

Missionary Man

Teachers advocate Scott Dauenhauer aims to take wayward K-12 districts to school

Scott Dauenhauer has a soft spot for teachers. There was the seventh grade science instructor who “made things come alive” for him ... and the college business law professor whose lessons on ethics continue to inform his life and work. But at the end of the day (and on weekends), his hands-down favorite is the woman who heads the science department at Ensign Intermediate in Newport Beach, Calif., a.k.a. his wife, Shauna.

There are the obvious reasons. “She’s the perfect complement to me,” says Dauenhauer, a fee-only certified financial planner in Aliso Viejo, Calif. “She’s very patient, very organized, and she’s got this incredible personality that people kind of flock to.” She even taught summer school last year — “with a smile on her face” — to help keep Scott’s fledgling firm, Meridian Wealth Management, afloat.

But Shauna is also indirectly responsible for what has become Dauenhauer’s unofficial mission: to fight for the financial interests of K-12 educators. It began in 1998, when he tried to make sense of the dubious pension plan Shauna and her colleagues had been pitched. That would eventually snowball into a website (www.403bRetire.com), newsletters (*The Teachers Advocate*), books (*The 403(b) Wise Guide*) and a full-fledged advocacy avocation.

His current “crusade” is a grass-roots effort to fix what he calls “the Orange County mess”: 10 of the county’s 32 K-12 districts recently hired a firm that replaced their 403(b) supple-

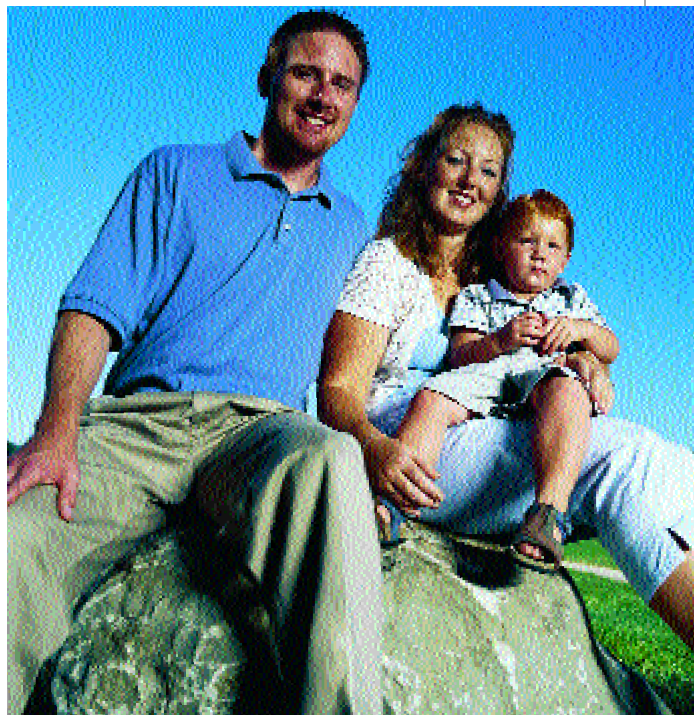
mental retirement savings plans with a program that features poor choices, high fees and, Dauenhauer says, a web of too-cozy corporate relationships, cronyism and kickbacks.

The dirty details are in the contract’s fine print — and Dauenhauer’s crying foul. “The teachers are really getting taken advantage of here,” he says, maintaining that the onus isn’t on the administrator but on the folks who hired it. “The districts don’t understand the fiduciary issues, that they have an obligation to look out for the teachers’ best interests.”

So, Dauenhauer speaks, writes and lobbies districts, employees and legislators — all while trying to build a financial planning business that, not surprisingly, offers teachers a discount for its services.

“He truly puts his clients’ interests first,” says Dan Otter, who co-authored the *403(b) Wise Guide* and is working with Dauenhauer on two new books for teachers, on 457s and general financial topics. “A lot of people say that. Scott does it.”

The combination of work ethic and ethical work doesn’t surprise those who know Dauenhauer, the third of four kids raised in Portland, Ore. by role-model parents. His father, Leroy, was a firefighter for 32 years; his mother, Kathy, escaped an abusive first



Dauenhauer wants to ensure that teachers like Shauna (holding Collin) get a fair deal. “The districts,” he says, “have basically been duped.”

marriage and worked her way off welfare to become a successful realtor.

The Dauenhauers also draw strength from their faith — and each other. They met as undergrads at Assemblies of God-affiliated Southern California College (now Vanguard University), when Scott’s errantly thrown napkin ball found its way to Shauna’s forehead. Their first date was at Disneyland, and within six months they were engaged.

The rest, including son Collin, 2, is history. “I married way above my pay grade,” Dauenhauer jokes. Teachers in Orange County — and beyond — should be glad he did. ★