highly-esteemed recognition given to no more than five percent of attorneys in Florida.

During his free time, Craig enjoys bicycling long distances, swimming, boating, hiking and other outdoor recreational sports. Craig is married to his wife, Patti, and they have three daughters: Gabrielle, Courtney, and Madison, as well as two sons-in-law, Benji and Philip.

### FROM OUR CLIENTS

"My wife and I engaged the Sheppard Law Firm last year to establish our trust after reading Craig Hersch's book on Florida Residency & Estate Planning...We now feel secure that **we have a law firm that we can turn** to as our estate matures, and that **we weren't just "one time" clients**. We highly recommend the firm!"

**Randall W.** | Sarasota, FL ★★★★★





## Michael B. Hill

As a partner of Sheppard Law Firm and a board-certified specialist in Wills, Trusts, and Estates, Michael is committed to redefining estate planning for families in southwest Florida. With over two decades of legal expertise, he, along with his partners, have distinguished their practice through a blend of exceptional legal acumen and deep personal empathy. They are proud to be among the few practices to boast multiple board-certified attorneys in their specialized field within Florida.

Having experienced the challenges of inadequate estate planning within his own family, Michael brings a deeply personal understanding to his practice, ensuring that every client receives thoughtful, meticulous planning tailored to their unique needs. Their innovative approach extends beyond drafting documents to fostering enduring relationships through their Client Care Program, ensuring plans remain effective as life changes.

A former trumpet player and dedicated runner, Michael infuses his passion for education and personal engagement into every aspect of their practice. He believes in empowering his clients through understanding, allowing them to make informed decisions that secure their legacies and protect their loved ones.

Connect with him to explore how thoughtful estate planning can bring peace of mind and secure your family's future.

### FROM OUR CLIENTS

Attorney Michael Hill at the Sheppard Law firm is **exceptionally professional and knowledgeable**. Mike takes the time to **explain things in simple terms** and is **always up to date** on the very latest regarding Estate Planning. We've trusted for years now that we are with the best professional Estate Planning Team in the area who have met and will meet all our and our family's Estate Planning needs.

**E. K.** | Fort Myers, FL ★★★★★



## Hayley E. Donaldson

Hayley E. Donaldson is a partner of the Sheppard Law Firm and a Florida Bar Board-Certified Wills, Trusts & Estates Attorney. Florida Bar Board Certification is a distinction only awarded to the few attorneys who can demonstrate profound proficiency and competence in this complex field, as well as unwavering ethics and professionalism.

After the passing of a loved one, Hayley guides family members in the trust administration and probate process. Additionally she assists clients with their tax and estate planning, drafting simple and complex wills, trusts, and related estate planning documents.

Graduating first in her class, Hayley received her Juris Doctor from the University of Florida Levin College of Law. In law school, she was a member of the Florida Law Review and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program which assists lower income individuals with their yearly tax returns.

As a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Hayley previously worked as an Internal Audit Consultant for a national firm. With a Masters in Professional Accounting from the University of Texas, Hayley holds degrees in Accounting and Finance from the University of Miami. Raised in Fort Myers, she is also a proud graduate of the International Baccalaureate program at Fort Myers High School.

In her free time, Hayley enjoys running, swimming, and watching the Boston Red Sox.

### FROM OUR CLIENTS

We thought we understood living trusts when we went to see Hayley at the firm, but we learned how much we didn't know. Hayley was very knowledgeable, asked questions, and truly listened to our answers. While helping us broach tough subjects. Everyone we dealt with was exceedingly helpful and professional. It was **obvious that their goal was to create a trust to meet our specific needs**. No matter how many questions we asked, **everyone was always happy to help**.

**Gary & Connie H.** | Fort Myers, FL ★★★★★



## ABOUT SHEPPARD LAW FIRM

Established in 1924, Sheppard Law Firm has a century-long history of providing legal services to Florida residents and consulting with local counsel for clients around the country.

For 100 years, we have dedicated ourselves to delivering peace of mind and clear guidance through tailored legal strategies that meet our clients' unique objectives and needs. Our team includes multiple Florida Bar Board-Certified Attorneys in Wills, Trusts, and Estates.

We use cutting-edge research, thorough analysis, and the latest technology to stay updated with ongoing legal developments. Sheppard Law Firm remains committed to offering personalized legal advice in Estate Planning, Probate and Trust Administration, Asset Protection, Guardianship, and Real Estate Law, ensuring our clients receive the highest standard of legal expertise.

## COMFORT. CLARITY. PEACE OF MIND.

Learn more about our Family Estate & Legacy Program™ process, created by our Florida Board-Certified Estate Planning Attorneys. Learn how we guide you through the creation of the best estate plan for you & your loved ones. Visit [floridaestateplanning.com/our-process](http://floridaestateplanning.com/our-process).

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THE FAMILY ESTATE & LEGACY PROGRAM  
Expertise. Confidence. Clarity.

### Our Process

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# SUCCESS STORIES

“My husband and I have been clients of the Sheppard Law Firm for 17 years. We have always been very pleased with the knowledge, counsel, and professionalism of Craig R. Hersch. Recently, we had our estate planning documents reviewed and updated, and **we could not be more pleased with the results and Craig's dedicated efforts.**”

**Pamela M.** | *Naples, FL* ★★★★★

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My husband and I have worked with this firm for 5 years, and we couldn't be happier. Craig Hersch and Maria Reimer are exceptional, **taking the time to understand our goals thoroughly.** Craig even arranged a meeting with our executor (daughter) to ensure she knows the firm beforehand. Maria's meticulous work on our revocable trust gave us **great confidence.** Mike Hill has also been impressive with ongoing updates. We appreciate the complimentary educational seminars on legislative actions. Craig's books are an added benefit...the quality of work is outstanding. **We trust this firm and confidently recommend them to our friends!**

**Diana P.** | *Fort Myers, FL* ★★★★★

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“We cannot thank enough Attorney Michael Hill for his courteous, professional, gracious, and attentive service regarding the estate plan, trust, and related documents he prepared for us. When it came time for us to deal with matters relating to the trust twelve years later, he was once again courteous, professional, gracious, and attentive to our needs and questions. **We would recommend [Sheppard Law Firm] to anyone seeking assistance with estate planning, trusts, and related issues.**”

**Theresa S.** | *Fort Myers, FL* ★★★★★

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“What sets Sheppard Law Firm apart is their personalized approach. They took the time to listen to my concerns, goals, and family dynamics. Instead of offering cookie-cutter solutions, they tailored their recommendations to fit my specific circumstances. **I felt like more than just a client—I was a valued individual with unique needs.**”

**Bronwyn B.** | *Captiva, FL* ★★★★★

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“I have worked with the Sheppard Law Firm for the last five years. As the former CEO of one of the largest independent Trust Companies in the US, I have seen the work of many law firms. Sheppard ranks among the very best in my view. **They operate with the highest integrity and are well versed in the intricacies of estate planning.**”

**Jim M.** | *Fort Myers, FL* ★★★★★

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