

LI People ON THE MOVE

BANKING

Suffolk Federal Credit Union announces two promotions.



Gail DiGiacomo of Bohemia has been promoted to branch manager at the Commack office. She was assistant branch manager in the West Babylon office.



Megan Diehl of Patchogue has been promoted to assistant branch manager at the Medford office. She was a senior financial services representative there.



Diane Duel of Oceanside has been appointed vice president of the banking division at **Astoria Bank** in Glendale, Queens.

ASSOCIATIONS

The **Long Island Builders Institute** in Islandia, a residential trade association, has elected board officers for 2016.

Grant Havasy of Huntington, president of Blue & Gold Corp. in Riverhead, has been elected vice president. **Sal Ferro** of Huntington, president of Alure Home Improvements in Hempstead, has been elected treasurer. **Peter Florey** of Huntington, principal of D&F Development in Hempstead, has been elected secretary. **John Ratto** of Huntington, president of J. Ratto Landscaping in Riverhead, has been elected associate vice president.

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Market volatility in China and tension in the Middle East caused U.S. stocks to tumble yesterday to lowest levels since mid-October.

MARKET EXPERTS: DON'T PANIC

Resist temptation to overreact amid global volatility

Q and A

BY MAURA MCDERMOTT AND KEN SCHACHTER

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U.S. stock prices took a dive on the first trading day of the year amid fears of a worldwide economic slowdown, but investors should view the market's decline as a mere blip or even a buying opportunity, not a cause for panic, local financial experts said yesterday.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 276 points yesterday, a decline of 1.6 percent. Earlier in the day, the market dropped as much as 467 points, temporarily falling below the psychologically important 17,000-point level.

Why are U.S. stock prices falling?

The drop comes as a response to a stock market rout in China and escalating tensions in the Middle East. That turmoil sparked fears among

investors, causing them to dump stock holdings.

In China, a manufacturing slowdown and falling currency sent mainland stock prices plummeting by 7 percent, and prompted authorities to impose a first-ever halt in trading.

"If China slows drastically it will lose its appetite for foreign products, including those made in America," said Cary Carbonaro, author of the book "The Money Queen's Guide" and a Huntington-based certified financial adviser.

Craig Ferrantino, president of Craig James Financial Services in Melville, said the slowdown in China's economy accounted for 80 percent of the downdraft in the U.S. market. "China is a sleeping giant," he said. "That's going to be a problem going forward."

Investors also reacted to fears of growing conflict in the Middle East, where Saudi Arabia has cut diplomatic ties with Iran after protesters attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran. The conflict could

lead to more volatility in oil prices, financial experts said.

What should I do with my money today — if anything?

Don't sell in a panic, investment advisers said. Market watchers said investors should expect volatility in the year to come, but it's impossible to predict exactly when the market will turn.

"If you think you have an ability to sell now and jump back in right before the market turns up, you're kidding yourself," said Barry Ritholtz, chairman and chief investment officer at Ritholtz Wealth Management in Manhattan. "The idea is that you have a plan and you follow that plan," Ritholtz said. "You want to control costs, you want to rebalance regularly, and you want to own a little bit of all the major markets around the world."

If anything, long-term investors should consider this a good time to buy, Carbonaro said. "It's like when a sweater goes on sale you want to buy it — except in the market, with stocks, people do the opposite," Carbonaro said. "Fear takes over."

In fact, global unrest often

sends investors scurrying to the relative safety of the United States, she said: "We're still the cleanest dirty shirt in the hamper."

OK, I won't panic. But what should I do with my portfolio this year?

Last year, the widely followed Dow Jones industrial average and Standard & Poor's 500 index inched into the red despite being buoyed by a handful of major tech and media companies with the acronym FANG — for Facebook, Apple, Netflix and Google, said David Schwartz, chairman and chief executive of FCE Group, a Great Neck wealth management firm.

Investors would be well served in 2016 by taking a broader view, Schwartz said.

He proposed buying bonds with short maturities as a "safety guard" and high-quality stocks whose dividends are increasing. For investors willing to place a high-risk bet with a sliver of their portfolio, Schwartz suggests looking at beaten-down natural gas stocks. "To me, natural gas is going to be a home run," he said. "Natural gas is the least polluting fossil fuel."