Two years ago, presidential candidate John McCain secured initial campaign financing by using his $3 million life insurance policy as collateral.

In 1980, Doris Christopher used a life insurance loan to launch her struggling kitchen gadget company. In 2002, she sold that company—the Pampered Chef—to Warren Buffett for a reported $900 million.

Even in the midst of the Great Depression, J.C. Penney used a loan against his $3 million life insurance policy to resuscitate his retail stores after the 1929 crash.

By this point in our nation’s recession, it is clear that there is no such thing as a perfect investment strategy. As the Dow Jones Industrial Average sits at about 65 percent of its value from 18 months ago, now is an ideal time to learn about the proven benefits, strengths, and versatility of life insurance and annuity investing.

IF IT’S GOOD ENOUGH FOR BANKERS . . .

According to government disclosures, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke has a majority of his liquid wealth—between $1 million and $2 million—invested in fixed and variable annuities. Fixed annuities are contracts issued exclusively by life insurance companies that promise guaranteed rates of interest.

What’s more, the 401(k) Thrift Plan for Employees of the Federal Reserve System, according to a 2009 first-quarter Fed report covering 22,000 Fed employees, has 75 percent of its assets—that’s $3.2 billion—invested in its fixed-income fund, which is invested exclusively in annuity contracts underwritten by major U.S. life insurance companies guaranteeing principal and an interest rate of 5.8 percent.

And this is not a new trend. A Deloitte audit affirms that in 2007 and 2006, Fed employees overwhelmingly chose fixed-income annuity funds over volatile mutual funds, according to the federal reserve system thrift plan participants, smart investment report.

The nation’s large banks invest immense sums of their Tier 1 capital reserves—a bank’s most important asset and a key measure of its strength—into permanent life insurance underwritten by major life insurance companies. (See sidebar “Banking on life insurance” for more details.)
Simply put, there are two types of life insurance—term and permanent—and a combination of both types works well for most investors.

**Term insurance** covers you for a specified period of time, usually from 5 to 30 years, depending upon your age. Essentially, it is rented insurance.

**Permanent or cash-value life insurance** are essentially one and the same: insurance for as long as you live. You own your life insurance. Permanent life insurance has a savings component and a death benefit. There are three general types of permanent life insurance: whole, universal, and variable life.

**Whole life** has guarantees in mortality charges and interest, and additional earnings in dividends.

**Universal life** is more flexible: Interest earned is determined by short-term money rates. Mortality charges increase with age.

**Variable life** includes mortality charges that can be either fixed or increasing. The savings component rate of return with variable life is determined by the rate of return in the stock market—thus adding significant risk.

An annuity, meanwhile, is a contract issued by an insurance company that offers a guaranteed rate of interest and guaranteed payout options—including an income for life. Annuities are particularly well-suited for retirement savings and are the cornerstone of all pensions. Unlike a bank or mutual fund, an insurance company must maintain cash reserves equal to the annuity’s value.
The following table represents banks’ most recent Tier 1 capital holdings of life insurance/cash surrender value (CSV) as of March 31, 2008, and 2009 (as a percentage of banks’ total Tier 1 capital). The far right column represents the total amount each bank has invested in its premises, fixed assets, and other real estate. Many banks have more invested in life insurance than they do in all of their hard assets combined. The life insurance proceeds (death benefit) to the bank at the employee’s death are about five times the cash surrender value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Total Tier 1 Capital 3/31/2009 $/Billions</th>
<th>Holdings Life Ins/CSV 3/31/2008 $/Billions</th>
<th>Holdings Life Ins/CSV 3/31/2009 $/Billions</th>
<th>Life Ins. as a % of Bank Tier 1</th>
<th>Bank premises fixed assets &amp; real estate $/Billions % of Tier 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>$137.20</td>
<td>$16.74</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>$13.79 (10.05%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPMorgan</td>
<td>$112.44</td>
<td>$7.53</td>
<td>$11.07</td>
<td>9.85</td>
<td>$9.99 (8.88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>$81.03</td>
<td>$5.53</td>
<td>$18.17</td>
<td>22.42</td>
<td>$11.00 (13.58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Bancorp</td>
<td>$15.63</td>
<td>$4.66</td>
<td>$4.83</td>
<td>30.90</td>
<td>$2.80 (17.91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNY Mellon</td>
<td>$13.33</td>
<td>$2.66</td>
<td>$2.72</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>$1.47 (11.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KeyBank</td>
<td>$7.81</td>
<td>$2.70</td>
<td>$2.79</td>
<td>35.70</td>
<td>$2.88 (36.88%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, this author prefers mutual life companies over publicly traded stock-based life insurers (although stock companies can be well-run and offer investors great value). Why mutual companies? A mutual company is not a publicly traded entity and does not succumb to the continuous demands and whims of Wall Street. Mutual companies, although not entirely unscathed, have for the most part dodged the stock market meltdown that has hammered their publicly traded counterparts.

Mutual companies, often criticized for being too prudish and conservative, are now pillars of strength. With a mutual company, a physician is technically an owner in the company and receives the profits of the company through dividends and interest—not stock.

If a mutual company does go public at a later date, its investors can enjoy potential rewards of cash, additional insurance, or shares of the new public company—while still maintaining their initial insurance and annuities.

It is wise to work with an adviser who has expertise not just in life insurance and annuities, but who has a working knowledge of taxes, risk management, investments, and economics. Insure your life as you would insure the economic replacement value of your automobile, home, or practice. Your human life is the greatest economic value of them all—the creator of all property values.

As a general rule, the economic replacement value for life insurance for a physician under 40 is around 20 times his annual income. Physicians who are young will need large amounts of term life insurance—pure death benefit protection. As cash flow improves and debts such as student loans are paid down, purchasing permanent life insurance makes economic sense.

When buying life insurance and annuity products with savings components, purchase products that are backed by the general account of the company first. Why? The general account is the heart of any life insurance company and, by design, one of the safest places for savings in America today. By choosing general-account-backed products first, all financial risks are shifted onto the insurance company.

When allocating funds to life insurance and annuities as an asset, a commitment of 10 to 30 percent of one's resources is prudent, since these instruments have stable value and are easily convertible into cash. The nation's large banks consistently invest between 10 to 30 percent of their reserves—hundreds of millions of dollars—into life insurance and annuity products, according to the FDIC. There's every reason for you to do the same.

For more than two and a half decades, Barry James Dyke has advised individuals and corporations about financial planning, employee benefit plans, investments, and other economic issues. He is the author of the book The Pirates of Manhattan, which illuminates the reasons for today's financial crisis and how to protect your assets in the days ahead. Learn more at www.thepiratesofmanhattan.com.