

It's a Good Time to Be an Accountant

By NJBIZ Staff, Jim McConville - 2/26/2007

After facing some lean years in the past decade, New Jersey's accounting firms have been on a hiring tear this past year.

The state's top 50 public accounting firms added 456 new CPAs to their combined employee rosters in 2006, a 15.2 percent increase compared with 2005. This group now boasts a combined total of 3,454 public accountants, compared with 2,998 last year.

Accounting experts say the fuel for this drive can be summed up in two words: Sarbanes-Oxley.

"The Sarbanes-Oxley Act has been called the accountant-employment act," says Jay Soled, professor of accounting and information systems at Rutgers-Newark business school. "Accounting firms just need more coverage. Sarbanes has really juiced up the accounting world, but how long it can sustain itself is anyone's guess."

"There's been a lot more hours that have been put into the audit process, so all the firms have had to ramp up and hire," says Kenneth J. Sharkey, managing partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) Florham Park office.

PwC, the largest accounting firm in New Jersey, reached the 672 CPA mark in the state last year by adding 188 accountants.

Another factor is the recent spate of corporate mergers or breakups.

"There's been a lot of mergers, acquisitions and companies that are breaking themselves up," says Sharkey. "For instance, Tyco is spinning into three different companies; Cendant has broken itself up into five different companies."

Not to be outdone, New Jersey's medium-sized public accounting firms are trying to beat the big firms to the hiring punch by getting to prospective candidates first.

"It's such a competitive industry right now," says Kevra Esposito, human resource representative for Clifton-based Sax Macy Fromm & Co. "In the past we would maybe do on-campus recruiting and maybe hire four junior accountants for the upcoming year. Now we go to more schools and we're now hiring each year seven to 10 juniors."

Other firms on the NJBIZ list that are boosting their CPA count include Ernst & Young with 55 new hires; KPMG with 59; Rothstein Kass with 40; and J.H. Cohn with 33.

Newly joining the top 20 this year is Alloy Silverstein Shapiro Adams Mulford Cicalese and Wilson, which broke in at No. 20. Launched in 1959, the Cherry Hill-based company has 35 CPAs.

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